

ANYA HINDMARCH talks to **HEATHER MCGREGOR** about craftsmanship, celebrity and her admiration for the woman who turned “handbagging” into a verb

HANDBAGS FOREVER

ANYA HINDMARCH

Anya Hindmarch founded her eponymous brand in London in 1987 and now has 58 stores globally. The brand is known for its craftsmanship, personalized pieces, Britishness – and sense of humor.

A UK Trade Ambassador, Non-Executive Director of the British Fashion Council and Trustee of both The Royal Academy and The Design Museum, Hindmarch was awarded an MBE in recognition of her contribution to the British fashion industry in 2009. She was named Veuve Clicquot Business Woman of the Year and Harper’s Bazaar Woman of the Year in 2012.



“A handbag is a piece of engineering. And interesting in a way that a beautiful handmade car is interesting. It has still got to work.”





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HEATHER MCGREGOR is a headhunter and *Financial Times* columnist whose favorite handbag is her bespoke Anya Hindmarch Ebury, featuring embossed messages from her three sons and long-suffering husband.

“In terms of communication, we always talk about taut ropes – the connection between, say, me and our store in LA.

Do they feel they can pick up the phone? Do they feel connected?

If they needed to go the extra mile, would they?”

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“We’re 80 people here now [at head office] and it’s very collaborative, cooperative, and – I like to think – a really nice place to work.

We certainly attract a lot of talent because of that.”

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“I don’t design specifically for different markets. It’s a global marketplace these days – everyone is pretty much in sync.”

“There is so much talk in the luxury world about the cult of celebrity – who is wearing what, this bag named after that celebrity, and so on, which is fine. But for me, it’s the craftsmen who should be celebrated.”

HANDBAGGING *verb*: to verbally attack or crush (a person or idea) ruthlessly and forcefully [1980s: coined by Julian Critchley, Conservative MP, with reference to Margaret Thatcher’s ministerial style in cabinet meetings]
Source: Oxford Dictionary

Says Hindmarch, “What Margaret Thatcher represented to me was that period of cut-the-red-tape, get out there, start your own business. It was a very exciting time. It was a time when many brands were formed ... Of course, she also made the word ‘handbag’ into a verb – you’ve got to look up to anyone who does that.”

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Having the unsolicited backing of the most famous fashion icon in the world was a coup for Hindmarch, who recounted to *The Sunday Telegraph* the patronage of Diana, Princess of Wales. “She would pop into our first shop on Walton Street, without any bodyguards, and she was very lovely, very low key. She always used to refer to [the Hindmarch clutch] as her ‘cleavage bag’ because she would use it when she got out of the car to protect her modesty.”



"My dream was to have craftsmen in the store. People are so disconnected from how things are made. Seeing a craftsman at work makes you really value why something is special - and appreciate why you want to keep it."

Pictured is the interior of Hindmarch's Madison Avenue flagship store in New York. A growing part of her business is bespoke, where customers can personalize items



“The commercial team want to do what sold really well last year. They want it safe and all in black. And of course the design team want to break new ground. Both are savvy enough to know that they want to achieve the same thing. But there’s a natural tension that *should* be there.”

“I’m very lucky because I get to play with all this creative madness.”

“It would be very dry if you ran a business purely to make money. It has to have a life to it. Fashion is a combination of art and business.”

“Sometimes a creative decision is actually smart for the business. It’s not a case of one or the other.”

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FASHION...

...speaks volumes about your personality in a way that words don’t. It is very much a coloring in of people’s characters.

...is quite tribal. I’ve always been interested in the psychology behind it because it has a very soft set of unspoken rules.

...is very mood altering and, more importantly, very confidence boosting.

Confidence is hugely important. It is about saying, ‘This is what I love,’ and getting people to follow you.

You can carry people with you on all sorts of journeys if you can do that.

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The response to Hindmarch’s 2007 project to persuade people to use less plastic was explosive. Cloth bags emblazoned with “I’m not a plastic bag” (£5 in the UK, \$15 in the US) attracted queues of enthusiastic buyers. As the BBC said at the time, “The bag’s must-have credentials were secured when it was chosen as the goodie bag for guests at the 2007 *Vanity Fair* Oscar party.” Hindmarch says, “Someone told me once, ‘When you throw something away, there is actually no away. It ends up in landfill.’ ... [the bag’s popularity] just went around the world like sort of a wave. It can be a bit distracting, I suppose, from day to day business, but it was important to do and made a difference.”

“I didn’t thrive in an academic environment. I was, shall we say, impatient in the classroom. I just wanted to get going. I think that’s quite an entrepreneurial trait.”

“I was keen to build a business that was authentic and came from my passion about craftsmanship and design. And combining that with humor.”

“The way my brain works is good for remembering form – shape – texture – color. I have a very good visual memory.”

