



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

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

### **Sara Page Design – the art of the table**

Sara Page started her business, Sara Page Design, in 2012, having first studied a BA in Textile design and graduated with an MA in surface pattern design from Birmingham City University. Her inspiration was to come up with 'Sara's mark' a brush stroke representing a painterly signature and instantly recognisable as hers. Whilst she was not planning to manufacture her products herself her plan was to produce a range by drawing on other manufacturers supplying her with the pieces she needed to expand her sales and develop her brand. "I have been trying to grow a brand, something I can feel genuinely proud of. With my designs I am trying to create something that looks and feels familiar, enables us to celebrate the 'art of the table', that is not just another 'me too' product, that is simple but original and personal with a universal appeal," says Sara.

In her first year she exhibited at Handmade in Britain and later at Top Drawer, thanks to support from Interior and Lifestyle Futures, a project run from Birmingham City University, helping West Midlands businesses to find new high-value markets and create profitable and collaborative partnerships with other businesses and organisations.

"Being part of Top Drawer was fantastic as I had great interest and orders. Following this up by being part of the retail collective where we jointly ran, administered and promoted, was a unique experience. As I had not sold directly to customers before but through other retailers this gave me firsthand experience of how they viewed my products, what they thought about different designs, price points, quality and gave me ideas for new range developments. It enabled me to double my sales and made me start to really focus on my suppliers.

Sara also participated in a retail collective initiated by Birmingham Made Me, which involved running two stores in the Mailbox Birmingham for just over a year, through the generous support of Mailbox management.

"The shop initially was opened for three months, but it became so successful promoting the work of a group of artists, designer makers and entrepreneurs. We all shared in the collective responsibility of manning the store so that it was open during regular trading hours. People were chosen to keep the sales and accounts. The university provided the banking facilities and re-distributed the proceeds of the sales to the retail collective participants according to the sales made whilst retaining a small commission on sales to cover its investment in future business student collaborative events, together with the marketing and administration involved in this project and other related activities.

"The university launched and promoted the store, organised speakers from retail, finance, law and business to come in and talk with us, as well as some additional entrepreneurship support for our businesses as we moved towards the end of our period in the store. My

products were displayed in the Birmingham Made Me retail store alongside jewellery, clothing, art, gifts and cards, vintage, retro and contemporary furniture, accessories and beauty products.

"I was very conscious that if I was to expand my sales I needed to ensure I had a robust supply chain. "My second year was all about consolidating the suppliers. I ended up moving from UK based manufacturers, where I had struggled to gain the margin necessary for the stores, to Portuguese suppliers. They have been really supportive, given me good credit terms as well as the quality and reliability that I needed.

"Participating in the Birmingham Made Me Design Expos brought me into contact with other useful leads. I was proud to have taken part and to have been a part in celebrating the design history of our city region. My products have been licensed and sold by Coleshill Plastics, Coventry, who are making my trays and placemats and who also produce a bespoke Sara Page range. I have worked with Glass Domain, based in the Birmingham Jewellery Quarter, and they have been producing glass splashbacks featuring my designs – Wild Wine - being the first to go on sale, with Allotment and Seedling designs planned to follow. I have also been selling for the past year at the Louisiana Museum and Art Gallery in Copenhagen – the Danish market have been quite enthusiastic about my designs.

"It has not been easy and I am not doing the volumes I would like to do. The media suggests that we are enjoying a strong retail recovery, but in my experience people are still very cautious. But now I have sorted out my suppliers, and I am happy that they will not let me down, I am ready to expand. I have built a database of shops that I've worked with – 50 in total with 10 regulars amongst these, I have also developed a good website, <http://www.sarapagedesign.co.uk/uk-en/> and started selling directly online.

"Other than support through Interiors and Lifestyle Futures and Birmingham Made Me, I have had some limited support from UKTI as I am keen to see if I can develop retail contacts in the Scandinavian markets.

Sara Page has been inspired by Emma Bridgewater, Cath Kidson and Orla Kiely and wanted to devise a path for herself that drew on their experiences. "In developing 'Sara's mark I was inspired by these amazing designers and impressed by their great successes. Of course I would like to follow in their footsteps, but clearly this does not happen overnight. I have been doing it for three years now. It's been quite a journey and I look forward to the next phase, with some exciting plans in progress."

#### Contact and Social Media Information

Web: [www.sarapagedesign.co.uk](http://www.sarapagedesign.co.uk)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/sarapagedesign](http://www.facebook.com/sarapagedesign)

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