

Dennis visits Le Mans and Paris

After eighteen months of staying at home and non-business travel or travel in general, Dennis finally had the opportunity to visit the teams in Le Mans and Paris.

On this business trip, he had the chance to meet French artist Olivier Masmonteil during a visit to his studio based in Paris. A brand ambassador for Lefranc Bourgeois, Thierry Collot, Frederique Rousseau and Caitlin Boucher joined Dennis on the studio tour.

The team learnt more of Oliver's artistic vocation, creative process, and passion for LB's extensive range of colours.



In his own words: Dennis writes about his experiences in France.

Visiting Olivier Masmonteil

In a large building in Saint-Ouen, Paris, I had the chance to meet Olivier Masmonteil, an amiable and enthusiastic artist. He told us about his lifelong love for painting. He explained how he had to keep believing and convincing his art school tutors in the 90' when "painting" was not trendy, and his arts education was focused on conceptual art (the idea being more important than the materials and craftsmanship). Over the years, he built a strong network of serious, professional painters, and today it's fair to say that he is an established artist who sells almost all he makes. He also has a functioning workshop, set up much like those of the Renaissance Old Masters', with several apprentices who he trains and instructs to do the laborious work of his large-scale canvases, and then he delivers the finishing touch.

He started his career by painting classical landscapes, in which he blends extra layers of abstract lines and colours, contours of nudes and lately also overlays with screen-printed patterns.

He has incredible energy and creativity, loves living the good life (fishing, dining, wines) and constantly comes up with new ideas. He is a true spirited artist who loves Lefranc Bourgeois colours and inspires me to continue building a sustainable Colart to reach and serve more artists like Oliver.

Visiting Charbonnel Boutique

Together with Paul Schrotti, Colart Board Chairman, we had the chance to see an almost finished Charbonnel Boutique. Frederique recently joined the company and has accepted the challenge to come up with a good name for what we strategically have labelled as “the destination for and home of our French Brands”.

It will be an experiential place where the artists will meet and learn about our brands and products, where events will be organized for customers to engage with our business, where part of our marketing team will have their office and where Julien Robin (Flagship Boutique Officer) will be running a retail environment to sell products to the public. And all this with a full view of Notre Dame Cathedral!

We have been in this location for a very long time and recently had the opportunity to acquire the property ourselves. The renovation has been done with the historical spirit in mind and executed with a contemporary style combining wood, steel, and glass. Thierry gave us an enriching introduction and showed us around, including the bits and pieces that were not quite ready yet

Paul and I left very impressed and proud to see such a bold and strategic investment coming to fruition in a very professional way.



Visiting the factory in Le Mans

After more than a year, joined by board members Xavier Desjobert and Paul, I could finally come back to the beautiful world of our factory and offices in Le Mans.

My mechanical engineering heart always jumps up a few beats when I see, hear, and smell a factory and this time, even more, because of the many changes that have taken place. These include:

- A fully fit for purpose new laboratory,
- Four new tankers to efficiently store resins from suppliers like BASF,
- A massive, big mixer that is about to be installed to minimise handling and to reduce our costs,
- Automatic Guided Vehicles moving around,
- Fully functioning conveyors taking products from new filling lines,
- Robotised picking and palletising system,

- Improved lean flow by integrating and running a previously outsourced warehouse called Trembley,
- Multiple sustainability initiatives to fulfil our “no more virgin plastic” dream,
- and a new layout and specific picking and packing area for Amazon.

It was overwhelming in a positive sense and gave me so much confidence in the future. Not just because of the investments we have made but also because of the ability of our team to execute on time and stay on budget while doing so. Lots of kudos to Dominique and the team.

We also had a shortboard meeting in Le Mans to receive approval for a €1.3m bottle filling line. This “out of process” agile approval will allow us to catch a significant opportunity with a LiquitexBasics Liquid proposition to be launched with Michaels by September 2022.

In the afternoon, we spent time with Carole and the team to discuss the progress on the people agenda, emphasising on wellbeing and the new hybrid working model.

Then came Bruno and the team to review and discuss “all things supply chain”. In a very coherent and knowledgeable way, Bruno described the context and next steps of the challenges we are facing.

Finally, running short of time to catch our trains, Thierry, Patricia, and Frederique gave us a quick overview of the South European and Lefranc Bourgeois businesses. With a clear longer-term strategy in mind and taking steps every month to execute the plan, we were all delighted to see the fantastic progress made to grow with increasing profit in a highly competitive market sustainably. Reflecting on the train, it was still buzzing in my head how much progress we have made both operationally and commercially. And also, how much energy I felt from all the colleagues I met not to accept to stand still being ready to take on the long list of ideas and improvement actions we will always have.