



BRAND BRITAIN

From tailoring to watches, and leather goods to cars, British luxury has been revived and reinvented in recent years to create some of the world's most desirable brands – classic with an inimitably cool and contemporary twist, says SIMON DE BURTON

The initials 'UK' are recognised around the world as the United Kingdom, but when it comes to the manufacture of luxury goods, the letters also appear to have acquired an alternative meaning: Ultimate Kudos. For this country's reputation as the home of fine craftsmanship is currently flying high in a wide range of disciplines, from the traditional (tailoring, shoemaking and luxury car making) to the less obvious (watchmaking, hi-fi manufacture, boat building, interior design).

Historically, the UK was always seen as the home of high-end workmanship, but its standing declined post-war due to increased competition from overseas, with foreign manufacturers undercutting prices, often at the expense of quality. Lately, however, luxury goods buyers have become increasingly discerning about what they purchase and have come to recognise the worth in spending more to acquire well-made objects from British firms that are rich in heritage and have a reputation for producing goods that stand the test of time.

To gauge the strength of the luxury manufacturing industry in Britain, you only have to look at the diverse brands that belong to Walpole – a non-profit-making organisation that harnesses and shares the collective knowledge, experience and resources of its membership. Encompassing everything from a gentlemen's outfitters, Alfred Dunhill, to china at Wedgwood and gunmaking at Holland & Holland, each brand has strong British ties and serves as a telling snapshot of the wide-ranging talents of the UK's luxury businesses.

Although still a minnow in comparison to France and Italy, which currently rank first and second place in global sales of European luxury goods, the UK is set to be first by 2018. Indeed, the luxury goods industry in the UK is incredibly valuable to the economy as a whole, helping it to recover from the economic downturn of 2008 by generating annual revenues that now

Fashion Business
Designs from Roksanđa's, spring/summer 2015 collection. The label has opened a flagship store in Mayfair



PERSONAL VIEW

Stephen Bayley on the design revival

Henry Recamier, the mercurial figure who assembled what has become the LVMH conglomerate, once said that French luxury is feminine and British luxury is masculine. The French excel at couture, perfume, fine luggage, château-bottled wines and crystal, while native British genius is better expressed in four-wheel drives, tweed, firearms and whisky.

But now, perhaps reflecting the larger economic changes that influence the destiny of empires, British luxury is acquiring an international credibility that French luxury is, by small margins, beginning to lose. For example, London now has a more vigorous food culture than Paris. Certainly, in Paris, diners-out can still touch on the sublime if they book ahead, but walk-ins will do better in the W1 postcode than in the 6th *arrondissement*. British wine was once an acidulous bad joke, but now sparklers from Kent and Sussex regularly best real champagnes in blind tastings.

And that muddy Land Rover has been translated into a shiny new Range Rover. This is not

only the best four-wheel drive in the world; it is, by many measures, the best car in the world. Under Design Director Gerry McGovern, Range Rover has developed a design language and commercial philosophy that have rapidly acquired international credibility. A Range Rover's interior is, simply, one of the best places you can ever expect to be. For a nation with such a reputation for conservatism, the brand shows how you can respect an original idea, but treat it with brave radicalism. And the world will pay for this revolution in taste.

And then there is the revival of dead brands, such as Burberry and Hunter. Hunter wellies and outerwear were once something you abandoned in the boot room, but have now become part of an international code of smartness. Twenty-five years ago, Bentley and Rolls Royce were struggling to sell a few hundred cars every year; now, German ownership has realised the huge latent value of their image capital. And the designers have kept pace with astonishing inventiveness, which, if it sometimes presses the boundaries of taste, proves how resourceful the British can be. *Stephen Bayley is Founding Director of the Design Museum, London*



Craft Work

FROM FAR LEFT: tailoring brand E Tautz, shown at London Collections Men, spring/summer 2015; a Triumph Thruxton Ace motorcycle, launched at cult biker pitstop the Ace Cafe London; drawings and watch parts by horologist Roger W Smith, a UK maker of handcrafted timepieces

advances in digital,' explains Ken Kessler, one of the world's most respected specialist hi-fi journalists, who began writing on the subject more than 30 years ago.

'With BBC influences, the geniuses based in and around Cambridge and the once-mighty technical contributions from record labels such as EMI, Pye and especially Decca, high-quality audio is as British a luxury commodity as Tusting luggage and Rolls-Royce cars. Brands such as B&W, KEF, Quad and SME didn't merely assault the state of the art, they defined it,' says Kessler.

Now, ultra-wealthy audiophiles worldwide turn to Britain for the ultimate in listening experiences, often paying huge sums for components made by the above-named brands and others; for example, Meridian, Linn, Naim, Arcam, Avid and EAR-Yoshino (yes, even that one is British).

But one especially notable area in which Britain is widely considered to be the best is that of men's tailoring. Tony Lutwyche, the founder and proprietor of the eponymous bespoke tailoring business in Clifford Street, Mayfair, believes there is nowhere else in the world with such a stellar reputation for the craft. 'Clients have travelled to London from America for 100 years, because they know British tailoring is the best. And thanks to the recent renaissance in the trade, we are receiving more and more clients from a wide range of countries,' says Lutwyche.

And that British tradition of craftsmanship and skill also works in the opposite direction: foreign luxury goods firms come to the UK to take advantage of what we have to offer. One such company is luxury mobile phone-maker Vertu, formerly a division of Finland's Nokia, but independent since 2012. It creates top-end handsets that can carry six-figure price tags – and the firm's manufacturing headquarters is not,

approach £10 billion compared with 'just' £6.6 billion four years ago. Much of that is down to the fact that overseas buyers in newly-rich economies such as China, Russia and India, who have the resources to pay for the best, know that they will find the best in Britain – be it Jimmy Choo shoes, William & Son tweed townwear, a Rolls-Royce, an Anya Hindmarch bag, or a luxury hotel suite. Which means that numerous British brands have developed iconic status abroad.

Wei Koh, the Singapore-based founder of luxury watch magazine *Revolution* and ultra high-end men's style magazine *The Rake*, knows better than most how powerful 'Brand Britain' has become around the globe regarding craftsmanship. Says Koh, 'I spend a large part of my life travelling the world, and everywhere I go the story is the same: stuff made in Britain is considered to be cool, well made and worth buying.'

'The most discerning and style-conscious people I meet invariably own many British-made items, and these can be anything from an Aston Martin or Morgan sports car to a fine English shotgun or something more basic, such as a pair of gold and enamel cufflinks from Aspinall of London, or an Ettinger wallet.'

In fact, Ettinger is typical of the small but thriving British crafts firms that are currently enjoying global recognition. As is Marksbury. Based near the Somerset city of Bath, Marksbury was founded shortly after the dawn of the millennium as a maker of luxury, handmade leather bags, yet its future turned bleak when a major client pulled the

plug on a contract. Shortly after, however, British firms including Paul Smith, Burberry and Ally Capellino recognised Marksbury's worth and stepped in to save it. The firm now makes more than 20,000 bags annually, which retail for up to £2,500.

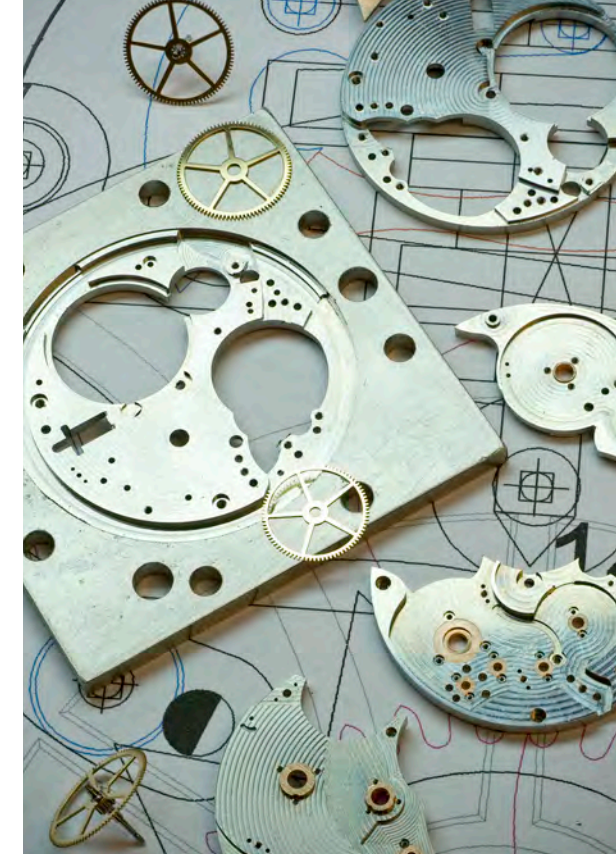
'Made in Britain speaks of quality, craftsmanship and heritage. But, above all, it represents a sense of incomparable style and classic understatement,' continues Koh, who is currently looking forward to taking delivery of a special-edition Triumph motorcycle, which celebrates that most British of institutions, London's Ace Cafe biker hangout (which, incidentally, has become a global brand in its own right).

And if there is one word that best sums up the key to Britain's craftsmanship, it is 'diverse'. The sheer breadth of blue-chip products we create in this country is remarkable – and often quite surprising. It is a common misconception, for example, that luxury high-fidelity audio systems were invented in Europe or Japan; in reality, the UK is one half of the duopoly, along with America, that took hi-fi to the next level.

'The man on the street has no idea how massive the British contribution to audio is, from its role in developing stereo to

COURTESY OF ROGER W SMITH, PREVIOUS PAGES AND OPPOSITE: JASON LLOYD-EVANS

'MADE IN BRITAIN SPEAKS OF INCOMPARABLE STYLE AND CLASSIC UNDERSTATEMENT'



PERSONAL VIEW

Dylan Jones on emerging brands

As London reinforces itself as the centre of the fashion industry (with a rejuvenated London Fashion Week and the success of London Collections Men), the world is looking to the UK once more for its design excellence. So it should come as no surprise that many new British luxury brands are emerging as global players.

If you travel regularly to Asia, it is impossible not to notice how important Britishness has become, whether it is a Fortnum & Mason pop-up store at Lane Crawford, or the emergence of relatively young labels such as Mary Katrantzou, Jonathan Saunders, Peter Pilotto and Roksanda.

As Michelle Emmerson, CEO of Walpole, said at the British Luxury Awards last year, 'Strong British luxury brands, such as Burberry and Stella McCartney, continue their exceptional growth trajectory, they are trailblazing the

as one might expect, in China, but at leafy Church Crookham in Hampshire, where Vertu products are painstakingly assembled by hand to the same standards, and using many similar materials, as found in the Swiss watch industry.

'Vertu is dedicated to creating its phones in England, due to the high standards of craftsmanship, service expertise and general skill base it has at its Church Crookham headquarters,' says the company's spokeswoman, Louisa McCarthy.

'The area is also a crossroads for the high-tech industries from which it can draw talent for this unique luxury mobile-phone category. And the UK provenance of our manufacturing is also seen as a huge positive by Vertu customers.'

Meanwhile, in that famously independent, yet still British, outpost that is the Isle of Man, Manchester-born horologist Roger W Smith is attracting an international clientele for his entirely handmade timepieces that start at around £100,000 apiece. 'Today, watchmaking is closely identified in our consciousness with Switzerland,' Smith says, 'yet English horology was considered the highpoint of the art for hundreds of years.'

'This forms the basis of our philosophy towards watchmaking and what we are trying to do is reinterpret the past while using modern horological developments to create exclusive and distinctly English wristwatches for the connoisseurs of today. Instead of simply punching or stamping dials from non-precious metals and giving them a chemical finish, for example, we make ours from several separate parts of silver or gold, which are handmade and meticulously soldered together.'

'Likewise, frosting (the delicate, egg-shell-like finish used today by only a handful of watchmakers for movement baseplates) is usually created by micro-blasting with special sand under high pressure, which achieves the effect simply and quickly. We, however, do it the classical way, using a fine metal brush turning on a spindle. Each tiny, fine steel hair microscopically beats the surface, creating the subtle frosting effect.'

A further demonstration of how highly regarded British craftsmanship has become is apparent at the annual, major classic-car events, Concours d'Elegance, in America



British Tradition
The 'Royal' shotgun by
Holland & Holland

and Europe, where high-end UK restoration company JD Classics invariably sweeps the board with its entry of exquisitely rebuilt cars.

At the 2014 Quail Lodge Motorsports Gathering in Monterey, California, for instance, JD's 1957 Jaguar XKSS took Best in Class in the Post-War Sports category, while along the coast at the Pebble Beach concours (considered to be the most prestigious event of its type in the world), a JD-restored Jaguar XK120 Coupe was judged best Post-War Touring car, and JD's XK120 land-speed record car took Best in Class for Post-War Sports Racing.

The firm carries out its meticulous restorations at its Essex headquarters, but recently opened a showroom in Mount Row, Mayfair (near the Connaught), in order to cater to the demands of visitors to London who might just want to step out of their hotel one morning, stroll across the street and buy themselves a classic.

And if one of those people happens to be you, that award-winning XKSS might still be sitting in the JD Classics showroom right now. You could take it home today... in exchange for a mere £10 million. ✂
Simon de Burton reports on luxury for The Financial Times

way for new luxury brands from all corners of the country... The upswing in interest in genuine craftsmanship and British heritage products has meant that we are seeing significant export success across the board.'

The make-up artist Charlotte Tilbury was awarded Emerging British Luxury Brand for her new range of beauty products, while industrial designers Barber & Osgerby won best British Luxury Design Talent.

Elsewhere, top-end British creativity can be found in shoe brands such as Mr Hare, or in beachwear label Orlebar Brown, Vertu phones and Bremont watches. Personally, I think you only have to look at the success of relatively new British tailoring brands such as E Tautz and the resurgence of Savile Row to see that as far as modern luxury goes Britain leads the way. With Norton & Sons, Kilgour, Sir Tom Baker and Fielding & Nicholson joining dozens of established Savile Row institutions (Gieves & Hawkes, Henry Poole, Oswald Boateng, Richard James, Hardy Amies, Ede & Ravenscroft, Anderson & Sheppard, Huntsman), it is difficult to see how the focus of the luxury industry at the moment can be anywhere else but London.

In fact, just take a walk through Mayfair, from Savile Row to Mount Street, and then through St James's, stopping off at a completely re-energised Fortnum & Mason, and you will see what I mean.
Dylan Jones is the Editor of British GQ and the Chairman of London Collections Men

'ENGLISH HOROLOGY WAS THE HIGHPOINT OF THE ART FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS'