



Minimalist movement

When its old store was faced with demolition, Port Talbot independent VJ Bailey had to look elsewhere for new premises. Now it has a spacious four-storey outlet, selling brown goods, appliances and fireplaces. ERT reports

INDEPENDENT retailer VJ Bailey in Port Talbot, south Wales, was recently forced to move into new, larger premises when its store, which was over 50 years old, was threatened with demolition.

“We had to move – we didn’t have any choice,” says director Wayne James (pictured). “The old building was taken over by the Housing Association – they wanted us to move out so they could demolish it and put a complex with 43 flats and new shops in its place. They also wanted us to move back in, but we didn’t want all the hassle.”

Luckily an empty four-storey building in the area came up for sale, so VJ Bailey acquired it. In its former guise it had been a Littlewoods catalogue clearance shop. The entire refit process took around six months – the building had to be completely gutted and renovated. Specialist company Replan was called in to refit the ground floor, which took just over a week to complete.

Display

“Replan were very good to work with – no trouble at all. They turned an empty shell on the ground floor into a superb retail display. We’ve gone down the route of a clean, black and white Panasonic fit. We originally got the idea when we saw what Replan had done to the Hickmans store in Swindon – we were really impressed by it,” says Mr James.

CIH and Retra member VJ Bailey is now run by the James family and has been operating since just after the Second World War, when it started out by selling batteries.

It then moved into TVs and was taken over by Wayne’s father, Bill, who worked for the then owners, the Bailey family. Bill has been involved with the business for 52 years. His son is now the director and Wayne’s



“We had to move out, as the Housing Association was going to demolish our old place and build new flats and shops in its place”

two younger brothers also work with him.

The store sells brown goods from Panasonic, Toshiba and Finlux, while its white-goods offering includes Indesit Company, Bosch, Panasonic and Beko. Interestingly, it also sells fires and fire suites. The product mix is roughly split 70 per cent white goods and 30 per cent brown goods.

“The new store is open plan and minimalist. It’s a lot cleaner, neater, spacious and less cluttered than our old store,” says Mr James.

“It gives a much better impression – our old store had got tired and dated and we’d crammed too much into it. In our new store, we’ve got a living room concept with a 50in 3D TV, a 3D Blu-ray player, a surround-sound system and a settee. We wouldn’t have contemplated doing that in the old place – we didn’t have the room. We’ve been more successful with 3D than we thought we’d be – we’ve sold about 20 sets. In our new shop, people can see it being demonstrated properly. Our next step is to demonstrate the new Panasonic Viera Connect smart TVs by setting up Skype cameras in-store.”

Confident

Looking forward, Mr James is confident and excited about the year ahead, but he says: “It’s going to be a tough year – there’s no doubt about it. Next year will be hard, too, but the mix of products that we do, such as the fireplaces, will help to pull us through the quiet times. There’s certainly still a place for the small independent trader because of the service and the value that we can provide. There are people who still want that level of service – they don’t want to go into a faceless shop.”

● To see a video walk-through of the VJ Bailey shop, go to www.replan.com

