



THE *design* SHEPPARD

Rounding up the very best in interior design today

HOME

ABOUT

CATEGORIES

SUBSCRIBE

LEGAL

CONTACT ME

INTERVIEWS

Interview : Nick Brandt of Ramsign

FEBRUARY 28, 2020

Advertisement Feature : This post is a paid partnership with Ramsign



Portrait of Ramsign Ltd. Founder and CEO, Nick Brandt

As many of you know, this year I am working with Ramsign, a Danish company that produces hand stencilled **enamel signs** for homes and businesses. (You can read the first post I wrote about them [here](#).) When deciding who to work with on a long-term basis, there are a number of factors that I take into consideration. Sometimes it's simply that I love a company's products. Sometimes it's because I love the materials, techniques or processes that they employ. And sometimes it's because I really love the story behind the brand.

And it was definitely the story that attracted me when it came to collaborating with Ramsign. Over the years, I've become quite good at reading between the lines and detecting a great story that might not always be so obvious at first glance. In this interview, I spoke with founder and CEO Nick Brandt who told me where his love of enamel signs came from, how he started his company and how he managed to scale it without compromising on his *core values and ethos*

values and ethos.

What sparked your love affair with vintage enamel signs for homes and businesses?

I grew up with my mum who was a single mum. She was a nurse and did shift work so I spent a lot of time staying at my grandparent's house in Copenhagen. My grandad was an artist so I had a lot of exposure to the arts in many forms.

It wasn't until my teens that a friend introduced me to enamel signs as he was collecting them. I was fascinated by the design and quality of them and the fact that they were made more than 100 years ago. The signs sparked a lifelong interest in typography.



An up-close look at the hand stencilling work that goes into each sign produced

What made you decide to start RAMSIGN and how did the collaboration with Carlsberg happen?

In the late eighties, I was a collector of enamel signs for homes and businesses and thought there must be a market for these products, even if they are more expensive. To prove it, I approached Carlsberg who welcomed the idea with open arms as it resonated with their brand and heritage. Once that collaboration had been approved, it gave me the confidence to quit my job and go all-in trying to produce these enamel signs for homes and businesses.

The next step was to form the company as I really needed to have a business in order to deliver the goods. So it wasn't that I had a business and then tried to make the products, it was actually the other way around. I had no idea how to make enamel signs, if I could produce them or if it was possible or where it could be done nor the price of the products, so I went cold canvas out to Carlsberg. The first thing for me was to sell the idea because I knew that if I could do that then it wouldn't be a waste of time to pursue the rest and find production and it all worked out in the end. It was fun, exciting and scary at the same time.



One of the original Carlsberg designs produced by Ramsign in 1991

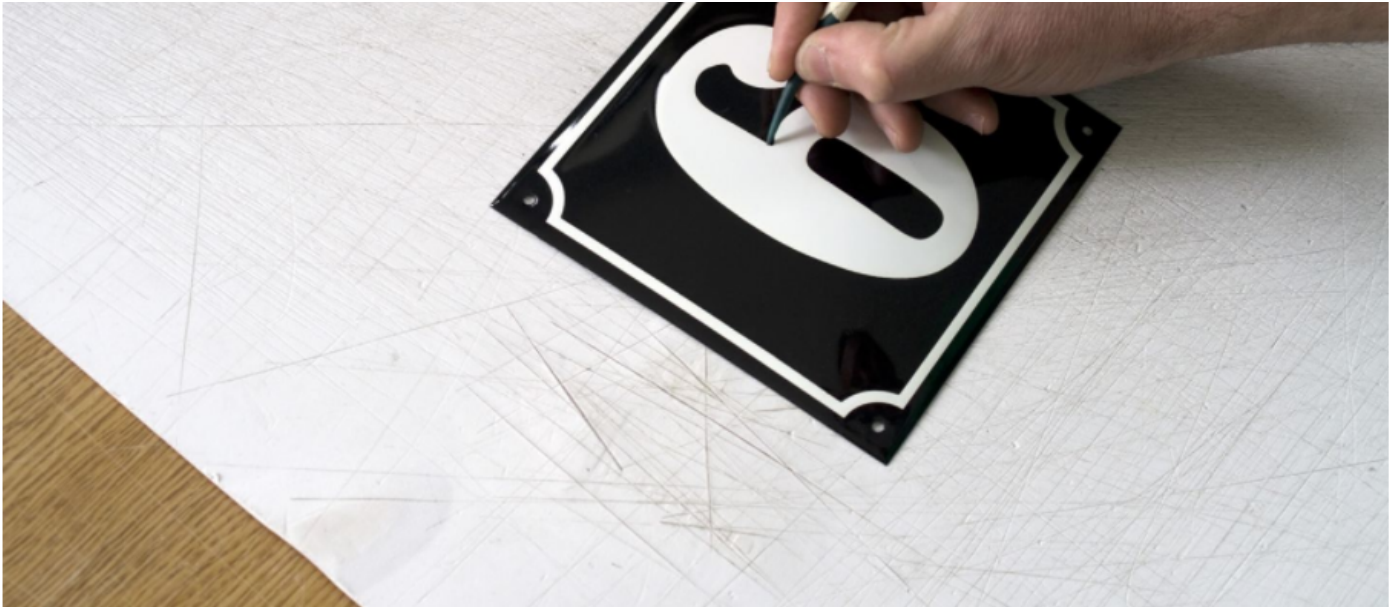
What influence has Scandinavian design heritage had on RAMSIGN?

I wanted to produce genuine designs that are rooted in tradition, which meant that I had to document the authentic designs from the turn of the century. I would take to the streets to photograph house numbers and then go back to the studio and draw up my designs based on the original designs and photos.

I also went to the Danish Design Museum in Copenhagen that features some of the original makers of typography and design, such as Thorvald Bindsbøll who designed the label for Carlsberg pilsner, and Knud V. Engelhardt who was Denmark's first industrial designer.

The museum allowed me to go down into their archives with their photographer and document some of the original drawings from Engelhardt. It was exciting to get the original drawings in my hands and reproduce something that hasn't been made since the 1930s. To this day, we still produce Engelhardt's design. Scandinavian design has been by far our strongest influence through the years; it is part of our DNA.





Careful attention to detail is given to every sign throughout the design stage

Can you tell us about the design and making process? How do the signs go from the design stage to being mounted on a house?



We work with a set of tried and tested design elements in combination with a set of tried and tested graphic rules, and of course, highly skilled graphic designers that have a trained eye for graphic design and typography. This is something that has been developed over the first decade of the company. This is done to ensure the consistency and quality of the artwork.

It starts with the production of the artwork that we then hand over to production who turn it into stencils which they use to apply the enamel pattern to the design. Once the proof has been approved there are a number of activities that happen simultaneously. Stencils are cut, metal plates are shaped, and fresh enamels are ground and quality tested in various colours. All is done by hand.

When the time has come, the base enamel is applied and fired at 800 C after which the sign is inspected for any faults. The process is repeated for every colour until all colours have been applied. Finally, the sign is carefully inspected for the last time before being packaged with mounting materials and shipped to its final destination anywhere in the world.

You went from having a small shop in Copenhagen to a super successful online presence. What were the main

challenges you faced during this period of growth?

The first serious challenge emerged only two years after I founded the company. The problem was that we had very few, but large, clients and it was a dependency that became a very obvious problem. It became painfully clear when the competition started winning my clients over one by one by offering cheaper lookalikes that won't last as long.

It felt like a betrayal, but I still felt I had a mission. While it didn't really work that well with the business customers, there were more private commissions for custom designs and I was encouraged to carry on.

During the first decade, I went on to create and refine a full range of products, all inspired by client requests and what we are doing today is the same thing as what we did in the 90s. By the time we entered the new millennium, I felt we were ready to go online. This was the next challenge!

Recently we have gained more interest from businesses which is interesting as we are returning to our roots. However, businesses today want another style of signage – something boutique and unique so we make lots of signs for boutique hotels (room and floor numbers, reception signs etc..) and this is great as it fits nicely with our ethos.



Each sign starts life as a metal plaque

How difficult has it been to stay true to the old-fashioned virtues you are founded on whilst expanding the business?

For me it was easy. I never considered doing anything differently in terms of compromising what we do in order to save time or money. For example, giving up hand stencilling, the arched shape, the original enamel pigments, or even the solid brass screws, in order to save labour or costs – it would kill my project. Maybe it would not be the end of the company, who knows. But it would be the end of my mission. My mission is to design and deliver

authentic, handcrafted, enamel signs to everyone who appreciates their heritage and future.

Your handmade porcelain enamel signs for homes and businesses come with a lifetime warranty. You must be very confident in their quality and durability?

Yes, I am 100% confident. RAMSIGN signs are carefully designed and handcrafted exactly like they were 100 years ago, and that means just like those signs, RAMSIGN signs are built to last. "Lifetime" means "for as long as the customer lives" so it is not only limited to the expected lifetime of the product. We rarely receive claims under the lifetime warranty and returns are less than 1%.



B2B signs produced by Ramsign Ltd

You also serve the business sector by designing and creating signage for retail and hospitality businesses as well as museums and educational institutions. What project has been your favourite to work on?

My favourite project was for the Marlton Hotel in New York City where we outfitted the whole hotel with room numbers, floor numbers and other signage throughout the hotel. The hotel opened in 2014 but it had been completely renovated to look like an authentic hotel from the 1880s. They contacted us because they wanted something that was authentic and not just a replica.





Room numbers for the Marlton Hotel in New York City

Knowing what you know now, what piece of advice would you give to your younger self?

I would advise myself to have more confidence in myself and follow my intuition as it is usually right. Forget about what others want and think. Define the few things that are really important and grow that part of your life and personality. Your own beliefs are your biggest limitation. Take more risks. Try it out. Life is too short not to.





An inside glimpse into the Ramsign creative studio.

Any exciting plans for the future or projects you are currently working on?

Yes, we are always working on innovation and right now we are working on a redesign for our eCommerce sites as well as developing a new product range which will be street signs with an authentic design. Now we are working on designs for custom street signs for St. Croix, one of the US Virgin Islands (formerly a Danish colony) – so that is typically large blue and white signs with a single trim that will fit the streets of St. Croix.



Each stencil is custom made for each design

Finally, how did you come up with the company name RAMSIGN?

I choose RAMSIGN as it was the combination of two things. Ram is a male sheep and is a strong and enduring animal that can survive in harsh environments. They are valuable and reliable creatures and also independent and strong. It's a nice analogy, as our signs are also reliable and strong.

Also, I myself am an Aries and we are considered strong and stubborn characters so it was a good and natural fit.

I don't know about you but I really enjoyed reading that interview with Nick and getting a real behind the scenes insight into his business. His passion for what he does really shone through, didn't it? My favourite part of his

story is definitely how he approached Carlsberg before he even set his company up. What a way to start! What was your favourite part?

f SHARE @ PIN TWEET EMAIL COMMENT

[PREVIOUS POST](#)

[NEXT POST](#)

Leave a Comment

[POST COMMENT](#)

This site uses Akismet to reduce spam. [Learn how your comment data is processed](#)

