

From left to right:
Marc, Terrie, Bill
and Christie Wood

FAMILY FIRST

After 30 years in business, Edwins Bathrooms founder Bill Wood, and his wife Terrie, are gradually handing over to son Marc and daughter Christie, who have plans to keep driving the family firm forward

Words **Amelia Thorpe** Photos **Rowland Roques-O'Neil** (Edwins images only)

In its 30-year history, Edwins Bathrooms has slowly but surely taken over numbers 17, 19, 21 and 26 All Saints Road, to the point that local residents, and company founder and chairman Bill Wood, are tempted to rename this corner of London's fashionable Notting Hill, 'Edwins Avenue'. And it's not just because of the number of Edwins shops, but also because it has an enviable reputation for service and product knowledge.

The story starts over three decades ago when electrical contractor Bill needed somewhere to store his equipment. He settled on 21 All Saints Road at a time when it was known as the 'front line' and more famous for drugs and prostitution than anything to do with electrics, let alone bathrooms. "But I got left alone and it really wasn't as bad as it sounds," he says.

It wasn't long before he decided to open up a



A floorstanding radiator seat by Aestus displayed in front of a Victoria + Albert los freestanding bath and Axor Bouroullec wall-mounted basin and mirror

plumbing trade counter in 1983 to help pay for the rent of the shop. "It all started from there," Bill recalls.

Before long, he opened a bathroom showroom at number 26, bought number 17 a few years later, then number 19, all to allow expansion along the way. He even bought another one to use as a warehouse until the company outgrew that, and now he rents it out and has moved the warehouse to premises on Scrubs Lane.

The business, named Edwins after Bill's middle name – and the family middle name given to all sons over the generations, including son Marc – now has an annual turnover of about £3.5m with a steady performance over the last couple of years, while Notting Hill has been transformed into one of the most on-trend and affluent areas of London.

At 64, Bill says he's now semi-retired, spending five months of each year in New Zealand with his wife Terrie who is also Edwins' company secretary. Together, they are in the process of handing the business over to son and MD Marc, 32, who left the Marines in 2010 to join the company, and daughter and office manager, Christie, 29.

"Our focus has changed in the last 18 months," explains Marc. "We used to have far more generally available brands, but realised that it was no good being a mirror showroom to everyone else. So now we are giving space to higher-end brands who will give us some form of exclusivity." It was a decision that was prompted by the fact that there are more than five other local bathroom showrooms, all selling similar products, coupled with a desire to achieve better margins.

"Some showrooms rely on volume and end up practically giving product away, which Dad has never done," continues Marc. "They don't need to [give products away] and it's causing problems for all of us."

Like many retailers, Edwins suffers from its salesmen spending hours working out comprehensive specifications for customers, only to see those customers shop around to buy the products from the cheapest merchant.

He says that Edwins' reputation for service and good-quality advice has been built up over many years.

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Marc Wood, MD, Edwins Bathrooms



Falper's Scoop bath catches the eye in the Edwins Notting Hill showroom, shown here with a freestanding bath/shower mixer from Vola



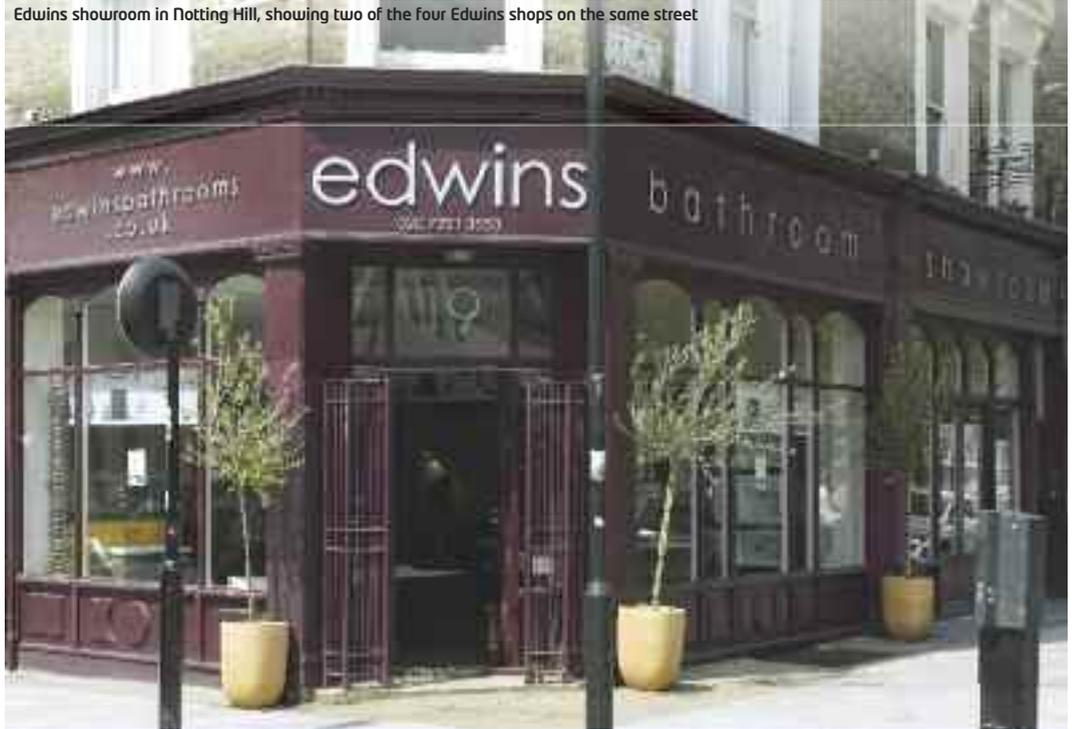
Fantini Acquapura shower panel with 378 front jets, handshower and thermostatic mixer, above a bespoke marble shower tray



If we are 5% more expensive than another showroom, I like to think our customer service more than makes up for that. Our salesmen see each job through to completion

Marc Wood, MD, Edwins Bathrooms

Edwins showroom in Notting Hill, showing two of the four Edwins shops on the same street



retailer profile

Edwins Bathrooms

Who are we? Chairman Bill Wood and son and MD Marc Wood

Where are we? 17,19, 21 & 26 All Saints Road, London W11 1HA. Tel: 0207 221 3550. www.edwinsbathrooms.co.uk

What we do Well-established and upmarket bathroom retailer, plus plumbing and heating trade counter

Business history Founded by Bill Wood in Notting Hill in 1983, initially as a plumbers' merchant before expanding into bathrooms, Edwins remains family-owned. Bill and wife – and company secretary – Terrie are semi-retired, so day-to-day running of the business is transferring to son and MD Marc, and daughter and office manager Christie. It operates from four shops on one road, totalling about 3,700sq ft with at least 500 bathroom products on display. Sales are split 75% bathrooms, 25% trade counter. Of the bathroom sales, 60% is retail, 40% from architects and interior designers. Bathroom prices start from £1,000 for a complete suite geared towards the contract housing market upwards. Average is £5,000 to £6,000 per bathroom, and most expensive project to date, £190,000.

The area is "colourful" according to Bill, with a mix of "customers owning £5m houses and A-list celebrities, to housing association tenants looking for a rubber washer". Products, with some degree of exclusivity, from Falper, Utopia, Fantini, Inbani, Regia, Armani Roca, Svedbergs, and Sprinz. Others from Hansgrohe, Lefroy Brooks, Vola, Dornbracht, Villeroy & Boch, Duravit, Kohler, Bette, Kaldewei, Matki, Majestic, and SSI

Sales stats "Annual turnover is about £3.5m," says Bill. "We are looking forward to growth as we climb out of the recession and expect 5% growth in the financial year 2013"

Staffing levels 13

Favourite aspect of job "Occasionally a customer will come in and be quite blasé and not really very interested at all. It's great when I can turn him around and make a sale," says Bill

Least favourite aspect of job "Spending an hour with a customer who spends 10p on a washer," says Bill

Strange but true "The discipline I learnt in the Marines comes in very handy for running a bathroom business," says Marc

"If we are 5% more expensive than another showroom, I like to think our customer service more than makes up for that. Our salesmen see each job through to completion."

"Now brands are actively approaching us, because they know we won't water down their names," continues Marc. The terms of each exclusivity arrangement are individually negotiated according to brand and product, but two examples include Falper – Edwins is one of very few retailers across the UK to display the Italian brand, and the only one in London to display Armani Roca.

Busy changing the product mix and constantly updating the displays – "It's important to keep them fresh to get people through the door," he says – Marc sees the internet as another challenge.

"We are in the process of developing our first proper logistical experiment, setting up our warehouse and website for ecommerce," he says.

By the end of September, he plans to be trialling the sale of clearance and ex-display products from the site. "If that works smoothly, a year from now we could be going into ecommerce with our everyday items," he adds. "But unlike some people, we will be sticking to very strict discount protocols. We will go to each supplier to establish their policies, as they are so varied, and we will stick with what they want us to do. We're not rocking the boat with anyone."

Marc is also considering opening a new showroom in another location, but says plans are very much in their infancy. "But we can't tread water or we'll be in danger of falling by the wayside," he says. "It's very easy in this economy to mentally stagnate and let the showroom become dull and tired. Now, more than ever, we have to make sure that doesn't happen."



Edwins is the only retail showroom in London, and currently one of only two across the UK, with the Armani Roca bathroom on display, shown here in Nero



Bespoke Via Veneto fittings by Falper including a cabinet in matt white finish, basins in white Cristalplant and Falper white basin mixers



In the 'traditional' showroom, the Regean bath by Ashton & Bentley shown with a wall-mounted ladder rail by Bard & Brazier, with freestanding bath/shower mixers by Lefroy Brooks



Tambo by Inbani washbasin and storage unit in matt white, displayed with Zucchetti Isystick mixer



More of the Armani Roca display featuring Nero Shagreen tiles on the walls and Nero Matt on the floor, Nero wall-hung WC and bidet, and Nero shower fittings and tray

We are delighted that Edwins has come on board with Falper as we forge a small and exclusive network of retailers throughout the UK



Marco Poltronieri, export manager, Falper



The Scoop freestanding basin in black made entirely of Cristalplant, and shown here with white Falper basin mixer



The new Falper Wing basin by Ludovico Lombardi, leading designer of Zaha Hadid's London studio, with its sweeping shape made from bio-based Cristalplant

company profile

Falper

Who are we? Marco Poltronieri, export manager

Where are we? Via Veneto 7-9 40064 Ozzano Emilia, Bologna, Italy. Tel: 07770 761 656.

www.falper.it

What we do Italian manufacturer of leading design-led bathroom furniture, baths, basins, showers, mirrors, lamps, indoor fireplaces and outdoor furniture

Business history Founded in Italy in 1962 by the Fallavena family, the company name derives from the 'Fal' of 'Fallavena' and it remains entirely owned by the family. CEO is Luca Fallavena. The headquarters, production facility and showrooms are based just outside Bologna in Ozzano Emilia. The company has a well-established reputation for cutting-edge

design and manufacturing techniques, for example the new Wing basin by Ludovico Lombardi, leading designer of Zaha Hadid's London studio, with its sweeping shape made from bio-based Cristalplant. Design collaborations include those with Michael Schmidt on the Scoop and George collections, Paola Navone on Coco, and Naghi Habib on Level 45. Falper recently sponsored the 2013 Cristalplant competition of which the winning entries - Controstampo and Longue Shower - will be part of Falper's 2013 Autumn/Winter collection. "We are delighted that Edwins has come on board with Falper as we forge a small and exclusive network of retailers throughout the UK," says Marco Poltronieri