

Just after Blue Luster

After the success of 5A grade cubic zirconias from Nevada diamond CZ, Fraser Studios has added the Russian Blue Luster ring from the same supplier.

The stones are 3A grade cubic zirconias which, unlike most costume jewellery, pieces are not glued, but cut and set - as a diamond would be - in a jewellery factory.

The finish is rhodium over base metal or gold vermeil.

The top American line features the best-selling rings, necklaces, earrings and bracelets. It is being introduced into the UK in a 50-piece pre-pack costing £960, with free jewellery displays, point of sale and merchandising. Price tickets will also be given to retailers, who will be able to take advantage of a dual pricing opportunity, enabling them to discount the product if the wish.

For further information phone Fraser Studios on 01592-774540; email sales@fraserstudios.com



Villeroy & Boch commits to Europe

Villeroy & Boch has confirmed its continued commitment to manufacturing in Germany despite the current economic downturn. The premium ware and bathroom ceramics brand announced it would not be shifting its main production out of Europe to meet the tough trading conditions. It will however, implement a series of cost-cutting measures which include consolidation of production facilities, and a reduction of 900 staff worldwide

from the current 9250 employed. These measures have been taken to improve term efficiency and productivity, and to ensure the company emerges from economic crisis stronger than before.

A wide-ranging cost-reduction programme will be implemented over the next three years, focusing on consolidating fields of specialisation at particular sites, establishing competence centres and continuing to automate production processes.

Patrick Heeley, Managing Director of Villeroy & Boch Tableware in the UK, says: "Villeroy & Boch Tableware will continue to be produced predominantly in Germany despite the economic downturn. We are dedicated to providing products of exceptional standard and are therefore committed to protecting and preserving our European heritage.

Nevertheless, the business climate is challenging, and our industry has suffered more than its fair share of casualties. The streamlining programme was a necessary decision, which was made to protect the company now and into the future."

The product featured is the 'Benedikt & Friends in Africa' range.



Jeremy Piercy

RETAIL Q & A

With Jeremy Piercy

Retail Q & A

Trends can drive business – but how can you stay abreast of them? Jeremy Piercy explains

I recently attended a talk about how to publish a book, by Kate Lock, author of *Confessions of an Eco-Shopper*. This may seem irrelevant to the gift trade, but there were some interesting parallels. Just as designers in the gift trade are finding it hard to attract work as the recession deepens, with many being made redundant, so are authors being shed by publishers. Many are finding it hard to get their latest work commissioned, and if you're a new author, it's especially difficult.

The book industry apparently has fashion trends just as do gifts. 'Terrible childhoods' are now out, 'uplifting personal stories' are in. 'Eco' is out temporarily because too many books have been commissioned in the last couple of years; fairy and escape stories are in. What do you do if you're an author and it takes two years to write a book?

Q. How do you keep up with trends – and is this important?

The answer for the author, says Kate, is to do what you really believe in. Follow your passion! If your heart isn't in it, you won't write a bestseller. This set me thinking. Is it the same in the gift industry? Many gift retailers will say it's not. Gift retailing, they will say, consists of keeping up with the trends, giving the customer what they want.

They're right of course – you need to know what the customer wants. But if you're passionate about customer care and keeping up with the latest trends, that's a passion in itself. The worst thing in retail is not to bother,

not to change – to get stuck in the same old routine, without realising it.

If you're really passionate about something, you may even start a new trend. Can you respond to something in the public eye that is not yet being catered for by current retailers? Taking risks, of course, is risky – especially in a recession! But that's how the supermarkets, the Body Shop, and fair trade, one of the fastest growing sectors in the UK at present, started. They all started not with products but with a belief and with passion.

What's next? I know of only two eco-shops in the UK, in London and Glasgow. I suspect there may soon be many more (will they be run by campaigners whose experience of retail is limited, or will they be started by people who know what they're doing?). The issue of climate change is already high on the public agenda, and will become more so as the Copenhagen summit, which will replace the Kyoto protocol, approaches this autumn. Concern about global warming can only grow, and I believe sustainable, recycled and fair trade products are going to attract increasing support. Canny retailers are already taking note! If you show your customers you care, and you're not just doing it to 'greenwash' your business, you should thrive.

If you have a retail question for Jeremy, email us at Gifts Today: phughes@lemapublishing.co.uk