



LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Conventional wisdom tells us that location is the three most important factors when it comes to determining desirability, so little wonder then that ForeGolf, one of the most respected club-making companies in the world, has moved to Killeen Castle. Interview by Colin O'Brien.

Derek Murray and his team have been at the fore of golf equipment for years – and have the awards to prove it. But crucially, and when you pay them a visit you'll see this, they have the experience, too.

To name but a few of the gongs, ForeGolf has been named Irish club-maker of the year, European club-maker of the year (twice) and world-club maker of the year. It's the only outfit trusted to actually build and combine freely different parts by many of the major manufacturers ... and they've also got a long list of happy customers out there. Perhaps you know one of them – maybe the guy in your club who drives it longer and straighter than you do.

But nowadays, one cannot rest on one's laurels, and after years of service, the crew has left its faithful shop at the Red Lane Golf Centre near Newbridge and set-up base in Killeen Castle, County Meath.

"For us, it was really a move that we had to make," says Derek Murray, who builds the clubs with his father Don, and is also our

very own equipment editor.

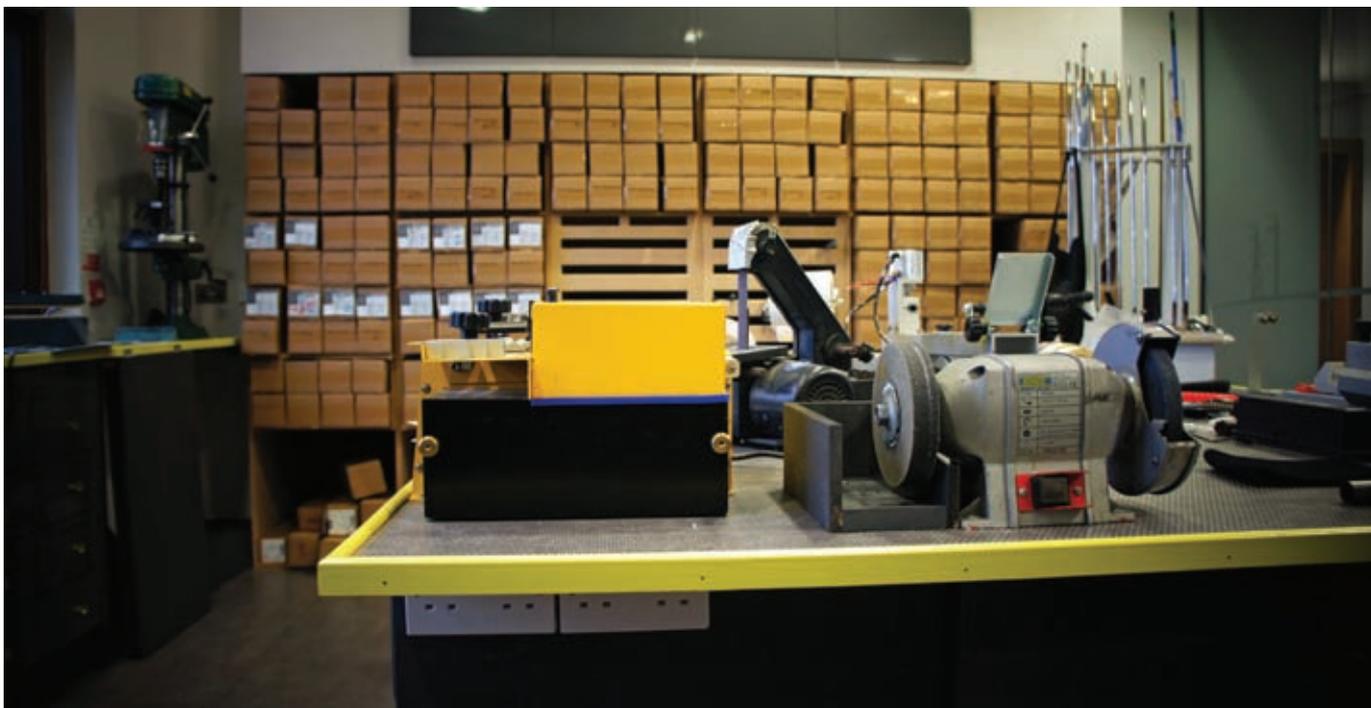
"I'm a progressive person, and I think no matter what you do I think you always need to be thinking of the next thing, of how to make it better. We needed to find a way to make ForeGolf better, and I think the move allows us to do that. After all, if you're not going forward, you're going backward. You can't even stand still anymore – you need to be moving and getting better or else your business is doomed in this economy."

Given the likely cost of such a move, and if the full orders books are anything to go by, the ForeGolf lot must be moving forward at a rate of knots, because business certainly seems healthy. But the move was not just a

vanity one, it's more than simply a posh new office.

"The thing we do better than anyone else," explains Derek modestly, "is the building of the clubs. But it was something that no one ever saw in the old place – there was no direct connection between the customer and process. The move allowed us to showcase the whole workshop. We've glass-walled the whole workshop, so you can see we're not just taking clubs out of boxes – we're making them. When you walk into reception you can see all of the clubs in production. We want to emphasise that we're not just opening boxes and putting the clubs up on racks – we actually hand-build your clubs.

"Our business has been growing and the demand has been growing, so it was time for us to get into a space that reflected that and provided us with some room to grow." – Derek Murray

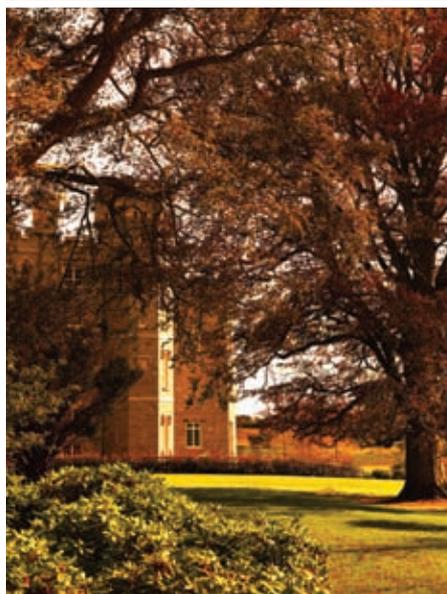


“Elsewhere, the idea of custom fitting is actually just to fit the golfer to whatever the shop has in stock – they’re not actually making anything. We put the time to make sure everything is perfect; we’re not giving you something that’s just ‘close enough’. I mean, anyone can open boxes, that doesn’t take any kind of art at all.”

There’s always been an art to what these guys do, but now they’ve got the platform to really focus people’s attentions. Even though, in a perfect world it wouldn’t be, it’s human nature to associate surroundings and appearance with performance and quality. If you’re spending premium money, after all, you want a premium experience.

“It’s a fact of life: Location matters. You’ll buy a Rolex on Rodeo Drive, but not down the back of Henry Street. So moving to Killeen Castle shows people what we’re all about: it’s a premium service in a premium location. And I think that fits us, because we were the people who brought fitting to Ireland; and we’re still among the few in Europe who get the club-heads directly from the manufacturers.

“We’ve got a club-room, which has all the club-heads and the shafts and all the technology we need, where you can test them out, right on the driving range. And that’s all the brands – we’re not just selling Titleist or Callaway or Cleveland. We’ll show you the lot and then see what’s best for you. And with the glass around



the workshop, you can see the whole construction process.”

Of course, putting yourself on display like that takes guts; after all, you only want people to see what you’re doing if you’re actually doing something the right way, as well as it can be done.

“In the old shop,” offers Derek, “even though the clubs were coming out perfect – we won all of our awards there – some people didn’t actually get that we were physically making them there, because they couldn’t see the process.

“Our business has been growing and the



demand has been growing, so it was time for us to get into a space that reflected that and provided us with some room to grow. Also, I think that Killeen Castle offers us the kind of location that people associate with the kind of top-class product that we offer. And now the resort has every aspect of the game covered now: with the Pelz short game academy, Paul McCanny’s teaching, there’s a great course, we can custom-build your clubs – the whole lot.”

This all seems suspiciously like the rarest of things nowadays: an Irish business success story – long lay it last.