

Painting a brighter future in Cornwall....

Cornwall's environmental profile and exceptional levels of business support have attracted an innovative eco-friendly paint manufacturer to relocate.

Overview

A remarkable new range of decorating paints is already making a big splash amongst eco-aware consumers. Made from natural and sustainable materials, Naturepaint® is not only free from harmful chemicals but also a joy to use – easy to apply, quick-drying and without any of the petrochemical fumes that can make conventional, oil-based paints quite literally a headache. Sold in powder form, all users have to do is mix in water – and even the paper-based packaging is 99.9 per cent recyclable.

The inspiration for Naturepaint® came from two main sources. One was founder Ross Harling's awareness of environmental problems associated with conventional paint products. The other was his passion for restoring antique furniture. "I was working on some American pieces from the early 19th century," he explains, "and I started to wonder how it was that no-one still made the beautiful and very hard-wearing paints that had originally been used on them."

Ross uncovered a fascinating history. "At the beginning of the twentieth century, several technological developments paved the way for modern petrochemical-based paints. Then World War One wiped out a whole generation of craftsmen, devastating the skills base for traditional paint-making."

Ross set up Nature Paint Limited in 2004 to make naturally sourced decorating paints based on traditional paintmaking techniques, but with all the convenience and value for money expected by 21st century consumers. Initially based in Wiltshire, in 2008 the company decided to relocate its entire operation to Hayle in west Cornwall.

Technology

With a patented formulation and advanced performance, Nature Paint still uses traditional paint mills with real millstones. This has the additional advantage of giving the paint a distinctive, subtle grain that reflects light more softly than conventional chemical paints. A wide range of natural pigments are used, including ochres from Lacsaux in south-west France (home of some of the oldest cave paintings in the world) and sienna from Tuscany.

Workforce

Nature Paint currently employs five people in all. Having already hired one new member of staff on the sales and marketing side since the move to Cornwall, the company is planning to expand the team to some 10-15 people over the next couple of years, and sees Cornwall as an exceptionally good area to be recruiting staff with the range of skills and aptitudes that it needs.



"We were attracted to Cornwall for several reasons," Ross says. "The availability of finance for innovative young businesses through EU-backed programmes was just one factor.

"What made Cornwall stand out was threefold. Firstly, we'd been aware for some time that the county had shed its 'pixies and pasties' image and established a strong profile in the environmental technologies sector. Then there was the fact that a key raw material for our products, China Clay, comes from Cornwall and we want to minimise our carbon footprint. But probably what clinched it was the exceptional support available to relocating businesses through organizations like Cornwall Pure Business."

Customers

Naturepaint® products are sold direct to consumers and trade customers via the company's website, www.naturepaint.com as well as via a sales hotline, 0845 3670140. Compared with liquid paints, the low weight and volume of Naturepaint helps keep down mailing costs, with free postage for larger orders. As well as the range of 100 colours, customers can also buy the Naturepaint® Paintbox – a complete ecological painting kit that includes coloured paint, ceiling white, an applicator, recyclable paintpads and a paint tray – making it a great 'green' gift. Working closely with the Eden Project, Nature Paint has also recently developed a special palette of paints, called 'Colours of Eden', with colours including Aloe Green and Biome Blue. These are now on sale both at the iconic visitor attraction and from Eden's online shop.

Support

"When we came down on an initial scouting visit, the people we spoke to at Cornwall Pure Business understood where we were coming from immediately," Ross says. "Since then, they've helped us in so many ways, introducing us to a range of important contacts and providing a sense of continuity throughout the process. They've really been a rock!"

Nature Paint has also benefited from investment from Finance Cornwall and the South West Investment Group (SWIG) to assist with relocation and expansion, and speak warmly of the supportive attitude of Penwith District Council, particularly when it came to converting their new premises into a model of green business practice. "We explained to them that we wanted to show how it's possible to take any ordinary business location – a converted fish warehouse, in our case – and make savings by installing environmentally friendly technologies," Ross says. "We've been hugely impressed by the efforts they've put into helping us make it happen."