



**What do we mean by the heritage market? Is it buildings in which it is difficult to replace windows because of their listed status or simply high end homes with wealthy owners who dislike anything artificial? Alan Burgess, looks at the scope**



The problem has been that for too long, mass production has driven consumer choice. Large capex investment has dictated that only bog standard, shiny white windows should be made, ones with internal Georgian canes and artificial clip on components like sash horns. Keep it simple and above all else, cheap.

Times are changing. Products and customer tastes are changing too. Take the car industry, once your choice was just one colour, black. Gradually alternatives were offered, then a limited number of metallic colours, now you can chose practically any colour you can imagine. If you wish to own a car with a totally bespoke colour, leather interior and matching clock, then you can have it, it just costs a shedload more than the standard model.

In the early years – the 70/80/90’s – mitred, welded and grooved corners were standard for windows and doors. Colour was limited to the co-extrusion of two different plastics; textured foils were rarely considered or offered to consumers. Today, foil accounts for 95 % of our production, white is less than 50%.

Extruders now stock ‘57’ profile variations, in small packs with next day deliveries. Monkey tail handles, dummy sashes and Georgian grids which fully align are now common place. The public have got to know about these new colourful, wood grained flush sash and box sash windows.

The same is true of construction techniques. If the client wants a mock timber window then they expect a foiled finish with traditional timber look joints. They dislike the grooved joints and reject open ended profiles (when they get shown them) in favour of ‘proper’ welded corners, ones which are closed ends and timber butt joints on both the inside and outside faces.

Photo sensitive glass, which changes from clear to opaque in an instant provides complete privacy for owners. Again the process is costly, the market is limited but as Google, drones and neighbours’ proximity



increases, invading people’s privacy, so some will pay to keep it.

Security was once just a better handle. Today its high security locks, fitted with smart technology, are able to detect when windows are open, closed, locked and unlocked, all controlled from an app on your mobile phone. However, just like with cars, sales people worry that customers won’t pay the extra, they fear it’s putting the affordability beyond the reach of their clients; obviously that’s a real concern.

Many of us would love a £1m supercar but quite frankly that will NEVER happen, it is way beyond the budget of most people. A £100k sports car may also be unthinkable for many, but for some, it just may be do-able.

If you really want something, the brain generally figures out how it can be done

and it’s amazing what people will sacrifice to obtain the item of their dreams, once the determination kicks in.

Yes all these products cost more and just like the high end cars, they may have a limited market of those who can afford the extra cost, but in time, those clients with disposable wealth and those who have the strongest desire for unique solutions, will invest in products perceived to have better quality, construction methods or special features, than their ‘standard’ equivalents.

Stay ahead of consumer trends. Innovate, evolve, develop, invest and improve your product offerings, because the market for standard, shiny white solutions is in decline, especially in the ‘heritage’ market.

Finally, those who understand this market and offer their clients the choice, expensive or otherwise, are genuinely surprised that price isn’t the first topic of conversation, it is: ‘Does it look real? Does it look the same as a wooden window, from every angle?’

Don’t be afraid to show products which are more difficult to make and thus cost more. Let your customer decide if the extras have added value. □