

ESSEX PROCESSOR PROVIDES COMPLETE DESIGN AND BUILD SERVICE FIRMANS AT THE CUTTING EDGE

FA Firman, one of the most complete glass and architectural metalworking companies in the South East, is putting glass into new areas. **By Dominic Bentham**

FA Firman has supplied a number of cutting edge architectural projects, including the landmark all-glass canopies at Glasgow Buchanan Street and Tokyo Yurakucho underground stations*. A reputation among architects and structural engineers for realising unconventional designs is backed up by some of the latest processing machinery, in house metalworking expertise and highly skilled installation teams. In short, the total package. Not bad for a company that began in 1975 as a replacement glazing supplier.

Firmans has clearly come a long way since then. Its two factories in Romford, Essex, operate 24 hours a day, six days a week, supplying glazing projects ranging from the spectacular to the everyday. Glass floors and structural balustrading are common jobs, using **Dorma** fittings or Firmans' own bespoke designs. The bulk of work is for the commercial sector, around 30 per cent being for the domestic market. A large range of float and laminates are held as stock items, including 12.8mm laminated **Pilkington K**, low iron glass and 6 x 3 metre mirrors.

Major tempering deal

In a major new development **Catsa, S.A.** the European agent of **Luoyang North Glass Technology Company**, has concluded a contract between Firmans and North Glass for the supply of a complex bent and flat glass tempering line for making both bent and flat architectural glass, to be installed in the next few months.

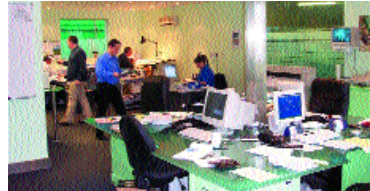
Firma-tuff is Firmans' branded toughened glass, and the current **Efco** furnace is kept busy with local glass companies also bringing their cut pieces for toughening.

A large variety of glass processes can be executed on standard and CNC machinery, including waterjet cutting. Two **Schiatti FPS50** heavy duty straight line edging and polishing machines are the latest new arrivals from UK agent **Peter Hawkins**. A **Bavelloni** four headed drilling

L-R: Sales Director Jody Hodgson with Ken Jones, a member of Firmans' bespoke metalworking team



Far right: The Royal Opera House is the single most high profile project by the company, consisting of a 30 metre length glass wall which connects the old and new buildings while allowing them to move independently



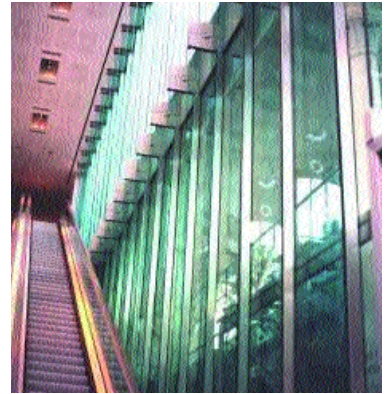
Above right: The busy office manages operations 24 hours a day, six days a week

machine saves time on a lot of drilling and countersinking applications.

Firmans is one of the few UK partners for **Dorma's** Manet glass fixing system, a comprehensive system which includes everything from heavy architectural fixings to partition rails, door sets, furniture fixings and shower door hinges. Bespoke fixings are made in house, often for structural balustrading. Metalworking is understandably an important part of many projects and the 30 strong installation team is highly experienced in this area.

High profile projects

The Royal Opera House is the single most high profile project by the company. The redeveloped Covent Garden site features a 12 metre high glass wall incorporating 6 metre sealed units, extending 30 metres and linking the old and new buildings. **Graham Dodds** of **Arup** designed the wall on a simple pivot system that allows the two parts to move independently. Firmans' own engineer, the late **Stephen Bandy** of **Dewhurst McFarlane and Partners**, then worked with the design and drawing team to ensure a safe working structure. Laminated glass fins and **Dow Corning** structural adhesive are a key part of this mechanism.



New developments

Firmans is already one of the most complete glass and architectural metalworking companies in the South East, and new developments promise to take the business forward and into new areas.

Firmaguard is the company's own glass clad polycarbonate which could find new applications for safety, security and bullet resistance. Because of its light weight, this cold pour laminate could reduce the structural support needed for glass flooring.

Another important new product is **Colorfirm**, a backpainted glass available in any **RAL** colour on short lead times, in large sizes and in small quantities. **Colorfirm** can be used for external architectural features, but perhaps most importantly gives designers new possibilities in kitchen splashbacks, trim and even benchtops in the kitchen and bathroom. Firmans is showing **Colorfirm** and various other interior products at the Bathroom and Kitchen Expo Show, 11-13 May in the **ExCel Centre**, London Docklands (see www.bkexpo.co.uk).

Some of Firmans' major projects can be seen at www.firmanglass.com

* The Tokyo project won Firmans a special commendation for expertise at the 1997 British Construction Awards.

READER ENQUIRY SERVICE ► 101

