



BEST OF BRITISH SPECIAL

Proud to be TRADITIONAL

From cult teddies to spotty teacups, we discover the products made by thriving companies who are proud to be among the very best of British

EMMA BRIDGEWATER POTTERY

'Tourists love our Union flag mug'

Emma Bridgewater CBE is founder and creative director of the eponymous ceramics company. All her stock is made in Stoke-on-Trent.

The company started by accident – I was looking for a present for my mother

and wanted a special cup and saucer that could fit in nicely on her dresser. Everything I came across was either too formal or too clunky, so I thought I'd design one myself. And so it began... When I first started the company,



'If I'd listened to sensible people I'd have abandoned my plans at the start'

everyone said, 'You don't want to stay making in Stoke. Everyone's going abroad.' I resolved to stay in Staffordshire. Sure, labour costs are higher here, but there are advantages. I now employ more than 300 people and have brought an old Victorian factory back to life. I'm proud to support British manufacturing, and to be preserving traditional skills.

We welcome over 50,000 visitors a year, who come to see our pottery made by hand. Every summer we host a literary festival. Tourists visiting our London store love our Union Flag mug, and the Polka Dot mug is a bestseller year after year.

EMMA'S ADVICE

- + Don't listen to advice too much – if I had listened to sensible people, I'd have abandoned plans at the start.
 - + Make sure people want – really want – what you have to sell.
 - + Listen to your customers.
- emmabridgewater.co.uk

THE CAMBRIDGE SATCHEL COMPANY

'A satchel is a simple, yet perfect shape'

Julie Deane is the owner of The Cambridge Satchel Company, based in Leicester. Creating the 'must-have' satchel, inspired by traditional leather schoolbags, she firmly believes in supporting British craftsmanship.

Originally trained as an accountant and that was invaluable going into business. I was keen to set up a truly British company. I'm a huge fan of British style, and investing in British manufacturing is important to me. I was brought up to value the Made in Britain mark and I believe it's far better to support our skill base, our economy, and to have fewer things that are really well made rather than lots of cheap, poorly made items.

We employ about 150 people and the vast majority of our production is in Syston, near Leicester. Establishing our own manufacturing made us much stronger as a business.

China and the USA love and appreciate the timeless heritage reflected in the products we offer. The styling is classic, inspired by times gone by, yet brought bang up-to-date with bold colours and a commitment to craftsmanship.

The Doctors Bag and The Sophie were introduced last year, and have been very successful. We were thrilled when Helena Bonham Carter was spotted carrying them. Satchels remain our most popular

product. It's such a classic shape – simple yet perfect. The Doctors Bag has shown the appetite of our very loyal customers for new styles, but always with the same company values of heritage, bags with a story, and dedication to craftsmanship.



JULIE'S ADVICE

- + Produce something you feel really passionate about.
 - + Do as much as you can yourself – this minimises overheads and teaches you about all areas of the business.
 - + Protect your Intellectual Property – The British Library Business and IP Centre can advise on this free of charge.
- cambridgesatchel.com >>



'I wanted to set up a truly British company'

MELIN TREGWYNT WELSH BLANKETS

‘My grandfather would still recognise the mill today’

Eifion and Amanda Griffiths are the owners of family-run business Melin Tregwynt, based at a 17th-century mill in Pembrokeshire, West Wales. Creating Welsh woollen blankets, cushions and clothes in their own unique fabrics keeps the tradition of Welsh weaving alive.

My grandfather started the business in 1912 when he bought a mill for £700. When he arrived at Tregwynt he came in a horse and cart with his wife and all their furniture in the back. And here we still are, all these years later.

We make most of our cloth on-site. If my grandfather came back today he would recognise the mill – not a lot has changed in the weaving of the fabric.



Today there are less than 10 mills left in Wales but we are proud to still be here. The mill employs 35 people, and its blankets, throws



‘Our designs are rooted in Welsh tradition’

and cushions can be found in hotels and design-led stores worldwide.

We believe passionately that manufacturing has to remain in Britain – partly to maintain a traditional craft, and to continue to help support the local community.

People have come to feel that provenance is important. At its core is the concept that things should be made where they have roots. We find that the story behind the company is important – perhaps because it’s rare to find a small textile manufacturing company that has survived in the UK.

We try to make things that are useful, beautiful and a bit special. Our designs are rooted in the Welsh traditional doublecloth for a good reason. It makes them very difficult to copy.

EIFION’S ADVICE

- + You have to love what you do and have confidence in your product.
 - + Talk to everybody – you can learn a lot by listening to your customers, competitors and especially critics.
 - + Be prepared to venture outside your comfort zone and don’t be afraid to fail.
- melintregwynt.co.uk



PJ PAN PYJAMAS

‘I couldn’t find any pyjamas I liked’

Pandora Stormonth Darling is the founder of PJ Pan – a luxury pyjama company located on the edge of Scotland’s Cairngorms mountain range.



I never set out to run my own business. The idea for PJ Pan came after an unsuccessful shopping trip to central London. I simply couldn’t find pyjamas that I liked.

I worked for an events company in London and when I had an inkling I wanted to set up my own business my boss allowed me to drop one day a week. This was perfect – at least I didn’t have to quit my job before launching into the world of pyjamas, which I knew very little about.

To begin with, I started manufacturing in Turkey but after a few years I looked at other options. I stumbled across a UK factory, which we have been with for nearly 10 years now. Manufacturing in Britain has become hugely important to me personally, but also to the brand. It is something we are extremely proud of.

It has made a huge impact on our business and, more importantly, it feels right to be supporting British manufacturing. It reduces our carbon footprint too, so it’s a win-win, really.

We moved to Scotland from Wiltshire

WORDS: ZOE WEST



about six years ago and restored a collection of old farm buildings belonging to my husband’s family. They now form our spacious office and warehouse overlooking the Perthshire hills. It’s a joy to go to work!

Our products are very well received in America. The British-made ethos appeals to them. They know it means quality. The bestsellers in the women’s collection varies from traditional stripes to more flamboyant prints but when it comes to the men’s collection they just want blue! So the classic blue stripes and plain blues are always the most popular.

I love our silk pyjamas, particularly the latest collection – the lovebird design is my absolute favourite.

PANDORA’S ADVICE

- + Keep it simple at first. Don’t try to juggle too many products until you’ve mastered what you’re doing.
 - + Invest in good software, accounting packages, and equipment that will allow you to run your business professionally and efficiently.
- pjpan.co.uk

MERRYTHOUGHT BEARS

‘Our teddies have become cult classics’



Sarah Holmes is the director of Merrythought Bears, based in Shropshire. The fourth-generation family-run mill still makes every single teddy by hand.

My great-grandfather set up Merrythought Bears in 1930. He was an enterprising man who had worked in the textiles business. Teddy bears were becoming popular and he saw an opportunity. They’ve since become cult classics and firm favourites with the likes of the Royal Family. The company has faced challenges over the years, but it has managed to survive – we are the UK’s oldest soft toy manufacturer.

We employ 26 people and lovingly hand-make each bear from the same building in Shropshire that we’ve been in since the 1930s, which has real heritage for the area.

Both my grandfather and father developed the business further, from expansion into exports to introducing collectable bears. The USA and Japan love our products – they put real value on something being made solely in the UK.

Because we stay true to traditional manufacturing – a 15-step process – there are specific skills required and we train on the job. Our most popular bear is the ‘Shrewsbury’, named after the town we are based in. It’s usually given as a special present.

Being so British has become our unique selling point. We’re proud of what we’ve achieved, and we’re celebrating our 90th anniversary this year.

SARAH’S ADVICE

- + Ensure you use your head to make decisions and not your heart.
 - + Have a plan, but be prepared to adapt as you go along, as business doesn’t always pan out as expected.
 - + Don’t expand too quickly – work on sustainable growth.
- merrythought.co.uk**

