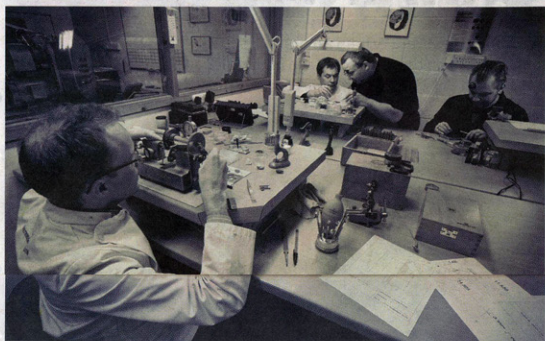


THE HIGH LIFE FOR BRITISH LUXURY



BRITISH HERITAGE The British luxury sector is thriving despite the recession, with established brands and new, niche products finding willing audiences at home and abroad, reports Simon de Burton



■ The initials "UK" are recognised around the world as standing for "United Kingdom", but when it comes to the manufacture of luxury goods they also appear to have acquired an alternative meaning: "Ultimate Kudos."

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 rich in heritage who produce goods that stand the test of time.

"The UK luxury goods industry has become incredibly valuable to the economy as a whole," explains Julia Carrick, CEO of Walpole, a non-profit-making organisation formed in 1990 to further the interests of the British luxury industry by harnessing and sharing the collective knowledge, experience and resources of its membership.

"It currently generates £6.6 billion in revenue annually, a figure that is projected to rise to £9.4 billion by

2015. Interestingly, it has proved absolutely vital through the recession because it has continued to draw income from foreign buyers in the newly-rich economies."

Britain is recognised the world over as the source of some of the most exquisitely made menswear on the planet. "The British way of dressing is highly regarded as an individual style and this is enhanced by the fact that nowhere else are the best practitioners of bespoke tailoring condensed into one place – in other words, the Mayfair area and Savile Row, in particular," says Ritchie Charlton of Hayward, the bespoke tailoring business at 95 Mount Street.

Sarah Curran, founder and CEO of luxury fashion site my-wardrobe.com, says, "We've seen a wealth of British luxury brands propelled to the forefront of the industry over the last few years, as brands such as Mulberry and Burberry have delivered phenomenal global sales. In addition, we've continued to see an extremely strong growth in sales from home-grown luxury designers including Anya Hindmarch, Paul Smith and Smythson. Consumers look to these brands for exquisite quality, as well as buying into the British heritage of the brand."

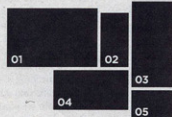
Vertu, the independently-run division of Nokia that creates ultra-high-end mobile telephone handsets, has its manufacturing headquarters at Church Crookham in Hampshire. Products, costing upwards of £4,750, are painstakingly assembled by hand.

■ The UK luxury goods industry currently generates **£6.6 billion** annually

"Vertu is dedicated to creating its phones in England due to the high standards of craftsmanship, expertise and general skill base it has here," says the firm's president, Perry Oosting. "The UK provenance of our manufacturing is also seen as hugely positive by our customers."

On the Isle of Man, horologist Roger Smith is attracting an international clientele for his entirely hand-made timepieces that have a starting price of around £72,000 each.

"Today watchmaking is closely identified in our consciousness with Switzerland, yet English horology



- 01 | Craftsmen at Roger Smith Watches
- 02 | Vertu's Constellation Quest Gold Carbon Fibre phone
- 03 | KEF Moon speakers with designer Rod Lovegrove
- 04 | Roger Smith's Open Dial watch
- 05 | Quad II integrated Classic amp

was considered the highpoint of the art for hundreds of years," he explains. "This forms the basis of our philosophy towards watchmaking and what we are trying to do is to reinterpret the past while using modern horological developments to create exclusive and distinctly English wrist-watches. 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 that are hand made and meticulously soldered together." At last month's annual Pebble Beach

Concours d'Elegance in California, the most prestigious classic car gathering in the world, it was Dr Will Finnes and his team from Oxfordshire-based Finnes Restoration that won three awards, including the highly coveted Lucius Beebe trophy for restoring a unique 1920s Rolls-Royce to its former glory after decades of neglect.

"It's a wonderful feeling to return to the UK with a hat trick of international awards in recognition of British manufacturing excellence," said Dr Finnes. Henry Royce would surely have agreed. ●