



Redesigning Manufacturing- Rebalancing the UK Economy through Making | Case Studies

By **Beverley Nielsen**, Corporate Affairs Director, Birmingham City University

Jack Row

Jack Row established his business designing and making luxury writing instruments and accessories in November 2011. It was whilst studying for his degree at the Birmingham School of Jewellery on their BA Jewellery and Silver smithing: Design for Industry programme that he got his first big break. He was taking this programme having completed the HND qualification before taking a job at well known business in Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter, WB the Creative Jewellery Group, where Jack was able to gain practical insights into specialist equipment, such as rapid prototyping, many styles and types of designs, meeting with customers and gaining great hands-on experience. "There are not many people as open-minded as Patrick Fuller, Chairman of WB," he says. "Working in their bespoke jewellery department I was exposed to many different designs, and saw what worked and what didn't. They are very professional with an absolute focus on quality which I took on board and which stood me in great stead," he adds.

Harrods were visiting the School during the Graduate Degree Shows and spotted his work, seeing in it something unique representing British craftsmanship with a contemporary twist. They prompted him to contact the buyer responsible for the Harrods Writing Room, now known as the Great Writing Room.

Jack made contact with Darren Walker, the buyer for Stationery, Giftware and Silverware, in August 2009 who advised him on designing and producing his first collection.

"He liked my name and recommended I used this," says Jack. "I was going to use a more generic design name, but he felt it had a British and artisanal ring to it which would work well amongst their target audience. I did not receive any advice on price-pointing, I was simply asked to produce a collection, to be exclusive to Harrods for 12 months. Harrods were a great deal of help in providing advice around brand recognition, awareness, credibility in this early stage as I was starting up and in entering the luxury market which is by and large run and controlled by a handful of companies including the Richemont Group, who own Cartier and Mont Blanc."

Jack spent the best part of the next two years working up his first pen collection for Harrods, known as the Architect Collection. The pens were inspired by the Lord (Norman) Foster building, known as the Gherkin, and have been retailing for between £7k-27k with his cufflinks selling for between £4k-9k. "I was really pleased as they ordered a whole range for their retail display and we sold a number of the top-end white gold and diamond set pens in my first year of trading, including one which is, I understand, in the personal collection of a prominent Middle-Eastern monarch" says Jack.

Harrods were very pleased with this performance, "especially considering the amount of space my work takes up in light of the sales per square foot I was generating," he adds with some satisfaction.

Jack then produced the Jaali Collection introduced in November 2012 which has been performing well with the modestly priced cufflinks in this range selling for around £700. Following this, he launched the City Collection, "this is more minimal," he says, selling it direct and online. He has also released his Mirage collection more recently which includes pens retailing for between £1k – 1.6k and cufflinks selling for £200 a pair. He has recently been working on a further collection which he expects will retail for approximately £500 each for the pens and £150 for a pair of cufflinks. "Working with quality handcraft techniques and making small production runs or even individually to order means that the price points are comparatively high, compared to items mass produced abroad," says Jack. "Even recently, looking to develop writing instrument in cast acrylic with silver trim, they are still coming out at retail price points of around £450-£500. To get them any lower we would have to make the work abroad in larger volume, where labour rates are cheaper. But, that rather defeats the purpose of British designed and made and would result in an inferior product, as well as detracting from our brand ethos."

He runs his business with his partner, whose brand, Lauren Elizabeth, designs and sells handmade contemporary jewellery. It was this link that led to his second lucky break. His father and mother-in-law have been his business advisers and investors since the start and as he says, "I couldn't have got to where I am today without the advice and support of my in-laws. For a start I needed a considerable sum to make the first collection in solid gold in order to fulfil the Harrods order and I didn't have access to this kind of investment and the bank certainly would not have loaned this to me at the time. Thanks to my parents in law who have invested in me I have been able to do this. My father in law is my business advisor and helps with financial advice and support too."

Jack admits that he and his partner have not really taken anything out of the business and re-investing everything they make again. "I freelance and it is this work that has topped up my income over the past couple of years," he says. "Whilst we have not taken any significant dividends from the business, I do cost into the price of the pens a rate for my labour and design time," he adds.

When asked if there is one single thing that could be done to help push his business on again, Jack pauses before replying, "A luxury retail collective based in Birmingham of top quality aspirational lifestyle designs would provide a real platform for young designers like myself." When asked whom he might include in such a collective he replies, "I would include, assuming they wanted to join in, Struthers London, Kevin Gray, James Newman, people like Emma Shipley and established brands like Pashley – doing their cycle clothing and accessories, Brooks England and pieces from other Midlands lifestyle brands too. Nowhere in the UK is there a retail Gallery style platform to sell contemporary high-end Silverware. This is a big gap in the marketplace and it would support people like myself and help to promote a stronger reputation for Birmingham as a quality design destination too."

"I could have benefitted from a greater business emphasis whilst at university. It was excellent being at the School of Jewellery and I was able to meet and have the benefit of some great tutors, but this is one element that might be improved and expanded on for the future."

Conclusions

The establishment and successful growth to-date of Jack Row's business has taken at least three lucky breaks to gain traction. Firstly working at WB the Creative Jewellery Group whilst studying for his degree enabled Jack to have the benefit of a high quality degree whilst experiencing what was happening in practice in a bespoke business setting. He was also able to see how craft and high tech machinery could be successfully combined to produce high end luxury items for the jewellery market.

His meeting with Harrods at the Graduate Degree show set in train the course of events leading up to his retail presence in that store along with advice and support on creating and establishing a luxury pen brand.

Finally, working alongside his parents in law he has been able to access 'patient finance' and support required to produce his first collection and gain visibility as well as high level custom.

Recommending the establishment of a luxury retail platform for himself and other emerging lifestyle designers is one way, together with practical business mentoring and support, that both Jack and other designers like him can gain further attention and develop market presence whilst gaining greater customer loyalty.

Contact and Social Media Information

Web: www.jackrow.com

Email: jack@jackrow.com

Twitter: [@JackRowEWI](https://twitter.com/JackRowEWI)