



KARA O'REILLY THE INSIDER



Bring it home

I am no little Englander, but sometimes one does have to champion the best of British. When, four years ago, Established & Sons arrived on the scene, part of the brouhaha surrounding the launch was down to the fact that all its products (such as the Jasper Morrison Crate Series chair, below right, £517) are made in Britain. As Tamara Caspersz, one of the company's four co-directors, explains: "Where we can, we will continue to use, embrace and develop the best specialist facilities in the UK. We are a British design company and this remains our unique selling point." This was, and still is, no mean achievement: Britain's furniture-manufacturing base has been declining at warp speed.

If you want to source the home-made, you have to do your homework. There are a handful of companies clinging on for dear life to the "made in Britain" tag, and the quality of the pieces they produce is testament to the undervalued skills we have in this country.

Sean Sutcliffe, the managing director and co-founder (with Sir Terence

Conran) of the furniture workshop Benchmark, agrees: "British furniture has a glorious legacy that dates back to the 17th century. Sadly, British manufacturing is petering out, which is why we are now running an apprentice training scheme to train woodworkers in traditional cabinet-making." The problem is these skills come at a price that can't compete with the likes of China – Benchmark's Rose dressing table, above, by Kay & Stemmer, costs £3,950 – but British made these days is more about quality than quantity.

establishedandsons.com; benchmark-furniture.com



BRIGHT YOUNG THINGS

Roll up, roll up! It's show time. Graduate show time to be precise, and if you want to do a bit of talent-spotting, you could do no better than to head to the New Designers exhibition at the Business Design Centre in London. The broadest of these shows, it's a great way to get an overview of what the future holds. Work by more than 4,000 students covers every area from textiles to theatre design, fashion to furniture, product design to photography.

Don't miss the One Year On spin-off, curated this year by Thorsten van Elten (the man who brought the world the Welly vase and Pigeon light), which showcases the work of graduates who have made it past the prototype stage and got some of their work into production. It's where you will see Guadalupe Velazquez's fabulous, oversized, graphic pendant lamps (Moss Light, above, £480; occenca.com), inspired by his childhood in Mexico and adulthood in Blighty.

Part 1: July 3-6; Part 2: July 10-13. newdesigners.com

MADE IN BRITAIN

1 Wesley-Barrell is still a family-owned company, now run by three sisters. A bit of an under-the-radar gem, it produces its upholstered furniture, from sketch to end product, in its Oxfordshire workshop. Voltaire chair, from £900 (plus 2 metres of fabric); wesley-barrell.co.uk.

2 David Linley has given a lifeline to some of the country's most skilled woodworkers by using several small family-run businesses to craft his made-to-measure statement pieces, such as this limited-edition Time table. Only 20 have been made, which

explains the eye-watering price. £19,500; davidlinley.com.

3 George Smith's Newcastle factory made the upholstered furniture for Shoreditch House, and its name is synonymous with classic yet cool designs that will last a lifetime. Brewster chaise, £3,395 (plus 9 metres of fabric); georgesmith.co.uk.

4 Ercol is enjoying a renaissance, thanks in part to the championing of its classic designs by the quintessentially English designer Margaret Howell. Originals nest of tables, £495; ercol.com.



TRY THIS

GIVE YOUR FRONT DOOR GRAVITAS WITH A LION'S HEAD DOOR KNOCKER MADE FROM THE SAME MOULD AS NUMBER 10'S. £45; ROULLIERWHITE.COM