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‘MY TEXTILE PRINTS ARE MADE USING TRADITIONAL ARTISANAL TECHNIQUES’

Textile designer Helen Round

Helen Round is Cornish through and through. Not only was she born and brought up in the county, but she was raised on one of Cornwall’s most iconic sites, St Michael’s Mount, where her parents had also grown up. So Cornwall, not surprisingly, shapes each design she creates. ‘Its coastline, beautiful coves and beaches and gentle way of life are what keep me here,’ says Helen. ‘The coastal walks, wildlife, hedgerows and my wild Cornish garden are constant inspiration for my drawings and designs.’

Helen taught at an FE college, but after having her children, Reuben, now 23, and Phoebe, now 20, she wanted a change. ‘I had always loved textiles,’ Helen says. So she enrolled in an evening class doing A-level textiles and then went on to do a Fine Art Textiles degree 14 years ago. ‘I had always loved making things, even as a child – my mum taught me how to use a sewing machine. After I finished my degree, I was keen to use my new skills in a creative job and thought, “What can I do now?”’

Helen became involved with Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery and worked as a

textile artist on a number of exhibitions, as well as holding contemporary craft workshops. ‘I found myself teaching for four or five years, then I realised I wanted to get back to making beautiful, functional things.’

So, in 2012, Helen set up her own business creating homeware and lifestyle accessories made from high-quality pure linen. ‘I had always loved printing, and screenprinting works well with textiles, so I decided to merge the two things together,’ she says. ‘The key is making beautiful things that are functional, using the best-quality fabric I can source. My first piece was a long crossover apron, then I thought, “What else do people use in their homes?” and developed collections and products within them.’

Her range now includes aprons, bags, cushions, lampshades, fabrics, table linens and mugs. Helen started from her kitchen table, but a year later, moved to a purpose-built studio at the top of her Cornish garden.

Helen’s main marketing tool was her website. ‘I worked hard on social media, too,’ she says. Design journalist Charlotte Abrahams came across her work and »

Text

Helen's studio
looks out over the
Cornish landscape
- a source of
inspiration for her.



What I love most...

'THE FLEXIBILITY OF WORKING FOR MYSELF IN A STUDIO AT THE TOP OF MY GARDEN!'

invited her to be part of Spotted at the Top Drawer trade event – a dedicated area for businesses that are new to the market.

'It was daunting,' says Helen. 'I had never been to a trade show before, but the buyers liked what I did and placed orders. It gave us a leg-up and the business grew. Now we have more than 80 stockists around the country. We grabbed every piece of business advice along the way. I still go to Top Drawer – it keeps us known. I also attend other events, such as The Contemporary Craft Festival at Bovey Tracey in Devon.'

Inspiration for Helen's screenprinted designs comes from the countryside and coastline around her, and her studio has fabulous views across the fields and down

to the sea. She spends many hours doing sketches and drawings for her collections.

For example, Helen's Coastal range includes designs based on a replica of an 18th-century lugger called the *Grayhound* that chased smugglers around the Cornish coast, and now offers sailing adventures, while her Quayside collection is inspired by visits to a nearby beach, where mackerel, looking for whitebait to feed on, come close to the shore. Helen's latest collection, coming out in September, features bees, which is a subject close to her heart because both her father and brother are beekeepers.

Everything is made at Helen's studio by Helen, Hayley Gibson and apprentice Megan Bartley. Helen took on Hayley in October 2015 and Megan in August 2016 as the business grew. 'For young people living in Cornwall, gaining access to employment within the creative sector, particularly in the area of textiles, can be a challenge,' she says. 'It was really important to me, as a small emerging business, to try to give opportunities to young people in the area and, as the business grew, I was able to take on my first apprentice.'

'Hayley, who lives in the village, has now successfully completed her qualifications and works with us full time, taking responsibility for the making of the products and stock control and assisting with the daily running of the business,' says Helen. 'She is helped by Megan, who also lives locally and came to us following the completion of an HND in fashion and textiles. We are a happy, busy team who love what we do. The apprenticeship scheme has given both Hayley and Megan a great insight into how a small creative business is run, and it's great to be able to give young people living locally in the village employment in the creative sector.'

'Every day is a delight and we always learn something new,' says Helen. 'I love living here and being part of a great village.'

**☎ Helen Round, 01752 822817,
helenround.com. »**



Helen sewing
a toiletry bag.



Helen's studio is surrounded by plants and flowers bursting with colour.



Helen's products range from mugs to peg bags.



An Indigo cushion from the Rame Head collection.



One of Helen's local stockists is The Upcycled Home Company.



Motifs from Helen's Garden collection are sewn onto a bag.



✱
**ON MY
DOORSTEP...**

Visit... 'Rame Head with its little chapel dedicated to St Michael in 1397. Views from the top are breathtaking, and on a clear, calm day you can see for miles.'

Shop at... 'The Upcycled Home Company (07875 756311, theupcycledhome.co.uk) stocks a mix of vintage finds alongside products from local makers - the best shop for present buying!'

Go for a meal at... 'The Canteen at Maker Heights (01752 659069). Set in old Nissen huts, it serves beautiful food, locally sourced.'

Helen takes time out to photograph an inspirational scene at the nearby village of Kingsand.



Small business advice

HOW TO SUCCESSFULLY EMPLOY PEOPLE

Our guide to maximising opportunities by growing your team



Helen Round ran her country business as a one-woman band from 2012 onwards, but recent rapid growth meant she has employed two people lately, one as an intern. 'Employing others is a big step, one which should be celebrated. It will give you real opportunities, allowing you more time to focus on your business development,' says Isabel Barrell, Business Management Consultant at Cognoscentis, which provides creative service solutions for home interiors businesses.

'However, it can also be a challenge, as you don't want too much time managing employees and losing sight of why you set up your business in the first place.' It is essential to take the time to recruit correctly, says Isabel. 'You will need to communicate internally within your team, as well as externally with your clients. By sharing your creative vision, you will ensure you are all travelling in the same direction. The team has to be as passionate about the company as you are, so they will flourish and grow with the business.'

Isabel offers the following practical advice to help with recruitment:

Draw up your job description. 'Make sure it is a concise one, then think about the skills required to carry out

that role. Only then can you write up your advert; targeting it specifically to the media you are using. The requirements for print are different to online, so take time to write it accordingly. Employing people is a "good news" story - use social media to actively promote your job opportunity.'

Get the most out of your applicants. 'Ask prospective candidates to prepare something relevant for the interview - examples of work/projects that will help reflect the skills that you are looking for. Keep applicants informed about the recruitment process, how long until they will hear back from you, etc. Set yourself a timetable for recruiting, and stick to it.'

Plan and prepare your interviews. 'Lay the groundwork with a series of questions and ensure that you cover these with each applicant to ensure consistency. This structured approach will greatly help you if you don't have much interview experience. Try not to talk too much during the interview - let the candidate speak and you will learn much more about them. Give time for the applicant to ask questions.'

'A successful appointment is only half the process - the first few months will

frame your working relationship with your new colleague. Make sure you give early attention to the following areas:

Induction programme. Cover all the exciting information about the business, sharing your visions and plans for the future. You should do this for every type of employment - internship, holiday job or a permanent staff member. Don't forget the essential Health and Safety rules, together with admin and employment details.

Communicate. Set up regular meetings with your new team and stick to them. Be visible and accessible, keep your team informed and involved.

Keep time for yourself. Having trained new members of your team, always schedule time for yourself - employing people can use it up very quickly! Set limits for communication both in person and electronically for you and the whole team. As your team grows, consider seeking HR support from an organisation such as the Federation of Small Businesses (fsb.org.uk). It's an invaluable resource of support, covering areas of expertise to help you as your business expands.'

☎ **Cognoscentis, cognoscentis.co.uk.**

The one lesson I have learned...

'KEEPING QUALITY AND TRADITIONAL CRAFT SKILLS AT THE HEART OF THE BUSINESS HELPS ME TO STAY TRUE TO WHAT'S IMPORTANT'

Text