

SLATE WORKS



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Features



Alain Richard
(1953 - 2008)



UK focus
Chafford Gorges
Nature Park
Visitor Centre



International focus
Argentina:
Hotel Potrero
de los Funes



Our colleagues in Spain

It's a sad time for us as we mourn the loss of Alain Richard, our technical director.

As we reflect on his time with us, his uncompromising passion about the quality of roofing slates keeps surfacing.

By Zoë Williams, Group Marketing Manager

I recently heard a celeb-chef say that to cook great food, you need the very best ingredients. Alain would have agreed wholeheartedly: you shouldn't expect to be able to make a great roof out of the bits of rock we sometimes see masquerading as roofing slates! No, you just can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

Spanish Slate Quarries – now SSQ – was formed in 1983, its activities centring on importing slate from Spain. With demand growing, the company entered into relationships with a number of quarries and, in 1994, made a bold investment by opening an office in El Barco, north-west Spain. The office has four roles: to maintain and foster our relationships with the quarries; to develop sales through our agents in Europe; to help manage the logistics of shipping our products from quarry to customer and to monitor, enhance and underwrite the level of quality control at the quarries.

Lisardo Garcia, our European manager, is totally committed to this last role: *"Realistically, we have to accept that the level of quality control will vary amongst the quarries – the smaller ones may struggle just in terms of manpower – so it's our task to ensure that we monitor what is done and supplement it as necessary. We've added our own procedures to ensure there's a universal minimum standard and have two, full-time quality-control managers touring the quarries, monitoring production and doing hands-on checks to ensure the standard of SSQ's brands."*

The Del Carmen Quarry is located on the vast slate belt that runs from Casayo to Leon in Galicia's Montes de Leon in north-west Spain. Although it's just one of more than 85 quarries in the area, what sets it apart from the other 84 is quality – opened in 1984, its name has become synonymous with some of the finest roofing slates available today. Our association with Del Carmen dates back to 1992 when we agreed an exclusive distribution

contract and we're immensely proud of the products they produce and the standards they set. Del Carmen's own quality system means that every slate, bar none, is checked twice during the production process for breakages and dimensional regularity in terms of squareness, thickness and flatness.

Lisardo continues, *"It's important to remember that slate is a natural product so our QC managers build on the quarry's checks by looking at strength, flaking, grain and inclusions. They randomly select three or four pallets and check 50 slates from each: if more than three slates fail, a further 50 slates are checked and if three of those fail, we reject the pallet – but that rarely happens! Commercially, our investment in having a universal quality-control system is very, very worthwhile as it gives the sales teams a real competitive edge."*

So, next time you look at one of our roofing slates, please try to remember: 'This isn't just a roofing slate, it's an SSQ roofing slate!'



**Uncover the source,
discover the pedigree**





Alain Richard (1953 – 2008)

It's with great sadness that we tell you of the death of Alain Richard, our technical director and internationally renowned slate specialist, who lost a long battle with cancer on Monday, 30 June.

Alain was born on 20 May 1953 in Brittany, France, and lived there for over 30 years before being sent to England by his employers in 1986. Although known the world over for his knowledge and expertise about slates and slate roofing, this was not Alain's first choice of career. Excelling at anything he put his mind to, it was suggested that he should look towards teaching but, having passed his exams with flying colours, he received his call-up for compulsory military service.

Returning to civilian life in 1974 Alain struggled to find a job and it was then that he made the life-changing decision to train as a slater, joining the FPA School of Slating in Brittany where his capacity for learning helped him amass a wealth of knowledge about slates and roofing. In 1986 the French roofing company he was working for asked him to go to England to manage a roofing contract it had won for three large buildings on the Stockley Park development in Uxbridge. Alain revelled in the challenge, managing a team of 15 slaters and having total responsibility for ensuring that the quality of both the slates and workmanship were of the highest possible standard.

When the project finished, Alain decided to stay in the UK and set up his own company, Hook and Slate, offering a unique, personalised, high-quality slate roof design-and-fix service. The choice of company name was no accident – it was Alain who pioneered the use of the continental 'hook' method of fixing roofing slates in the UK, his enthusiasm convincing slaters, architects, planners and others within the industry that it was a proven and reliable method. And his knowledge, convincing arguments and Gallic charm also persuaded many doubters that, yes, you really could design and build successful low-pitch roofs outside of the British Standards!

It was during this time that Alain met Ahmed El-Helw, our chairman, who had formed Spanish Slate Quarries, now known as SSQ, in 1983. Working in the same industry it was impossible not to hear Alain's name being mentioned and, having heard so much about his skills, Ahmed made him an offer he couldn't refuse to become SSQ's technical director.

Alain thrived in the role. Although his talents were invaluable to SSQ, Alain was, first and foremost, dedicated to slate roofing; his knowledge, skills, flair and enthusiasm helped many people within the roofing industry worldwide. Alain worked in many countries, leaving an indelible mark on both the roofs he helped create and the people he helped create them. Alain trained new slaters in Dubai, Turkey, Estonia and Latvia, countries where slate had never been used before; helped designers bring complex designs to reality; brought understanding about slates and their fixing to many architects and roofers and was always ready to get up on a roof and get 'stuck in'.

Alain's passion for life and learning extended to his spare time. He travelled widely and did so as often as he could whether for work or for pleasure, took courses in business and computing – loving the challenge and soaking up information like a sponge and, true to his Breton roots, he was also a master yachtsman.

The industry has been deprived of a unique individual. Alain will be truly missed by everyone here at SSQ; he was an exceptionally talented man who will be impossible to replace both professionally and, of course, as a dear and loyal friend.

If you knew Alain and would like to talk to somebody at SSQ about this sad occasion, please call Ahmed El-Helw on 020 8961 7725.

A small sample of Alain's legacy:



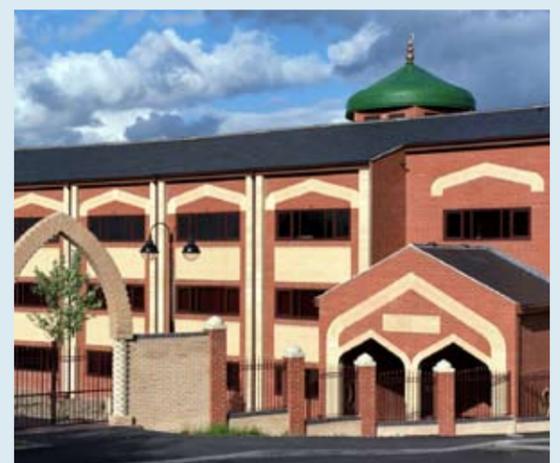
St Patrick's – Auckland

Alain completed the specification detailing for this impressive cathedral in Auckland, New Zealand.



Christ College – Brecon

Alain taught students of the college how to fix slates – they then went on to continue re-roofing the buildings.



Madrasa School and Mosque – Batley, Yorkshire

Alain drew up the complicated detailing and specification for this low-pitch (17.5°), curved roof.



Uncover the source,
discover the pedigree





Del Carmen: take a walk on the wild side



Project: Chafford Gorges Nature Park Visitor Centre
 Client: Essex Wildlife Trust
 Location: Chafford Hundred, Essex
 Architect: Laurie Wood Architects, Colchester
 Roofing: Arnold Roofing, Clacton-on-Sea
 Product: SSQ First Del Carmen® Blue-black roofing slate

Essex Wildlife Trust's Chafford Gorges Nature Park is an island of tranquillity in an ocean of urban development: 200 acres of carefully managed nature park surrounded by 6,500 new houses next to Essex's Lakeside shopping centre.

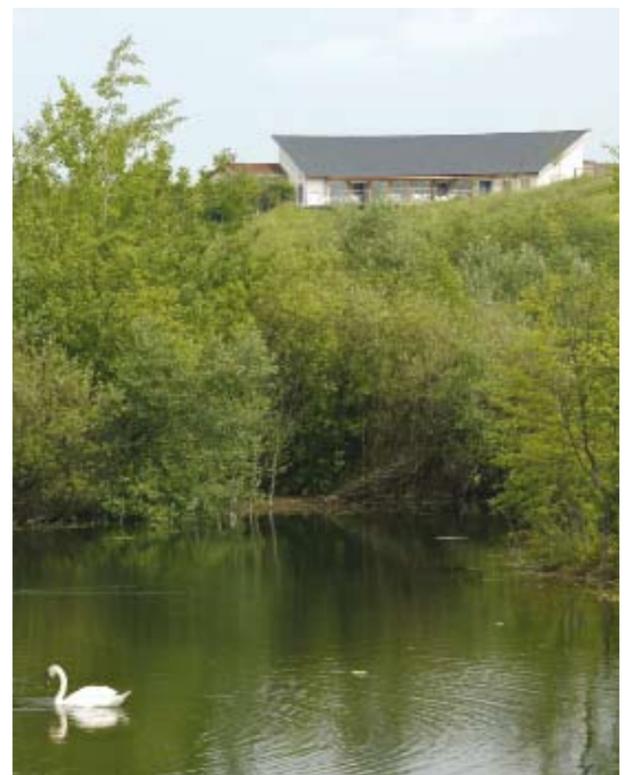
Designed by Laurie Wood Architects, the park's new visitor centre perches on the edge of Warren Gorge, its curved design helping to shield the houses from its visitors' gaze, focussing their attention into the gorge and its wildlife.

"The visitor centre reflects our ideals as an architectural practice – innovative designs combining quality with energy efficiency and a respect for the environment." said Laurie Wood, *"The centre provides visitor and operational facilities wrapped in an environmentally-friendly design that's both in harmony with its purpose and sympathetic to its location."*

The design of the roof is dictated by the design of the building: the front and rear elevations follow parallel curves that result in a single-pitch roof with an eaves length of 21m rising at a gentle 25° slope to a 29m long ridge. The design philosophy meant the choice of roofing material was relatively straightforward – good quality roofing slate has a long life expectancy; low environmental impact; low levels of embodied energy and carbon and can be recycled or reused.

"We knew this was going to be a challenge," admits Tony Arnill from Clacton-based Arnold Roofing, *"but it was one we were looking forward to! Alain Richard, SSQ's technical director, visited the site and helped us set out – having 'pinged' chalk-lines down the 9m slope, almost every one of more than 7,000 slates had to be individually cut so that the 116 slates per course gradually increased from 180mm at the eaves to 250mm at the ridge. The combination of a shallow slope, narrow slates and lots of cutting meant hooks were the only way to fix the slates and, of course, Alain was a great champion of that! Despite our initial trepidation, everything went incredibly smoothly and we're very proud of the job – it's a shame most visitors don't give it a second thought!"*

As Steve Beary, director of Essex Wildlife Trust's sales operation concludes, *"The centre acts as a focal point within the park, enhancing people's enjoyment of wildlife and brings benefits both individually and to the local community. To that end its design plays a key role in realising 'biophilia', the instinctive bond that people have with nature."*



Uncover the source, discover the pedigree



Project: Hotel Potrero de los Funes

Location: Potrero de los Funes, Argentina

Architect: Hugo Larramendi, San Luis

Product: SSQ Riverstone® architectural stone

The Hotel Potrero de los Funes sits on the rocky shore of Lake Potrero de los Funes, high in the mountains of the Sierra de San Luis, about 10 miles north-east of the provincial capital of San Luis in central Argentina.

The four-star, 97-bedroom hotel and conference centre offers its guests panoramic views across the mountain lake and acts as a focal point for the area's flourishing leisure industry. In 2005 the hotel hosted the World Chess Championship and, at the end of November 2008, welcomes the final round of the FIA GT Championship; an international motor race that will use the spectacular, recently rebuilt, forty-year-old race circuit that soars and swoops around the lake's shoreline.

The Sierra de San Luis is also home to SSQ's La Florida Quarry, the source of Riverstone® architectural stone, a range of premium-quality, natural rock products that have been specifically cut and dressed for architectural use. Riverstone is a phyllite, a close relation of slate, and has been used in the San Luis area for centuries; its natural beauty, durability and slip resistance making it an ideal choice of material for flooring, paving, cladding and stairways.

Hugo Larramendi, the architect responsible for the hotel's recent multimillion dollar refurbishment, was determined to make use of local, natural materials to connect the hotel with its rugged setting, promote the area's surroundings and showcase its local industries. So the decision about what to use for flooring in the hotel's public areas was an easy one to make: over 2,000m² of Riverstone flooring made the short trip from the quarry to its new home in the hotel's entrance foyer, reception, restaurant and function rooms.



We're delighted to announce that Philip Fergusson has joined us as Business Development Director, SSQ UK.

Having spent over 30 years working within the building materials industry, Philip brings us a wealth of knowledge and experience. Previous roles include seven years as commercial director at Asphaltic Roofing Supplies, eight as commercial director at SIG Roofing Supplies and, most recently, a two-year contract with Fosroc, the multinational specialist chemical company, working in Dubai's fast-paced construction sector.

Philip is initially working with Mike Crook, our general manager, and focusing on the development and implementation of a number of specific opportunities before concentrating on new, long-term development projects.

In a personal message to *Slateworks'* readers, Philip said, "It's great to be back working in the UK, in the industry where I spent so many happy years and especially with such a well-respected company. An essential part of my role is to expand our business through new accounts in the UK so I'm keen to re-establish relationships with the many friends and colleagues I've lost track of during my couple of years overseas. If you're reading this, it's a great opportunity for us to catch up so please take this as open invitation to contact me – direct on 07824 698 822 – I'll be delighted to hear from you."

We hope you've enjoyed *Slateworks* and found it inspiring. If you have anything you would like to contribute to future issues, or would like us to send you, or your colleagues, additional copies, please contact Zoë Williams on:

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Samples and literature

A full range of product guides, slate samples and geological test documents are available on request from:

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