

Continental CREATION

When craft bakery firm Birds the Confectioners bought the leasehold of a 1,000sq ft former bakery shop in Chesterfield last year, it resolved to ring the changes with a modern format that spared no expense.

It had been looking to open in Derbyshire's second-largest town for some time when the opportunity came up last autumn to lease a property in a good-quality secondary location. The company wanted a different design – something forward-looking – so it spoke to Aichinger, a German shop furnishings and fittings company it had worked with in Burton-on-Trent four years earlier and again, at its Westfield Derby store a year later.

High visibility of Birds' wares is crucial to the company when it develops a new shop, facilitated with good lighting and modern fixtures and fittings. To this end, Aichinger supplied an Art Line glass counter, without any intermediate shelves to obstruct the overview of the product displayed. It also supplied the back-fittings and the overall concept for the total refit.

Birds considers lighting a critical part of good shop-fitting and, in consultation with Aichinger, this was used to optimal effect, with strips of thin LED lighting used on shelf edges behind the counter and at the front of the counter, which change in synchronisation from red, through to blue, green and yellow in a highly evocative and distinctive style. An illuminated red panel in front of the counter and woody colours on the floor and behind the counter add warmth and contrast.

Essen-tial inspiration

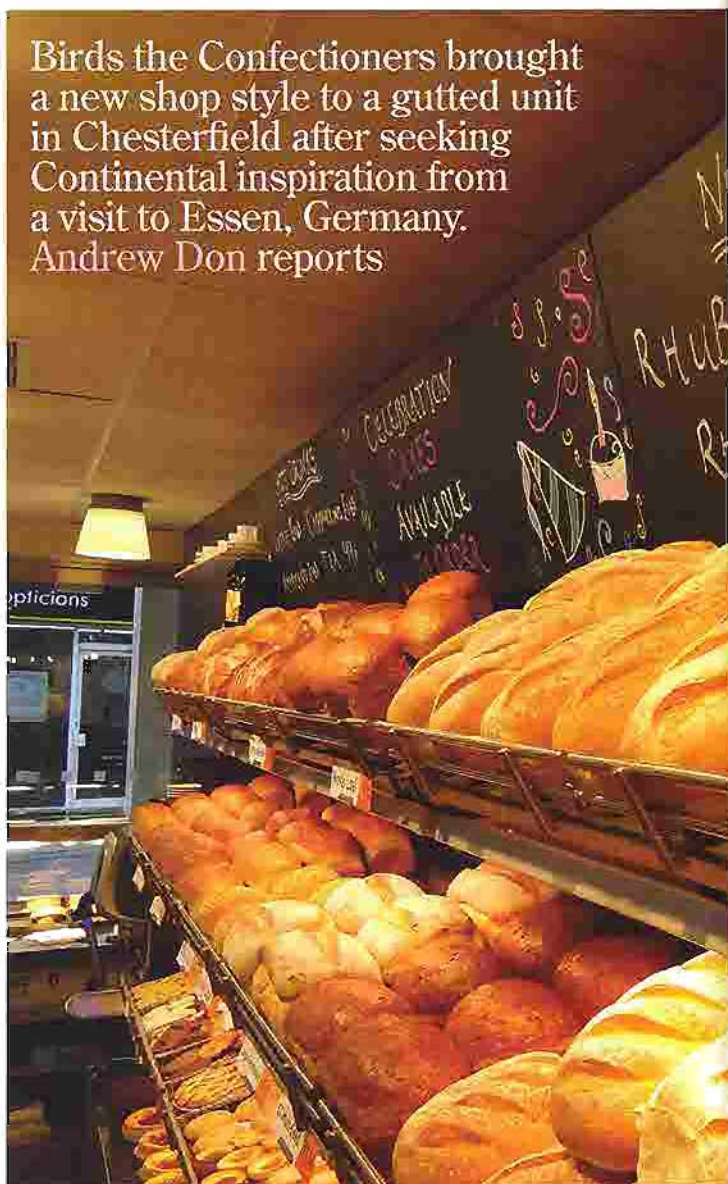
Mike Holling, head of retail operations, says one of the owners, Patrick Bird, saw the same counter at the shop in Essen with Marcus Pohl, Aichinger's export manager, who is responsible for Ireland, the UK and the Middle East. "We felt the display looked so good, it was worth exploring bringing the design back home," Holling says. "We wanted something totally different. We have competitors in Chesterfield and we wanted to make the shop clear, open and modern. We felt Aichinger delivered on that."

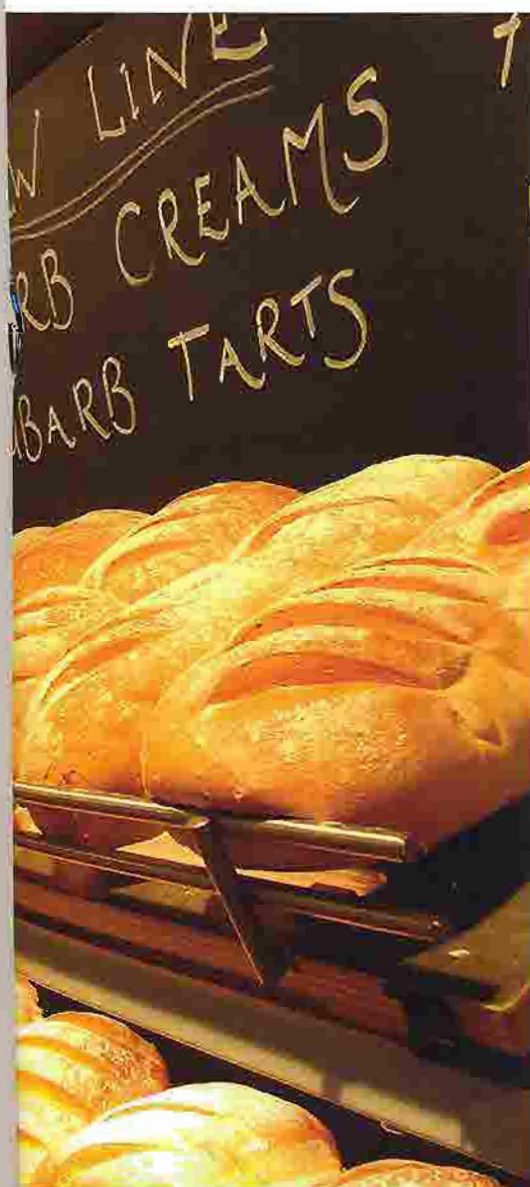
Birds sells a huge volume of cream cakes – about 71,000 a week or £52,000 in sales – through its shops, which trade as Birds the Confectioners and Birds Espresso. It also offers bread rolls and confectionery and has a market in bake-off, sandwiches and take-away, which it puts at the front of the Chesterfield shop.

Part of the new design spec was for the removal of the old shop

"We wanted something totally different. LED lights on shelf edges and at the front of the counter change in synchronisation from red, through to blue, green and yellow in a highly evocative and distinctive style"

Birds the Confectioners brought a new shop style to a gutted unit in Chesterfield after seeking Continental inspiration from a visit to Essen, Germany. Andrew Don reports





Clockwise from left: High visibility was important to Birds in the new design; Alchinger worked through the big freeze – laying the floor proved a particular problem; customers have given positive feedback; a new sliding two door frontage and large windows allow accessibility and a great draw to passing traffic; an illuminated red panel is used at the front of the counter and woody colours on the floor and walls behind add warmth



Birds the Confectioners

Established: 1919

Funded: Self-funded by three brothers Frank, Thomas and Reginald Bird when they returned from World War I

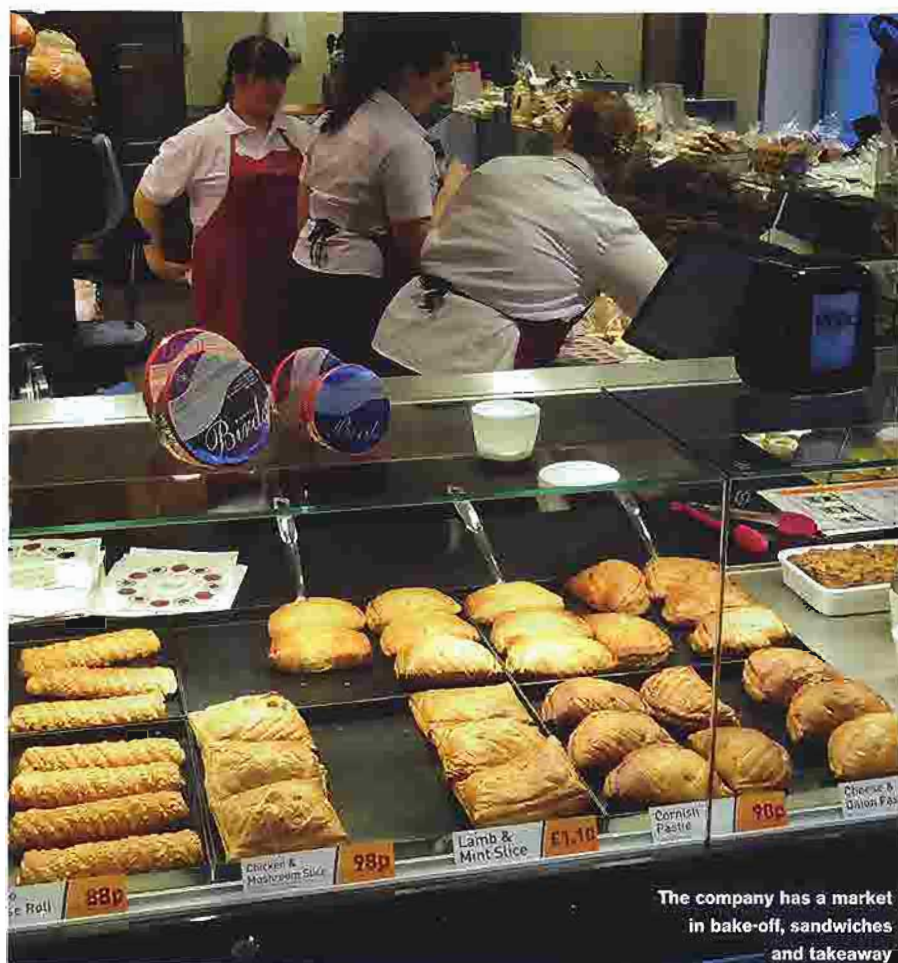
Ownership structure:

Family-owned limited company

Annual turnover: £19m

Number of staff: 700, 550 of which are based in the shops

Locations: 52 shops in the East Midlands, including eight tea rooms, plus a bakery in Derby.



The company has a market in bake-off, sandwiches and takeaway

At a glance

Synopsis of brief

To provide the company with a modern, clean Continental-style shop that customers would enjoy visiting, featuring state-of-the-art fittings that would showcase its traditional product range to its best.

Synopsis of the execution

Contractors spent four weeks on structural work, flooring and electrics. Aichinger, of Nuremberg, spent a further two days installing the high-visibility shop counter, LED lighting and back-fittings.

Shopfitter's viewpoint

Aichinger's export manager Marcus Pohl stresses the importance of detailed consultation, going backwards and forwards between the client and the architect before doing first sketches, consulting further and ironing out the detail before finalisation. "The consultation part is detailed and we tell the client they must do what is right for them and not to go ahead if it's not the right idea."

Product is very much the focus and Pohl says the entire store has to be designed to show the product in the right way. "We are niche shopfitters. We do flagship shops normally. People are prepared to invest more money for such stores."

front and the installation of a new sliding two-door frontage, created to evoke an open-plan feel. These can be operated in the summer so that 60% of the frontage opens up on to the street. Holling says this will be a great draw to passing traffic and will also provide greater accessibility for customers.

He declined to disclose how much the total shop refit cost, but *British Baker* estimates that, in total, it would be slightly north of £100,000.

Local labour

All structural work attending to walls, installation of a durable non-slip timber vinyl-style flooring, glazing and electrics by local contractors took four weeks and was overseen by Birds' former maintenance manager Matt Winters. The timing of the work could not have been worse, scheduled during the big freeze and the temperatures paid havoc with getting the floor to set.

Aichinger's fitting of the counter area took just two days. "Aichinger started at midnight on Sunday, 12 December and worked all the way through. By the time they finished on the Tuesday evening, they had cleared up, there was no mess and they were out of our way," says Holling. The shop opened four days later.

Holling says customer feedback has been positive and business is in line with expectations with week-on-week sales increasing by about 8%. Indeed, the performance is good enough for Birds to consider rolling out the format further afield to appropriate new shops and, possibly, retrofitting.

"Because of the cost you have to be a bit selective as to where you would put this in. It works well, I think, in provincial towns and cities," Holling says. The business may open another two or three stores this year, depending on the opportunities.



Birds sells a huge volume of cream cakes – about 35,000 per week



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– Mike Holling, head of retail operations, Birds