



MODERN LOVE

There's an excellent excuse this month to drop in to Margaret Howell, one of our favourite stores for understated British fashion and homewares. Howell is showcasing more than 50 pieces of 20th-century British furniture that inspire her at her Wigmore Street boutique, in an exhibition entitled 'Modern Design in Britain'. The pieces, including Robert Welch's 'Alveston' stainless-steel tea set from 1962 (right), mid-century Scandinavian glassware and 1930s furniture by Marcel Breuer (above), belong to design expert Ken Stradling, director of the Bristol Guild of Applied Art. 'Ken's collection is charmingly personal and eclectic. The pieces that we have selected complement the vintage products that we sell in our shops,' says Howell. 15 October–15 November (margarethowell.co.uk).



Robert Welch's 'Alveston' tea set (1962), on display at Margaret Howell

ANOTHER BITE

Leaving behind the acclaimed Polpo, whose Venetian *bàcari* (simple restaurants) have become much loved in London since they opened six years ago, founding chef-director Tom Oldroyd has now opened his own eponymous restaurant in north London. Aesthetically and gastronomically, the vibe is more English, though an Italian influence is still detectable. Sip a white peach bellini, share a plate of lamb and almond meatballs with *salsa romanesco* or a heritage tomato and broad bean salad; it's a local hotspot, but good enough to visit even if you're not from the neighbourhood. 344 Upper Street, London N1 (oldroydlondon.com).



MADE IN BRITAIN

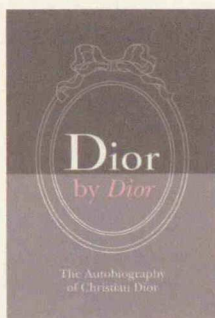
Thanks to the resurgence of traditional manufacturing on UK turf, it's easier than ever to find products that are made in Britain. New book *Best of British: The Stories Behind Britain's Iconic Brands* (Prestel, £35) is a timely survey of companies that have always made their wares on home soil. Most have royal warrants; many are now global-reaching (such as Barbour, founded in Newcastle's South Shields). If you're thrilled by the idea of a visit to James Smith & Sons, Oxford Street's unparalleled purveyor of umbrellas since 1830, or a trip to buy cashmere socks from Johnston's of Elgin in Scotland, this compendium is a must-read.

FIVE OF THE BEST FASHION BOOKS



1 BEST OF BRITISH

Three cheers for the bulldog British brand – A Very *British Heritage: The Stories Behind Britain's Iconic Brands* brings back the glory days of classic British manufacture. *October; Prestel*



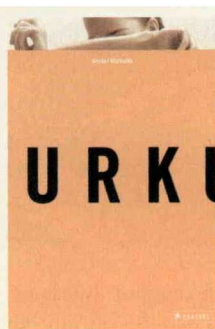
2 DIOR BY DIOR

The Autobiography of Christian Dior journeys through '50s haute couture and back into the master of silhouette's family life in Granville, on the coast of Normandy, and early design failures. *7 Sept; V&A Publishing*



3 THE IMPOSSIBLE WARDROBE

Written by actress Tilda Swinton, this book is naturally a quirky affair. It applauds our relationship with clothes and considers couture an art form. About time too. *29 Sept; Rizzoliusa*



4 KOSTAS MURKUDIS

Having bagged an early collaboration with Helmut Lang and the Philip Morris Design Award, this book follows 30 years of Kosta's creativity, with contributions from Terry Jones and Mark Borthwick. *Out now; Random House*



5 EAST END FASHIONISTAS

Shoreditch and Hackney are destinations for bar crawling and boutiques. Vivienne Westwood celebrates the best of the range in *East End Fashionistas* *14 Sept; Thames & Hudson*





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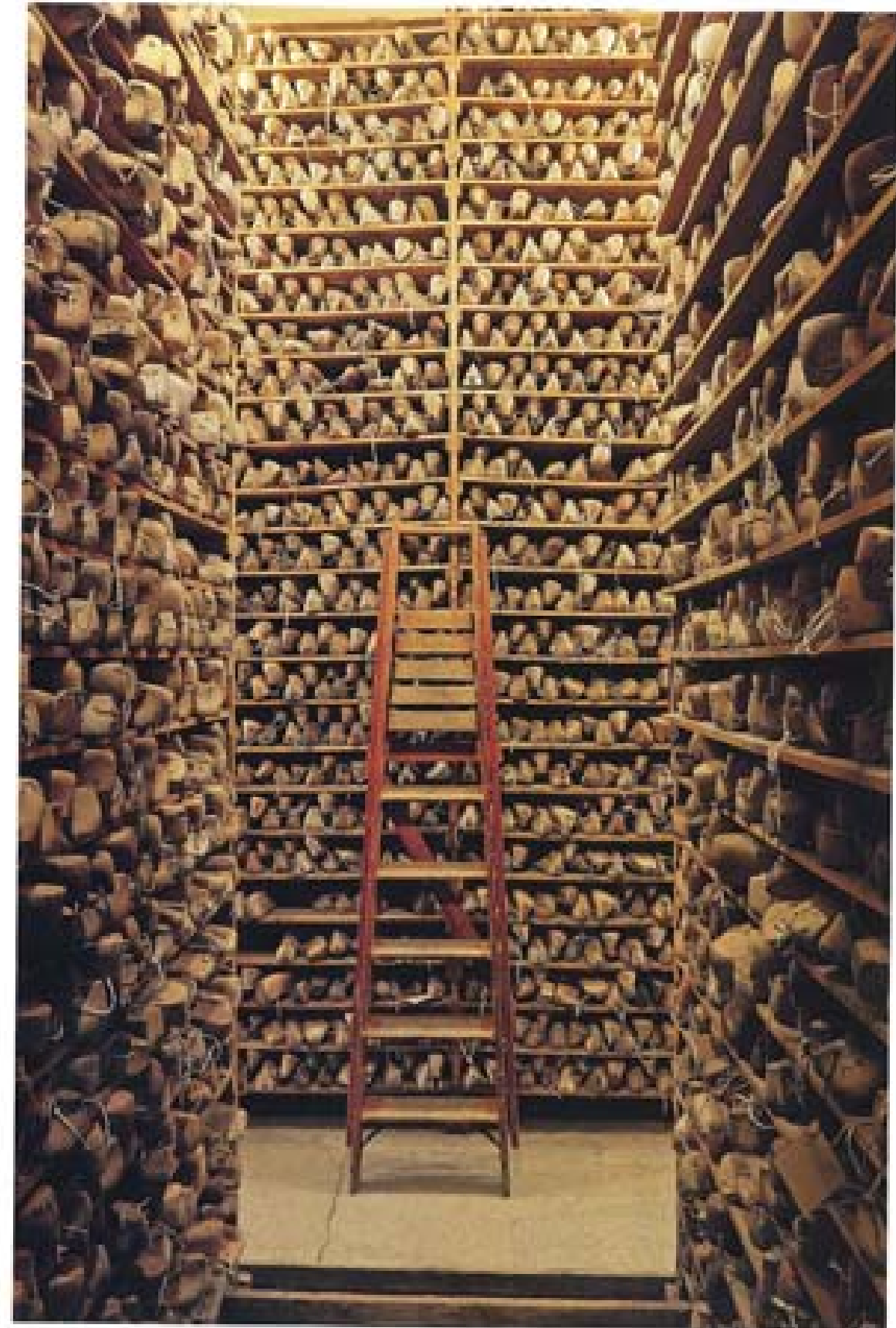
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MADE WITH LOVE

A new book, *Best of British*, goes behind the scenes at some of our biggest manufacturing success stories to bring you the insider on the UK's most iconic brands

Follow in the footsteps of kings and dandies, gentlemen and rebels, as *Best of British* explores the historic manufacturers that made Nelson's hats and Queen Elizabeth II's gloves, Fred Astaire's suits and Frank Sinatra's shoes.

From the world-famous Lock & Co in London, which has served Horatio Nelson, Charlie Chaplin and Winston Churchill, all the way to Johnstons of Elgin and Mackintosh in Scotland, via Derbyshire's John Smedley, many of these companies have operated for centuries yet remain at the top of their game.

The gloves that Queen Elizabeth I wore at her coronation, in 1559, were made of cream kidskin. They were embroidered in gold and silver, and had rather long, extended fingers: the queen was proud of her 'artistic' fingers, and was keen to highlight them.

The gloves, proudly displayed in a special museum cabinet, are part of the collection housed by Dents the oldest glove in Britain (established in 1777) and, for a while, the biggest in the world, which collects historically significant exhibits to help inform its work. In many modern ceremonies, gloves are symbolic. At her coronation in 1953, Queen Elizabeth II was presented with an embroidered glove Dents had made on commission. But there was only one, and the Queen did not wear it, merely touching it with her finger.

Today, Dents continues to be the glover many turn to for special work. It supplied



Next page: Lests are stored at John Lobb. This page, clockwise from top left: Vintage gloves from Dents; yarn at first knitwear maker John Smedley; today John Lobb holds two Royal Warrants



gloves for the *Downton Abbey* television series, for example, and made hundreds of pairs for the series *Mr Selfridge*, which followed the development of the department store founded by Harry Gordon Selfridge.

Two or three times every day, a bell rings through the shop of James Smith & Sons in London. It proclaims to the waiting shop staff that an umbrella is ready.

When a customer purchases some of the house's single-stick umbrellas, the tip must be cut to a length that corresponds to the customer's height. A single-stick umbrella is essentially a walking stick with a canopy, so the customer must be measured, using an old adjustable stick, and the tip cut to size.

The existence of such traditions will not surprise a casual visitor to Harewood House – the building James Smith & Sons has occupied since 1857 in New Oxford Street. There is a myriad of souvenirs from more than 150 years of continuous business, including an odd little mezzanine where clerks can look down suspiciously on customers, and a horseshoe hanging from the ceiling to ward off the bad luck of opening umbrellas indoors.

As soon as you walk into London's John Lobb – favoured by Frank Sinatra – you are hit by the history of the business.

On the right are row upon row of shoes in antique display cases (the business was founded in 1849); in between are letters and warrants declaring John Lobb the royal shoemaker (today Lobb holds two Royal Warrants, granted by The Duke of Edinburgh and The Prince of Wales) to one head of state or another; and there are artistic works inspired by the shoes.

The responsibility of all of these heritage brands in maintaining certain standards and practices is not taken lightly – something Leon Powell, cutter at tailors Anderson & Sheppard in Old Burlington Street, London, understands well. Powell says: "We are mere custodians. We are part of the great way tailoring has always been done at Anderson & Sheppard, waiting to pass the skills, values and stories, as we learn them, on to the next generation when their time comes." ■

For more extraordinary stories on great British businesses, visit www.britain-magazine.com

BUY THE BOOK

Best of British: The Stories Behind Britain's Icons, edited by Harri A. Friedrichs, Simon Chapman and Toby Eggrick, is available from Pevsner for £20.



Above: A single-stick umbrella is carefully wrapped at the London premises of James Smith & Sons, where the company has been based since 1857