



SSQ Celebrates Three Decades of Trust with Renowned Spanish Supplier

As he marks the 30th anniversary of his first meeting with long-standing supplier Del Carmen, SSQ Managing Director Ahmed El-Helw reflects on three decades of friendship.

In business, relationships are everything. You can have all the resources, the best strategy, the brightest ideas - but without good relationships with customers, colleagues and suppliers, you're never going to thrive.

The trouble is, maintaining those relationships is hard. There are always ups and downs.

Economic booms are followed by recessions. One month sales can

soar, the next they can slump - and as we all scramble to adapt and react to an ever-changing, always unpredictable world, partnerships can become strained.

So for a relationship to last, it has to be pretty extraordinary.

That's what I've been reflecting on recently as SSQ marks 30 years of friendship with Del Carmen.

It was in 1992 that I first made my way to Del Carmen quarry, just

west of the village of La Bana in the León province of North-West Spain.

In many ways, the '90s don't feel all that long ago at all - but back in '92, the world was a very different place.

John Major was Prime Minister, Bill Clinton was elected President, the average house price was £52,000, and - particularly striking given the current situation - a litre of petrol cost just 40p.

Back then, I'd dealt with slate quarries before - I'd already been running SSQ for 12 years. But with my previous suppliers, I'd run into difficulties.

The quality was inconsistent. I'd sold customers slate that I honestly believed to be good, but that then failed on the roof, costing me huge amounts of money in guarantees and significant reputational damage.

But meeting Manuel and Alberto from Del Carmen for the first time, I immediately knew I'd come to the right place.

In a way, it was a very strange meeting - quick and decisive.

We shared the same values. We both loved the product, and were passionate about sharing it with customers across the globe - and most importantly, we trusted each other.

At the end of the meeting, I said I'd get to work preparing the paperwork - but they said all they needed was a handshake. In the decades that followed, that handshake would prove to be worth more than a hundred contracts.

Celebrating the Past, Looking to the Future

More than anything, I think that's the secret to lasting relationships in business - trust.

In all the years we've worked together, Manuel and I have never signed a formal contract. We respect and trust each other to an extent that we've just never needed one.

It was an honour to travel to Spain in June to celebrate 30 years of friendship with Manuel, his family, his staff, my family, and valued SSQ customers and employees.

Landing in Madrid to temperatures approaching 40° Celsius, we travelled north to the historic town of O Barco de Valdeorras, and then onto La Bana in the heart of Spain's slate-quarrying region.

It's a journey I've done dozens of times before over the last 30 years - but this time, I was delighted to be accompanied by my family, colleagues and customers, and to show them the special place that produces the slate that made our name.



Led by my Spanish friends, we were given a tour of the hugely impressive Del Carmen quarry, and shown where and how the slate is extracted and processed.

Then, in the main Del Carmen factory, my friend Lincho effortlessly demonstrated how the slate is split by hand - something I first saw in the early '80s, and that

I still find just as impressive and inspiring today.

Later, we returned to O Barco for a fabulous evening of celebration. It was a wonderful event.

People said I was naïve when I first began dealing with Del Carmen - that they'd steal my customers by encouraging them to buy direct instead.

But that's never happened. The Del Carmen family are loyal, honest, sincere people, and it was a joy to reaffirm the ties we first made in La Bana all those years ago.

Today, thanks to that relationship, Del Carmen slate graces the roofs of outstanding projects all over the world - England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, America, Australia, New Zealand and many more.

It's renowned for its exceptional performance, and has earned its status as a superior material that's capable of going head-to-head with indigenous slate.

Together, Manuel, Alberto, Lincho and a whole generation of the Del Carmen family and I have laid some incredible foundations. Now, it's time for our children to take those foundations and turn them into a skyscraper. Here's to the next 30 years! III

For more information, visit www.ssqgroup.com, email info@ssq.co.uk, or call 020 8038 2675.

