

Smooth operation



SASA SAVIC

After two years of silence, Staverton has reappeared. **Sarah Brownlee** meets the man pulling the strings



Perhaps it's because I've just returned from the famously self-indulgent Salone (the furniture show that unashamedly puts style before substance), but I'm rather excited by this sensible-looking desk system from Staverton.

In this case sensible certainly isn't a euphemism for boring – we're talking sensible in the best sense of the word. Functional, smart, and stylish, this product is just what you might expect from Staverton, a highly respected furniture company that went into receivership in 2002...

Confused already? Let me introduce you to Tony Cole (that's the spiky-haired gentleman sitting on the product above) by way of an explanation.

If you consider that Cole has been sitting on this desk (metaphorically speaking) since

January 2003 – when Logic, the Rotherham-based furniture company that Cole runs, bought the Staverton name – it would seem to be something of a belated introduction, but I'm assured that the delay was intentional.

Part of the larger office furniture company Black Arrow Group, Logic is known for producing what Logic director – and now Staverton director – Paul Edward happily describes as 'effective and reasonably stylish' mid-range office furniture solutions. The Staverton brand, by comparison, has always had more aspirational connotations. Needless to say, the last thing that Cole and Edward wanted to do was immediately 'exploit the brand and then not deliver to the expected standards'.

Where some companies would be quick to bash out a product and instantly cash in on the

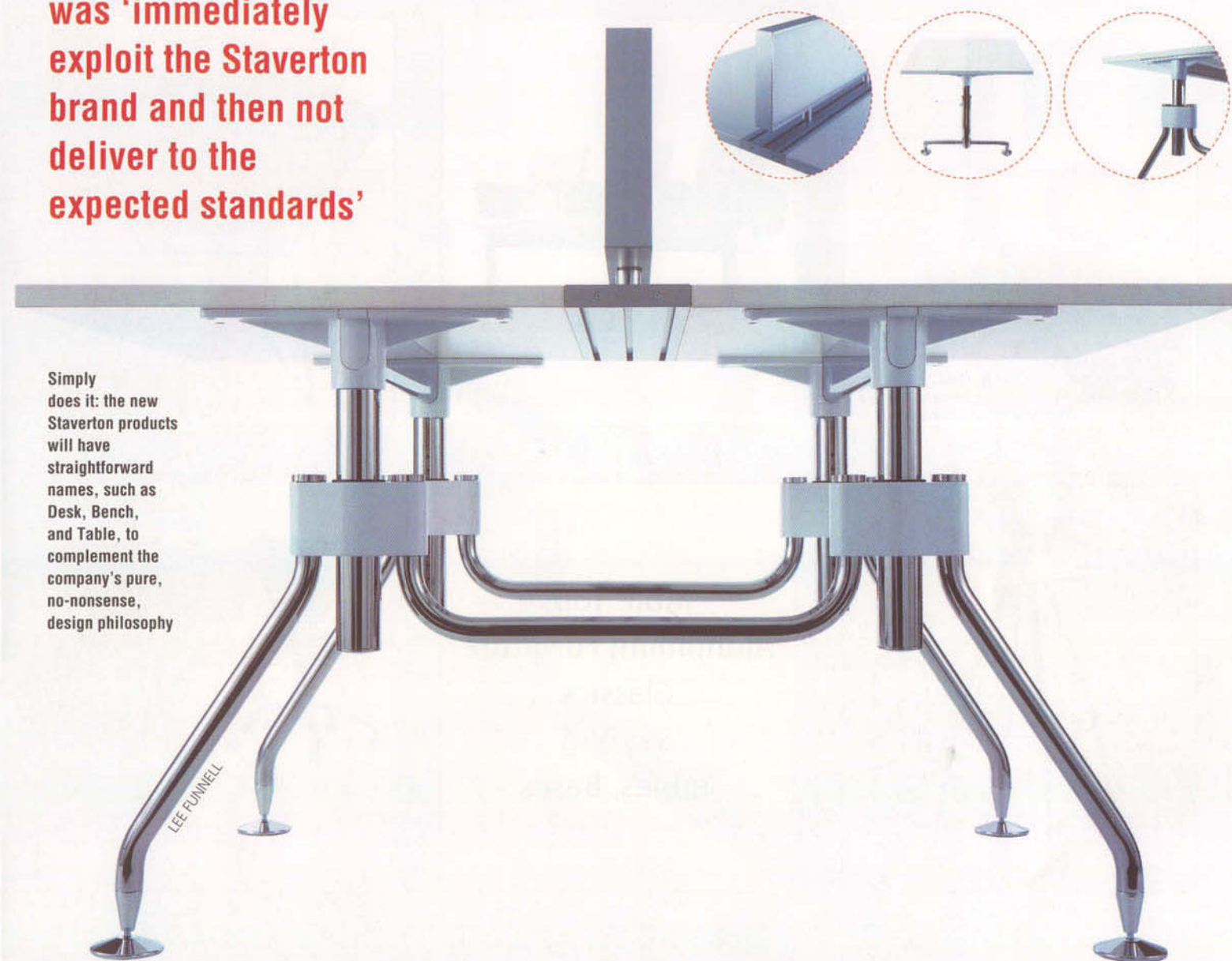
Staverton name, Cole and his team instead embarked on a rigorous product development programme, to ensure that the first launch under the new regime lived up to the Staverton brand.

Forming the backbone of the design strategy is research started by Seymour Powell Foresight in 2002, at a point when Logic was first looking to target the A&D market, and a long time before buying Staverton was a possibility. Cole is quick to credit Seymour Powell Foresight's input, and Dick Powell himself confirms that he's 'very proud' of the work his company has done on the project. However, the finished product, which was unveiled last month at Design Prima, owes as much to Cole as anyone else.

Although Cole would rather sing the praises of his lead design engineer Roger Holt, a glance

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Simply does it: the new Staverton products will have straightforward names, such as Desk, Bench, and Table, to complement the company's pure, no-nonsense, design philosophy



at his rather intimidating CV confirms a wealth of experience.

Born in Pontefract, West Yorkshire, Cole was destined to join his friends down the mines when he left school at 15, until his mother persuaded him to apply for a job with a local furniture manufacturer. Cole then embarked on a five-year cabinet-making apprenticeship, which resulted in a scholarship from the Worshipful Company of Furniture Makers to work and study in the German furniture industry. 'In those days we were taught to believe that the Germans did it better than anyone else,' he says, implying that this is no longer the case.

Cole launched his first company, an office screen specialist called Kudos, in 1980. He was evidently doing something right – a system of electrics Kudos brought out for incorporation

into its products has since become an industry standard. Cole launched Logic Office Furniture, just two years later, and in 1986 both companies were bought up by Black Arrow. This was a positive development for Cole, giving him the financial backing he required to capitalise on these already successful businesses.

While he retains his managing director role at Logic, Cole is now Staverton's official design director – a title that he feels suits him best. His sound background in engineering means that as soon as he puts an idea down on paper he's thinking 'at twice the speed' how it will work, both practically and structurally. This results in products that are as smart and smooth as the new Staverton branding and identity, masterminded by Sea Design.

The only aspect of this story that could be

perceived as, ever so slightly clunky is the changeover of production (for Logic and Staverton products) from Logic's Rotherham factory to the technically excellent Staverton factory in Devon. To complicate matters further, Staverton's sales HQ is in Fulham, while Cole and his design team continue to work at the Logic office in Rotherham, making regular trips down to Devon.

However, since he and his colleagues have been making things work behind the scenes since 2003, there's no reason why, now that the new Staverton has gone public, Cole can't continue to work from his Yorkshire base. Anyway, despite the A&D haircut, you get the feeling that Cole might miss Rotherham (and indeed Rotherham would probably miss him) if he left to set up in the South any time soon **FX**