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WHAT

SIR TERENCE CONRAN
"Innovation"

BETHAN GRAY
"Multicultural"

IS

BARBER & OSGERBY
"Visionary"

BRITISH

In a time of turmoil, three
top designers contemplate
the country's identity

The
British
issue

DESIGN?



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ON TOPIC

On your mark

In the run-up to Brexit, Design Guild Mark founder, Jonathan Hindle, speaks to the importance of celebrating British craft

WORDS BY ELISSAVETA MARINOVA

On behalf of The Furniture Makers' Company, Jonathan Hindle, introduced the Design Guild Mark back in 2008, with a mission to recognise the highest standards in the design of furnishings in volume production, by the finest designers working in Britain, or British designers working abroad. In the run-up to Brexit, celebrating the craft and creativity that lie at the heart of the British furniture industry has never seemed more timely. But what inspired Hindle to set up the Mark in the first place?

"We needed an internationally recognised and respected, peer-judged recognition for designers of volume produced furniture," says Hindle. "We required an appraisal of standards with a rigorous and consistent approach and which also involved the physical inspection of the products and presentations from the designers."



↑ Hindle: "design is the vital ingredient in distinctive products"



Interestingly, the Mark's inauguration coincided with the global financial crisis, and though the current state of affairs in the UK can't be likened to that of 2008, the question arises nonetheless: are Hindle's motivations still the same today? "It is evident that we still need to recognise the contribution made by designers in society generally, but especially in the challenging arena of furniture and furnishing design for volume production," he explains. "If we are to grow our economy and compete on a global stage, design is the vital ingredient in providing products which are distinctive."

So where do things stand today? At the time of writing, the country is bracing itself for a no deal scenario. The authorities are getting creative with the Dover-Calais quagmire, the Department of Health is stockpiling medicine just like food manufacturers are

stockpiling ingredients. So, how will the furniture industry be affected?

"The furniture industry, like all industries, will need to adapt and invest to minimise the likely disruption of Brexit. There will be an inevitable period of change and investment required to handle a greater volume of customs declarations at our ports if we are unable to agree a trade deal of sorts with the EU," Hindle explains. "However, because of the Government's 'we are desperate for a deal' attitude, the EU have had no incentive to compromise. This leaves businesses in a position of neither being ready for no deal, nor having a deal that's worthwhile."

He continues: "As a result, the ready availability of skilled trades from eastern Europe on which the industry has come to rely upon is also showing signs

↑ Pearson Lloyd's Famiglia for Allermuir won the Mark in 2018

on contracting. A prolonged lack of investment in training here in the UK for the skills required will take time and investment to remedy. The lack of infrastructure and training facilities to deliver on the industry's new training needs, and on expectations for Apprenticeship Levies, will make this transition even more difficult and will continue to stifle growth without substantial investment."

Despite these daunting concerns however, Hindle remains positive. He concludes: "In the medium to long term, with adequate investment in skills and the latest industry 4.0 technologies, we should see it strengthen our industry and its competitive prospects globally." ■