

{PERSPECTIVE} RICHARD BROWNLIE-MARSHALL

Edinburgh-born creative Richard Brownlie-Marshall was surrounded by art and design from a young age, and has applied his passion and talent to a string of successful corporate positions and independent projects, including innovative store redesigns and quirky homeware product lines



How do you describe your job, and what does it typically involve?

Being Creative Designer at Pret A Manger is a dream role for me, as it encompasses all elements of design within a brand I love – from marketing campaigns to product packaging, interiors and pioneer projects. The in-house creative team takes concepts from sketch right through to shop, which is a very satisfying experience. We are working internationally, so our designs are seen in shops from London to Dubai.

What's your background?

As far back as I can remember, I've always been creative. When I was in primary school I designed and sold my own magazine, at school I enjoyed and excelled in art and design, and in university I produced stage shows. I studied product design at Northumbria University, and on graduating I remember being completely confused as to what my design destination would be. But I knew I had to get into the industry as soon as possible, so secured an internship in London with the Brent

Hoberman brainchild, MyDeco. I really loved working with the young company and, after completing the internship, I secured a permanent position as Design Coordinator. Being an interior design-based role, I thought that this would be my career path, but then I met Tossed. After speaking with the founder of the healthy-eating chain, Vincent McKeivitt, I was introduced to the world of food retail. He took a chance on me and success was down to my willingness to work hard and learn fast. The first few months at Tossed were some of the hardest, but it was the pressure I needed to become a better designer. After three years as the company's Head of Creative, I arrived at Pret A Manger – a brand I've always loved.

As well as being Creative Designer at Pret A Manger, you've worked on your own side projects. How do these projects tend to come about?

After leaving MyDeco, I wanted to ensure that all the knowledge I had gained in home interiors didn't go to waste, so launched my self-titled design brand with a range of napkins. These received great coverage due to their unusual nature of being embroidered with stains such as coffee, ink and blood. From this, I had a string of successful collaborations with brands such as Zizzi, Candy Kittens and the Archbishop of Canterbury. A recent pop-up shop at West Elm launched my new range of mugs, and signifies a return of focus to the Richard Brownlie-Marshall brand. As a designer, I find it important to keep variety in my work, so these projects strengthen my design output at Pret at the same time.

Has it been difficult to really make your mark on the aesthetic of Pret, given it's such an established and large company?

That was perhaps one of my initial thoughts, too, but after my first meeting with Pret's Creative Director, James Cannell, I knew this wouldn't be the case. The company turns 30 this year, and every day I work on exciting new concepts that consistently look to push the brand forward. Pret has achieved so many milestones in the world of



Changing standards

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food retail and continues to do so. Working with the creative team I'm constantly challenged, which is good for my growth as a designer. Being a fan of the brand before, I still get excited seeing a new coffee cup design or the latest campaign landing in-store. I know that customers have a real appreciation of the brand, so I feel very honoured to be part of its story.

Who or what are your main influencers and inspirations in design?

Theatre has always inspired me and that's why I really loved having a deeper involvement with it earlier in my career. It's a little-known fact that I've actually taken two sell-out shows to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. I love the combination of elements that come together to deliver live performance that, if done well, can take you anywhere. I see a shop as a stage, with scenery and props, and it's our job as creatives to make magic in the space.

How have you built your profile and visibility?

Are there any platforms you've found particularly useful?

I've always thought of myself as a brand, so it's something I build on in everyday situations. I keep a hand in social media, but I'm not someone who will post every five minutes – there are already enough people who do that well. A lot of my profile has been built in person, taking part in the London social scene and always being open to new opportunities. At the end of the day, it's the work that will shine through. By working with inspirational people and being passionate about what I am creating, I deliver work that stands out. The aim is to always be in an environment where I can create greatness; if that's not a possibility, then I'm not there.

What are the biggest challenges you've faced in establishing yourself as a designer?

Being everyman. When starting out with my own brand I had to be every single role within the company, not solely creative. From working out costs, delivery timelines and securing stockists – it was a lot to juggle. However, it was very important for me to learn how the business worked and how to measure its success. I'm not someone who can sit in a classroom and learn about business, I've got to go and do it, so it actually worked out very well.

What's been the highlight of your career so far?

One of the biggest moments for me was when I



designed my first store for Tossed in Westfield Stratford. It was at a time when I was very fresh to the industry and I consider it as the project where I earned my design stripes. It pushed the boundaries and resulted in a store that is visually exciting and a design revolution for the brand. I enjoy that it still stands as a reminder of where it all began; no matter how many more shops I create, it was the first.

How do you think the design industry has changed since you started, and what direction do you think it's going in?

When I started out in design, it was all about shouting your brand, the bigger the logo the better. Now you have to work a bit harder, as it's about depth and soul. I think people are more engaged with design and have an opinion on it. With fashion and art being more accessible, it means customers expect more, which encourages designers to be more intelligent in their execution.

What else is in the pipeline this year?

After a successful launch of my new range at West Elm, I'm looking to get this on more shelves across the country, so it can have a much wider reach. Working on my own brand again has really re-energised me, so I am hoping to have a few more product lines available before the year is out. I've learnt that you can't plan out your future too much – so watch this space. ■

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