



Model career

Stephen Einhorn switched from model making to jewellery design using nothing but experience and innate skill, with great success. He tells **Kate Donovan** how he did it

British design needs people like Stephen Einhorn. At the mention of UK design, craftsmanship and manufacture, the jewellery designer's eyes light up, his body language shifts forward and he speaks with the animated emotion of someone who really cares.

Although he insists the skills are still out there and refuses to outsource manufacture to the likes of China and Thailand, Einhorn has become disillusioned about the training being offered to future generations on home soil.

"The skills just aren't being taught here any more and we find it very difficult to find highly skilled goldsmiths," he says. "The apprentices we get here have already done three years at college and they often come out lacking the technical skills that will be useful to them in the outside world." Don't even get him started on Margaret Thatcher.

Einhorn's not all talk, though: he has been immersed in the British design industry in various guises throughout his career and now runs apprenticeships from the workshop that sits behind his jewellery shop in Angel Islington's Upper Street, where he keeps all design and manufacturing on-site.

Einhorn is now best known for his contemporary men's and women's jewellery, which combines elegant simplicity with the weight of quality materials and craftsmanship. It maintains a British sensibility while playing with hidden messages, subversion and the occasional twist. However, in a previous life Einhorn was a key figure in the model-making industry.

Where it all began

Einhorn has always had a knack for making things and being creative. "I can look at something and usually work out what I need to know about making it," he says. "If you're inquisitive, you can find out."

At the age of 15, he patented a multi-



Einhorn at work on the *Beneath the Leaves* collection (also below), which was inspired by the *Snow White & the Huntsman* project

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coloured pencil, with lead that changed colour when in use. "Art was about the only thing I did well at in school - and maths, actually, I did quite well at that," he recalls. "But I left school without a lot of qualifications. I didn't get on with school and have really learnt by doing."

After school, having read about heroes of the film industry doing exciting work with special make-up and handmade models, Einhorn's imagination was captured by dreams of a career in model making. The route in was not straightforward, however, so the London-born designer laboured at a number of companies, where work included electroplating, pattern and mould making for costumes, silversmithing and a stint on a market stall with his wife and business partner Jane.

However, his heart remained set on model making and Einhorn got his first break in the industry when he was about 26, through the neighbour of a friend who had a model-making company. He worked at the company, which predominantly specialised in stills for advertising, for three years. After the first year, he was running the workshop and, in 1984, Einhorn started his own model-making business in Islington, where he produced models for both still and moving ads. "That was when I really learnt how to make anything out of anything because there were no computers and you could be asked to make literally anything," he says. Einhorn produced models for a variety of big brands including Coca-Cola, Carlsberg, the *Financial Times* and IBM.

His company, Don't Panic, became a big name in the trade, but with it came various pressures, and Einhorn admits to having no social life at the time and a sense of missing out on spending time with his two young children.

It was eventually a still ad for a cereal brand that broke the camel's back. Working through the night, Einhorn ended up having a "bit of a breakdown" when something went wrong and took an axe to the model. Despite high

emotions, ever professional, Einhorn stayed up all night, finished the model, announced the next day that he was giving up model making and looked ahead to his next business venture.

Learning on the job

Einhorn confesses that when he came to launch his new business, he didn't have a plan and, although he had never had any official jewellery training, the skills he had picked up adapted comfortably to the craft.

In the early days of the new business, Einhorn produced a small collection of metal-based products, which included four men's signet rings made in sterling silver. "A friend of mine introduced me to the buyers at Paul Smith and he really liked the rings," says Einhorn. "There was no one really making men's jewellery then." Paul Smith bought 300 of the rings. This initial success was very welcome, especially since Einhorn had taken the risk of selling the house he shared with his wife and children to fund it.

The transition from the model business to jewellery was a learning curve. "It's quite an odd thing to make stuff for photography that only has to last for a day and then to get into making what we do now, which is heirloom pieces, things of quality that last and are timeless," he says.

Although Einhorn describes himself at the time as being "very naïve," the jewellery he was designing and making on site was proving a hit with customers and other brands. As well as producing jewellery to sell in his own shop and numerous bespoke commissions, Einhorn produced collections for brands including Dunhill and cult Japanese brand A Bathing Ape.

More recently, Einhorn has created bespoke designs for Hollywood films and TV projects and in 2012 produced pieces for *Snow White & the Huntsman* and Tim Burton's *Dark Shadows*. Johnny Depp who starred in *Dark Shadows* kept one of the rings Einhorn made, as did Tim Burton.

Although his timeless yet very cool pieces appeal to stylish individuals, Einhorn prides himself on not being constrained by passing fashions and says that his pieces are designed to last a lifetime. "We're not a fashion company," says Einhorn. "We make things that are fashionable, but that's more by happenstance and zeitgeist than design, I'd say."

He adds: "We don't want to make throwaway things, that's not what we're about and if we were about that we'd be getting our things made in China



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or churned out from Thailand like everyone else – those opportunities have been rejected by us."

Einhorn's jewellery also comes with a conscience and, from the earliest days, he has tried to be ethically responsible. His packaging is made of recyclable materials and, in 2011, his became one of the few businesses in the UK to be given the licence to sell Fairtrade and Fairmined gold. "For me, being ethical is a way of life, not just simply buying Fairtrade products," says Einhorn. "Ethics is the way you behave towards others as well as the working conditions and materials that you use."

Pieces of history

Apart from using a range of metals, gemstones, pearls and diamonds in his jewellery, Einhorn also produces pieces featuring Thames Wood from oak trees that started growing on the Greenwich peninsular as far back as 186BC and were cut down by invading Romans to build docks to moor their boats. When he found out about the rare and precious 2,000-year-old oak, Einhorn had to have

(Clockwise from above) A ring featuring 2,000-year-old Thames Wood; the ring Johnny Depp wore in *Dark Shadows*; a Caged Heart necklace is one of Einhorn's designs for women



it and continues to use it in jewellery.

"We started incorporating it in jewellery and learnt how to stabilise it and preserve it," he explains. The material fits in with the brand's mission to make lasting, timeless jewellery, but while Einhorn may use some ancient materials, he is far from dismissive of all modern practices and has embraced the opportunities opened up by CAD and other computer software.

"I'm a techy nerd," he says. "I'd buy so many machines if I could. I'm willing to learn so I rarely say to someone, this is how you should do that. We use a real mix of technology and craftsmanship here, and the technology has allowed me to run the business and still be involved in all the design."

Self-taught Einhorn has had a varied career. Motivated by the challenge of problem solving, in another life he could very well have been an engineer or inventor, but luckily he turned his hand to jewellery making, negotiating a constantly undulating manufacturing landscape with aplomb. Whatever waves of change the next few decades bring, no doubt Einhorn and his team will ride them with ease. ●