

In the Picture

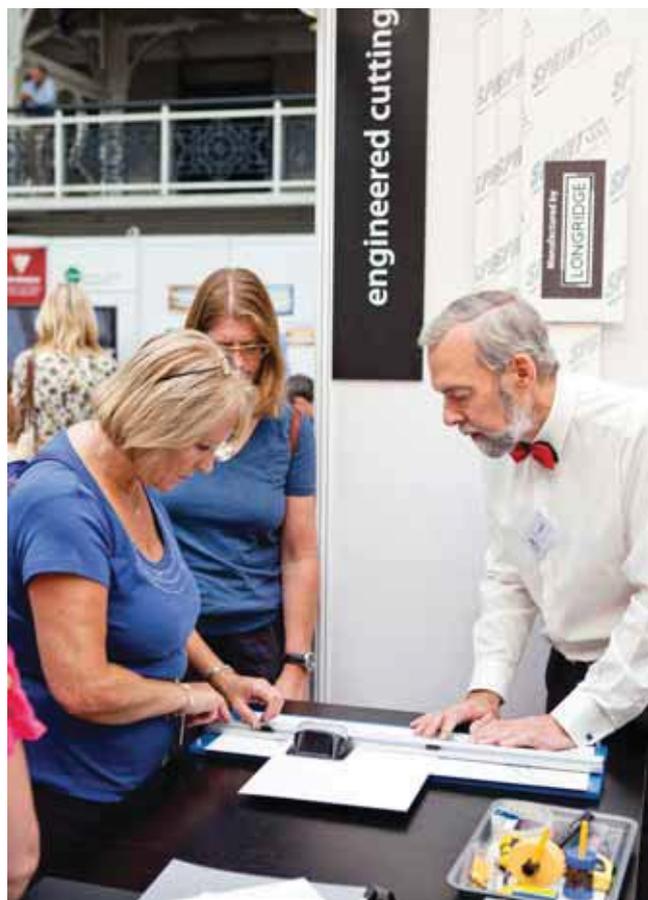
Chris Longridge

In this issue we meet Chris Longridge, the mastermind behind the Longridge Mount Cutting Systems

By his own admission Chris Longridge was never much of an artist, but one thing that did interest him was framing. The family had piles of old photos that hadn't been put into albums, together with certificates and prints that would have looked better on the wall than lying around in drawers, and Chris decided he'd like to learn how to present them properly. "I was working full time so it never occurred to me this would be anything other than a hobby," he explains. "I attended a few framing courses, and these covered mount cutting and decoration, which I soon realised were an essential part of good framing."

Although he enjoyed the courses, Chris soon realised that the framing business was very labour intensive. "We were shown how to use templates for the marking out procedure, and I

▽ A Spring Fair in 1996

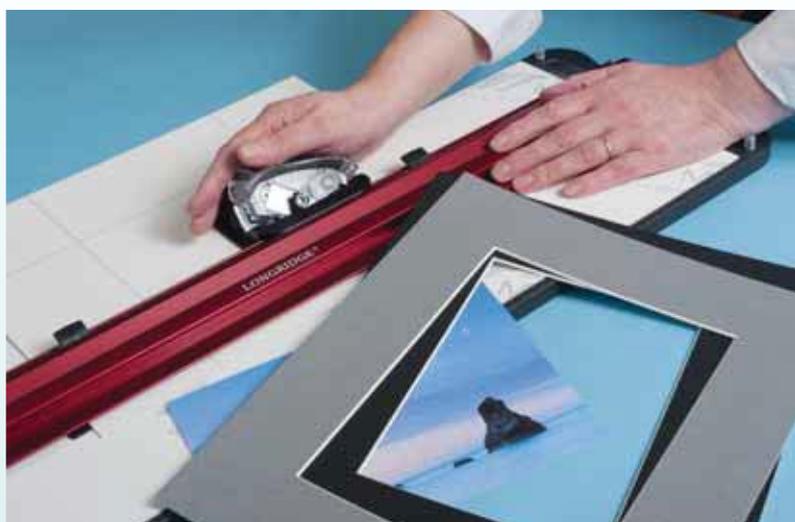


thought there must be a gizmo that would make it more efficient and accurate," he remembers. "So I went away in search of a less cumbersome solution."

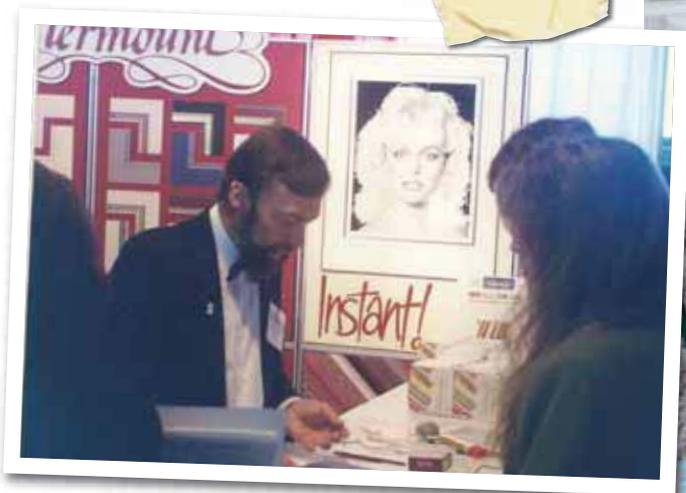
Despite having no previous experience in the area, Chris clearly had a natural flair for design and the ability to solve practical problems. He came up with the Corner Gauge, which could be used to mark out the position of decorations to be added to a mount. Excited by the possibilities of his new product he paid for a small stand at a framing trade exhibition at Alexandra Palace in London, and watched in amazement as enquiries came flooding in. "It was like bees around a honey pot!" he remembers. "A good friend was a lawyer and advised me to take out a patent on the Corner Gauge, for which I've been eternally grateful because several companies have since tried to copy it."

Realising that there would be a demand for his invention, Chris found a company to manufacture it. "Initially it was made by hand, but once I was certain that the market was there, it was made by injection moulding," he says. "My wife Eden was working full time as a partner in a legal firm at the time, which enabled me to drop everything to become immersed in this extraordinary explosion of interest in our product. It was an incredible experience and quite a learning curve. I spent four or five years travelling throughout Europe, establishing a distribution network. In the UK we were selling through mail order to the framing trade, and I also started to attend exhibitions aimed at artists, photographers and hobbyists."

As Chris immersed himself in the world of framing, he became aware of the limitations of the available equipment for mount cutting. "The more artists spoke to me of their frustrations, the more I realised we needed to design something from scratch; a



△ The Autograph



△ Chris at a show in New York in 1996

thoroughly thought out design, very practical and logical, something you could take out of the box and use straight away without any assembly work," he says. "It needed to be quick and easy to use so artists could get on with their painting, and it also needed to cater for left-handed people in the art world." Having initially used a combination of different mount cutting tools he had found in the UK, France and America, and realising that each had their drawbacks, Chris came up with the solution by adapting a woodworking tool to mark out window mounts. "This was the Marker Gauge, simplicity itself," he says. "A pencil combined with a marking tool and a scale all in one – very simple, logical and practical!"

In his search to produce the definitive mount cutter, he even commissioned a special blade from experts in Sheffield. "Blades in existing products turned out to be completely unsuitable for cutting mount board," he explains.

After a lengthy period of consultation, research and development, Longridge began manufacturing and selling its own systems 15 years ago, and Chris and his team have never looked back. "I wanted our mount cutting system to be made in the UK, and for it to be innovative, ambidextrous and address all the feedback I'd had over the years," he says. "At last we were enabling people to safely cut accurate mounts that didn't require a lot of pressure or force. Since those early days we have extended the range with different systems available according to the size and quantity of mounts you wish to cut."

Longridge is now a real family affair. Chris's wife Eden joined as a partner over ten years ago, running the administrative side of the business, and their daughter Helen is also involved. "Being fluent in French, Spanish and Portuguese, she has been invaluable when we've attended exhibitions in Europe!" he says. "I think people like the fact that we are a family run business. We have others working with us, but we like to be the ones to answer the phone and have contact with our customers. It's very personal and we are passionate about what we do."

Although much of their business is now done on the Internet, Chris and Eden still love attending exhibitions as it helps them keep an eye on the market place and have direct contact with customers. They've enjoyed a close working relationship with the SAA from the early days when the Corner Gauge first appeared in the Home Shop catalogue, and they enjoy meeting



SAA members at It's all about Art events. "Exhibitions are an important barometer of what's going on in the marketplace, helping us to identify future development ideas," explains Chris. "We have more ideas kicking around and are always interested to hear from artists with any problems they might need solving in the field of picture mounting."

Meet the Longridge Team at **It's All About Art** in London from 25th-27th July.

See the SAA Home Shop Annual Catalogue for the Longridge range of mount cutters, or contact Chris Longridge for technical information on mount cutting at www.longridge.co.uk or email chris@longridge.co.uk



△ Chris, Eden and Helen at It's all about Art