

Made in Britain

Want to see British industry thrive again? Kate Hills is taking a stand....

WORDS: KATE HILLS (MAKEITBRITISH.CO.UK)



UK MADE

When I left college in the early 90s after studying fashion design, I set up my own clothing label with a partner and we manufactured all of the clothes ourselves. When the business grew and it was no longer possible for us to produce everything ourselves, we easily found nimble-fingered machinists with the right skills to work for us.

I eventually went to work for a high street childrenswear

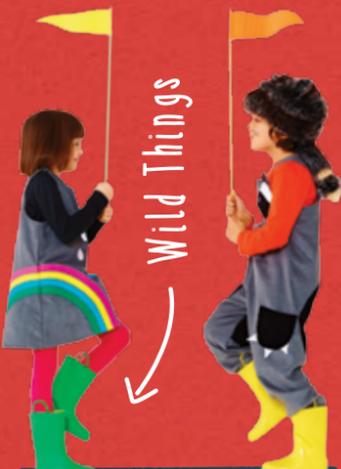
The last time you bought something in your favourite shop – an item of clothing or a gift for a friend perhaps, did you have a look to see where it was made? And if you did, was the country of origin a deciding factor in whether you bought that product or not? I bet that even if you did give a cursory glance at the label, it wouldn't have been the main reason why you decided to invest. That lovely leather trim detail or the tempting sale price probably swayed you, the country of origin likely to be pretty low down your list. This used to be the case for me too.



Lana



Funky Feet



GARMENTS FROM AFAR

chain and the majority of their clothing was still made in the UK too – a blessing for a designer as having your factory on the doorstep made it quick to sort out any issues! Even when I moved on to a job at Burberry in 1997, the head office was located directly above their factory in Hackney and we took it for granted that a design drawn up at the beginning of the week would be turned into a garment before the week was out.

Just 11 years later however, I was a buying manager for a chain of department stores, spending most of my time in the Far East and India and very little time at home. Whilst sampling designs took much longer, it seemed a fair price to pay for the reduction in costs that could be achieved by sourcing overseas, and the trips to exotic places such as Indonesia and Vietnam seemed exciting compared to rainy Hackney.

But something just didn't sit right with me. Negotiating the cheapest possible price became harder and harder to do, and maintaining the quality that the company I worked for required, was quite often impossible when there were 3000 miles between the factory and the shop floor – never mind the fact that it was often six months from when an order was placed to when the line would finally hit the shelves.

Kate models a scarf by Siskin, a luxury fashion brand.

Kate's daughter (right) models for British brand Hey Lee.

Lana Home provides a selection of beautiful contemporary upholstery.

MAKE IT BRITISH

This prompted me to begin looking into the manufacturing capabilities we have left in the UK and I was surprised to find that there were still plenty of great companies whose products were British made. I started makeitbritish.co.uk as a hobby to write about all the brands and factories that I found around Britain but it has since turned into a one woman campaign to highlight all of the great products that are still made here.

Home to the Industrial Revolution, Britain has a long history of manufacturing yet sadly, in just over a decade we have lost much of the skill we were renowned for. The average age of workers in today's factories is well over 50 – it seems manufacturing has not been an industry that young people have wanted to pursue.

CHANGE IS COMING

Recently though, the sweet smell of change is in the air. The recession has prompted people to stop and think about the impact on the UK economy of buying British, as well as how doing so can create valuable employment to those living here. And tragic events such as the factory collapse in Bangladesh last year that killed thousands of textile workers has brought into question the provenance of the clothes that we buy.

Everywhere you look there are people in the UK starting to make things again. From stay-at-home mums starting their own businesses to the textiles graduates with a sense of British pride and the designer makers producing unique one-off pieces, even the large multinationals are starting to bring their production back to the UK.

MAKING A MARQUE

This brings me back to my initial question, of whether you take a look at the label or not when you are shopping. And if you do want to buy British, do you find it difficult to source products that are made in Britain? I most definitely do and as a result, I have now joined forces with several other groups and company Directors that support British trade and industry. Together we have launched the Made in Britain campaign and created a recognisable logo for British-made products. The new marque can be used by any company that manufactures in Britain to highlight the provenance of their products and more importantly, to help shoppers easily identify British made goods and perhaps think twice about that next purchase.



Parisi Jewellery offer a selection of classic designs with an elegant twist.



Pashley Bicycles, made in Stratford-upon-Avon since 1926.

