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1) FIRST OF ALL, WE'D LIKE TO SAY WE LOVE YOUR DESIGNS AND YOUR INNOVATIVE SPIRIT, SO CAN YOU TELL US HOW YOU BEGAN BECOMING SUCH A CREATIVE ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNER (IF THAT IS THE CORRECT TERM)?

Thank you very much for the compliment, especially as Laissez Faire clearly knows a thing or two about innovation yourselves. I specialise in leather work, be it bespoke interior work for clients such as Mulberry and Tom Ford, or small runs and samples of handbags and accessories for independent designers. Both my parents were leather workers so really I suppose I was born into it, and am proud to carry on what is a family tradition as well as an increasingly rare craft. I started out by designing and producing handbags, with quite literally one sewing machine and my fathers tools, and have built up the business over the last ten years so that today it's a full time design and production studio in North London with ten full time staff and no where near enough hours in the day. As for going from handbags to interiors (although I should point out I do both) it just came down to transferring the attention to detail and craftsmanship that I'd developed working with the one over to the other.

2) WHERE DO YOU FIND YOUR INSPIRATION TO BEGIN A PROJECT?

Inspiration can (and does) come from pretty much anywhere and I find that the more experienced I become the easier it is to find it in the most unlikely sources. However, when it comes to both the interior work and the handbags, the overriding priority is the clients' vision and specific requirements. When I'm working on a commission I want my abilities as a craftsman, and even artist, to come through the clients' specifications. As a professional I have a job to do, and that's to make the clients vision a tangible reality. Obviously I make suggestions and can offer advice based on 25 years worth of experience, but doing the job to the highest possible standard is just as much a source of pride as is expressing my creativity.

3) CAN YOU DESCRIBE A BIT ABOUT THE QUALITY AND TECHNICAL MATERIALS THAT YOU WORK WITH?

Of course. Leather comes in two main forms, vegetable tan leather and chrome tan leather. Naturally we only use Grade A material and are continually liaising with tanneries and establishing new contacts to ensure that we can offer our clients the widest range of choice. We are fortunate in that our reputation and longevity mean that we have built up an extensive network of suppliers which gives us exclusive access to leathers that are not (usually) commercially available. Part of the challenge of the work (and also what makes it continually exciting and engaging) is combining the leather with other materials, wood, metal and even glass to give a modern, vintage, or even antique look depending on the brief. In fact going back to your question about creativity, this is one area where it really can manifest itself.

4) WHAT TYPES OF PEOPLE INSPIRE YOU IN LIFE AND WORK?

Anyone passionate about what they do, but professional in the way they achieve it. It's very easy to get carried away with the artistic and creative side of things and neglect the actual work. The flipside is that some people get too focused on just getting commissions and forget that the job is as much an art as it is a craft. And Nelson Mandela. Fact.

5) IF YOU HAD THE CHANCE TO WORK A PARTICULAR PROJECT, WHAT WOULD THAT BE?

Ah, the ideal project. Where the client tells you to do whatever you want and gives you an unlimited budget. Of course something like that would be nice but there's a real satisfaction to making things work with the usual restrictions of time and finance, in fact these "restrictions" can help as much as hinder, focusing your energies and establishing definite parameters. The truth is I love what I do, from the smallest accessory to the five month interior jobs and I wouldn't want to be doing anything else. Luckily I can't do anything else so there's also no conflict at all.

6) WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO DO WHAT YOU DO?

Doing your very best, every day, in a field you can excel in, is the most satisfying and rewarding way to live your life. Past that, I'm continually motivated by the team I have around me at AV Design Studio, as they are some of the more passionate, capable and hardworking people I have the fortune to know. What I do began as a one man business but is now very much a team effort, and the people I have around me, coupled with the work I do, are a constant source of inspiration. It's also incredibly encouraging to see new talent emerging on the scene, learning the skills and bringing their own visions of design and fashion to them. Nurturing that talent is a privilege as much as it is a pleasure and is the main reason I still teach the various technical courses I offer.

7) DO YOU HAVE A FAVOURITE PIECE?

That's almost exactly like asking a parent if they have a favourite child. The answer's yes, but you have to say it quietly just in case the other's hear and get the hump. The moulded leather torsos I produced for Mulberry are the pieces I look to and reference if I'm ever in need of that extra shot of creativity.

8) WHAT TYPE OF CUSTOMERS COME TO YOU?

I'll go from meeting a high profile designer, to having phone calls with an interior design company based out in the Middle East, to answering e-mails from fashion and design students looking to get into the business. I work with the entire spectrum and plan to continue to do so. Again, at risk of sounding slightly arrogant, I've been doing this for

25 years and have established my reputation as a professional who can do the job that is asked of him, with an exceptionally hardworking team working with me. The people that want the highest standards, be they in tuition or in end product, will come to us, sometimes after they've tried some slightly cheaper competitors.

9) DO YOU HAVE A UNIQUE STYLE THAT CAN SINGLE YOU OUT, JUST LIKE A STROKE IN A PAINTING?

While it's not something I could put my finger on, a particular stitch or a type of leather, I have had many of my pieces and commissions recognized as being AV work. This is a field where making that extra bit of effort, making sure that no corners get cut, makes all the difference in the world. There's a lot more to this than just stitching two pieces of tanned animal skin together, as anyone that's been on one of my courses will tell you!

10) HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO PRODUCE SUCH FINE PRODUCTS WITH ATTENTION TO DETAIL?

How long's the proverbial piece of string? A handbag can take between three days and two weeks, refurbishing the smoking room on a yacht can take five months. For us at AV being professional means that while we do get the job done as quickly and efficiently as possible, we will not take any shortcuts. Our reputation is built on our exacting standards, and no matter what area of the field you're working in, that reputation is ultimately all you have.

11) IT'S STRIKINGLY OBVIOUS THAT YOU LEAD FIRST WITH INNOVATION AND CREATIVITY, BUT WHAT ARE THE PRINCIPLES OF BUSINESS THAT YOU ADHERE TO, ESPECIALLY IN THESE ECONOMICALLY CHALLENGING TIMES?

It's false economy to think you should change your principles as a result of economic condition, or any external influences at all in fact. The client's vision always comes first, the quality of the work has to be the best. Being honest and straightforward with our customers and suppliers, being ethical and ensuring that every piece of work reflect us and our brand are also of paramount importance. Everything we produce should reflect who we are as a team, and AV really is a team effort.

12): THIS IS SUCH AN INTERESTING JOB. HOW ARE YOUR COURSES STRUCTURED AND WHY DID YOU START TEACHING THESE COURSES IN THE FIRST PLACE?

The courses range from beginner (pattern cutting and handbag construction) to advanced, and cover every aspect of the design and construction of leather products, be they handbags, accessories or footwear. I also run one on one courses for clients who can't commit to six consecutive Saturdays. I began teaching these courses for a number of reasons, predominantly because I felt there was a real need for them. It's a point of pride to teach the most comprehensive courses I can, offering as much practical hands on time as possible. I want to pass on as much knowledge as possible, and to ensure that people who are passionate about working in the field have the best instruction available to them. Also, I truly hate seeing bad work, so my thinking is that if I can train more students the standard will go up across the board. Hopefully.

13): FROM WHAT I CAN SEE, YOUR WORK IS AS GOOD IF NOT BETTER THAN THE WELL KNOWN BRANDS SUCH (I WON'T SAY WHICH ONES) THAT YOU CAN FIND IN HARRODS. DO YOU HARBOUR ANY PLANS TO GROW THE BUSINESS INTERNATIONALLY ?

The most important thing for AV is to maintain its standards and, as a consequence, its reputation. People within the industry know who we are and in some ways that's more important than public recognition. We already do a lot of work throughout Europe, the States and the Middle East. Really it comes down to passion. We're passionate about the work we do, and if the business keeps growing and there's even more work then I imagine we'll be passionate about that too.

14): WHAT IS CLEAR IS THAT YOUR STAFF ARE JUST AS SKILLED AND PAY EVERY ATTENTION TO DETAIL AS YOU WOULD YOURSELF. HOW DO YOU MOTIVATE SUCH A GREAT TEAM?

Christ, don't tell them that...the truth is I've been very lucky with the people I've got around me. It's not just their technical abilities that shine, their attitude is exceptional. They are all, without exception, self-motivated, creative and hardworking individuals who would frankly excel in pretty much any field. With that kind of talent your best bet is to nurture it and give it the opportunity to express itself rather than impose your own vision on it. I do try to keep the job diversity high so that they're constantly being challenged and I suppose the fact that I also pay them probably helps a bit...

15): I CAN SEE THAT YOU ARE A SUCCESSFUL ARTIST AND A BUSINESS PERSON AT THAT TOO. WHAT PEARLS OF WISDOM CAN YOU DEPART FOR MY READERS?

Stay in school? Don't do drugs? In both my experience and from what I've seen other people go through success is about being focussed and being realistic. You will make mistakes, lots of them, and that's where your real education begins. If you want to succeed you'll see these mistakes for what they are, valuable lessons that can make you better, even the best, at whatever it is you do. Otherwise you'll make the biggest and only unpardonable mistake there is, despairing, and that'll be the end of it.