With the help of technology solutions provider Lectra, French furniture maker Duvivier Canapés has been able to boost its production capacity and give more customers the opportunity to own a piece of its stylish leather furniture.

A cut above the rest

Leather furniture group Duvivier Canapés has been recognised by the French government for its know-how and heritage. In 2006, it was awarded the Enterprise du Patrimoine Vivant (EPV) or 'living heritage' status, a state initiative launched more than a decade ago to promote French culture and *savoir-faire*. Only companies that have demonstrated high levels of craftsmanship and success are eligible to receive it. Duvivier Canapés says it was handed this distinction because of its rich history, national and international reputation, capacity for innovation and expertise in the use of leather.

The company was founded in 1840 by François-Baptiste Duvivier, originally as a saddlery workshop. Located in France's Vienne region, the founder's aim was to manufacture French products of exceptional quality. More than a century later it shifted its focus to seated furniture and in 1978 Jean Marie Duvivier, a fourth-generation member of the founding family, opened a sofa manufacturing workshop in Usson du Poitou, around 40 kilometres south of Poitiers. The Duvivier Canapés brand was launched in 1989, releasing its first collection later that year.

At the turn of the century Duvivier Canapés set about expanding its distribution network. This took place both at home, with the opening of its first shop-showroom in Paris in 2000, and abroad. The company now operates three showrooms in France, two in Paris and one in Lille, and sells at a further 40 specialist retailers in the country. Overseas, its products can be purchased as far afield as Adelaide, Australia, Seoul, South Korea, and Vancouver, Canada. A showroom was opened in Shanghai in 2005, with another in Tokyo, which is operated by the company's Japanese partner.

Made in France

Duvivier Canapés describes the materials it uses as "essential elements" in its pursuit of high-quality products. As a result, they are "subject to the greatest care" from the moment they are selected until their incorporation into the finished piece of furniture. The company says it has "a passion for leather", favouring materials that develop a patina over time and so give a sofa or chair individual character and uniqueness.

Its leather is sourced from tanners affiliated with the Filière Française du Cuir and it is quick to pay tribute to their skills. "The experience of the tanner and his mastery of traditional methods are the key

Duvivier Canapé's products, such as the Pierre sofa, are intended to fit in with a variety of interior design styles. CREDIT: DIDIER DELMAS

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to obtaining a beautiful, natural and authentic leather," it states.

One of its material partners is the Rémy Carriat tannery, based in Espelette in the Basque Country. The company began operating in 1927 and produces high-quality leather for saddlery, leathergoods, footwear and furniture. Its raw materials of choice are young bull hides from Europe and buffalo calf skins from Pakistan. The tanning methods it employs are designed to create leathers that are soft and durable, valuable qualities in furniture upholstery. Like Duvivier Canapés, Rémy Carriat has received the French government's 'living heritage' status.

Duvivier Canapés offers its customers a wide range of leathers, including drum-dyed leathers, aniline leathers and semi-aniline leathers. They can choose from materials of different thickness, surface and colour, depending on their needs. All of them must meet "rigorous and demanding specifications", standards which it demand also be maintained by its suppliers. Duvivier Canapés points to the traceability of its raw materials as another important part of ensuring the quality of its finished products.

Manufacturing takes place entirely in France. Its main site in Usson du Poitou is home to its leather and fabric workshops. Around 50 staff work at this location. The wooden elements of its furniture are made at a separate carpentry workshop in nearby Lussac les Châteaux. The brand sources nearly all its wood from forests managed to Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) standards.

The first step in the creation process of any product is the initial design and Duvivier Canapés understands this stage is crucial to the quality and comfort of the final result. It encourages close collaboration between designers, production teams and suppliers to make sure the process gets off to as good a start as possible.

When it comes to manufacturing, the brand believes in offering frequent training to its workers, implementing clear procedures at every stage of production, and enforcing strict quality control measures before products are packaged and shipped to customers. It is working hard to preserve the know-how of its staff and to pass their

From initial material selection to the moment a piece of furniture leaves the Duvivier Canapés workshop, each step of the process is geared towards the quality and comfort of the finished product. CREDIT: DUVIVIER CANAPÉS

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knowledge on to a new generation of furniture makers. "The talented people that strengthen the company's workforce acquire expertise and values of excellence in their daily work by observation of the older generation and through repetition of precise gestures," it explains.

Material gains

Seven generations of the Duvivier family have successfully married traditional French craftsmanship with state of the art techniques and technological innovations. The current custodian of this heritage is Aymeric Duthoit, who acquired the company in July 2016. He now serves as both owner and CEO. After taking over the company, he paid tribute to its ability to "respond to the needs and desires of its customers without abandoning its past".

"The stakes are high and this is really about reaffirming a position and developing a brand that has everything already going for it," he added, explaining that his aim was to build on the brand's history "without breaching it but incorporating the essential elements needed for the current market."

Its relationship with technology solutions provider Lectra is a good example of its willingness to move with the times. It began using Lectra's Versalis automated leather cutting solution in 2013, hoping to increase its efficiency and productivity. The partnership came about as Duvivier Canapés sought to keep up with demand.

The company's target was to double the number of hides it was able to cut each day without needing to employ additional staff. It wanted this to be achieved without any compromise on quality. Versalis was capable of satisfying these aims; as well as the obvious improvement in efficiency that comes from automated cutting, it can also detect flaws in a hide and direct cutting to avoid them. This allows for maximum yield from each hide.

For Duvivier Canapés, the introduction of Versalis has brought three main advantages. The first is significant time savings due to the presence of a continuous cutting line. The technology is capable of digitising, nesting and cutting hides without the need for additional input. It has also allowed the brand to

By using Lectra's Versalis automated leather cutting solution, Duvivier Canapés has been able to make significant improvements in productivity and cutting quality. CREDIT: LECTRA

significantly improve its productivity; its throughput is now 140 hides per day, double its previous manual capacity. The final benefit is improved cut quality. It has described its cutting quality as "significantly higher" and says it now has an "extremely low rejection rate".

Lectra has said that Duvivier Canapés, like all its customers, benefits from access to international call centre and to its customer care teams. This means a member of the Lectra team is always available should any problems arise. The brand has in the past praised Lectra for the speed with which it was able to install the Versalis solution.

Perfect partnership

The brand's latest step into the 21st century is the launch of a new application for smart devices which allows customers to select any Duvivier Canapés model and configure it to their liking with the help of a 3D visualiser. The aspects they can customise include size, upholstery, colour and finish. They are even able to virtually place the item they wish to purchase into their own living room, so they can decide whether it is suitable. Duvivier Canapés describes the application as "an innovation that transforms the customer experience". In addition, it can be used in-store by sales advisors, putting the whole product catalogue at their disposal and reducing the number of items that need to be on display. The company has said it launched the application when it realised customers were looking for a new kind of experience in store.

Also new for 2018 is a partnership with young French designer Charlotte Juillard. The brand says it chose to work with her due to her "inventive and innovative approach to material" and has praised her for being "sensitive to the nobility of materials". The two ranges she has designed, which go by the names Jeanne and Jules, contain a variety of furniture options. The designer's main focus has been on the use of natural materials such as leather and wood, combining these with fabrics in some cases.

Ms Juillard appears to see this collaboration as an opportunity to make a broader statement about French craftsmanship and quality. "As a designer and company, we have a heavy mission, re-teaching the public to be sensitive to local production and the know-how of our industries, which are disappearing in favour of delocalised manufacturing and less expensive end products," she insists.

Summing up her design ethic, she has said: "My desire is not to alter the material but to emphasise and enhance it." This ties in very closely with Duvivier Canapés's own mantra. The combination of quality materials, expert craftsmanship and an appreciation for innovation makes Duvivier Canapés worthy of the recognition it has received at home and abroad.

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