

are busier than ever, and booked up to the end of the year. Product-wise, it's also been an absolute bumper year for decking, handrail and spindie – as well as their new softwood sleepers, of which they've sold 500 in the last week.

"All the money we make goes straight back into the business," Dan says, "we're trying to build the company up and we've got great plans for the future."

With Dan's nearest and dearest rallying round, Equestrian Fencing is slowly becoming a family business: in addition to his fiancé Caroline coming on board next month, Dan's sister and Mum also help out in the yard. Indeed, he's made it rather appealing for them to be around by building a house for his mum on site – and it's quite the show home, exhibiting stunning design and plenty of Dan's own products. Having taken care of the roofing themselves, as well as the decking and garden furniture, even the beds have been made with company oak. The finishing touches have been set off by friends of Dan's, such as the natural stone paving which has come from Landscaping Supplies, just down the road.

"My uncle has been a carpenter for fifty years and has become more involved to get us into the oak frame market. My other uncle is in the plant hire business, and my cousin works for GEC Marconi and Astrium, which is how we got into the security fencing."

Now with the business firmly rooted into the ground, Dan is in a fantastic position to start planning his next move. "We're going to re-tarmac the entire yard, build lots of racking to organise the different lines and make the most of our yard space, and I'd like to put up a steel-framed building in order to protect the machinery. I'm also hoping that in the New Year we can open two retail outlets in the Southampton area."

In addition, planning permission



for agricultural, domestic, security and commercial work:

"We have had some work through various trainers, such as Nicky Henderson, Brendan Powell and for Jonjo O'Neil – and we also had a big job at Cheltenham racecourse recently. Through associations, we've even had jobs erecting thousands of metres of fencing in both France and Belgium, which made a change from the norm."

Dan is used to dealing with big numbers, having had some rather sizeable jobs in the past, the largest of which was 5000m of creosoted post and rail which was erected for

a paddock in Henley upon Thames. "I hate the stuff," he tells me, "I'm glad I don't work with creosote anymore."

Business has changed completely this last year, with the months before the economic plunge being fantastic for contracting, and the months following proving to be quite the opposite:

"I think the contracting has dipped this year because everybody is going with the 'don't move, improve' philosophy." However, where a door closes a window opens, and Dan's team of five polish men who build stables and shelters for him

is currently being sought to knock down several buildings at the front of his site which date back to the Second World War. Dan tells me, "There used to be a search light on the top of the field, and down in the park there were big guns which used to keep watch over the channel and shoot down any approaching enemies, so there's plenty of wartime memorabilia around. I want to take the huts at the front down and get my uncle involved to build some really attractive buildings and make a good display, as well as expanding my office to 350square metres."

There are exciting times ahead, indeed. And it's quite incredible how much time, investment and dedication it's taken for Dan to be in the position he is today. Whether it's down to good advice and being shrewd or whether luck had a part to play, Dan's certainly achieved a lot. He credits his best ideas as buying a Protech banger (of which he is very proud) and making his own panels: "That was by far the best £1500 I ever spent," he tells me, "buying two panel tables, two guns and some compressor saws to enable us to make our own panels and trellis was a very good move as it happened in January 2007, just when the shortage came about. And it really did pay off."

It took three years for Dan to break even after opening his yard, and he's taken some gambles along the way. But now, with every type of wood and fence in stock, he has plenty of scope to expand.

"I think the reason we've done so well is by being versatile." He says, "People like having one company that they trust take care of the whole job. We give good service and quality products at a fair price, and hopefully will continue to do so for many years to come."

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