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## We Visit... Hand & Lock

with Emma Horrocks

Hand & Lock is a name synonymous with high end embroidery, and rightly so. They have been providing embellishment services to the Royal Family, top European fashion houses, the Royal Armed Forces and Savile Row for hundreds of years. They also offer bespoke embroidery services to members of the public, with services that range from hand stitched monograms and blazer badges to bridal embroidery and goldwork. With a long and rich heritage, we're excited to venture behind the scenes at this prestigious British company.





*Mr Hand's high quality, detailed embroidery and the M.Hand & Co. name became trusted by Savile Row and Military tailors for the next 200 years.*

The history of Hand & Lock dates back to 1767 when Huguenot refugee, M. Hand arrived in London from France and began manufacturing and selling lace. His reputation and repertoire steadily grew, incorporating the design and manufacture of embroidered military badges and uniform accessories. In these times, officer's dress uniforms were (and still are) highly specialised garments and require very specific embellishments. Mr Hand's high quality, detailed embroidery and the M.Hand & Co. name became trusted by Savile Row and Military tailors for the next 200 years. This forms the Hand in Hand & Lock.

As for the Lock... In the 1950s, Stanley Lock, a talented needlework designer had been working at specialist embroidery house CE Phipps & Co and took over the company after Mr Phipps retirement. Founded in 1898, the company had built its success on creating embroidery for some of the top fashion designers of the day. He renamed it S. Lock & Co. and it continued to provide high quality embroidery to couturiers such as Norman Hartnell, Hardy Amies and Christian Dior, working on gowns for The Queen, Queen Mother and later Princess Diana. S. Lock & Co was subsequently awarded the Royal Warrant.

Current Chairman, Alastair Macleod brought the two businesses together in 2001 and Hand & Lock in its current form, was born. With the rich heritage of both companies, the newly formed business aimed to combine the stately decoration of Hand with the stylish flair of Lock.

Hand & Lock now has global prestige, arguably the best and most renowned embroidery business in the world. It has continued to provide embroidery services to international designers, fashion houses, the Royal Forces, the Royal Family and costume designers for theatre, film, and television. Hand & Lock pride themselves on the fact that their design methods and embroidery techniques have changed very little since 1767.

The Hand & Lock HQ is tucked away on a remarkably quiet road, just north of the hustle and bustle of London's Oxford Street. As you enter, the double-height cloisters of the Hand & Lock reception it feels like a step back in time.

Deep luxurious red walls are lined with dark wooden boxes labelled with 'Diamanté mounts' or 'Sapphire half cut beads', containing a mix of embroidery and haberdashery treasures. A framed, hand-written letter from renowned 1920s photographer Cecil Beaton adorns the wall, proving this company's genuine design heritage. And there's also a vast velvet banner from the Diamond Jubilee reminding you of the longstanding relationship between the business and British royalty. You instinctively know you are somewhere very special.

The company works on a wide mix of embroidery pieces and every day in the studio is different. This diversity appeals to Production Manager Jessica Pile - "With every commission we aim to commit the highest care and attention from our team of dedicated embroidery designers and expert embroiderers. The range of projects and pieces we get involved with is staggering. One day I'm working on Louis Vuitton, the next on someone's dressing gown."

Commissions from the clergy can involve restoration work of historic textiles but a recent project included a design for an altar cloth from scratch for a church in Westminster. Military orders are placed daily from around the world (for the RAF, US Navy and Royal Marines, as well as enthusiastic collectors) and are mostly for standard beret badges, epaulettes and aiguillettes but recently they were asked to create a badge for a new regiment. Theatres can order handmade, synthetic braid to mimic the goldwork for costumes when budgets and deadlines run too tight to accommodate the real thing.

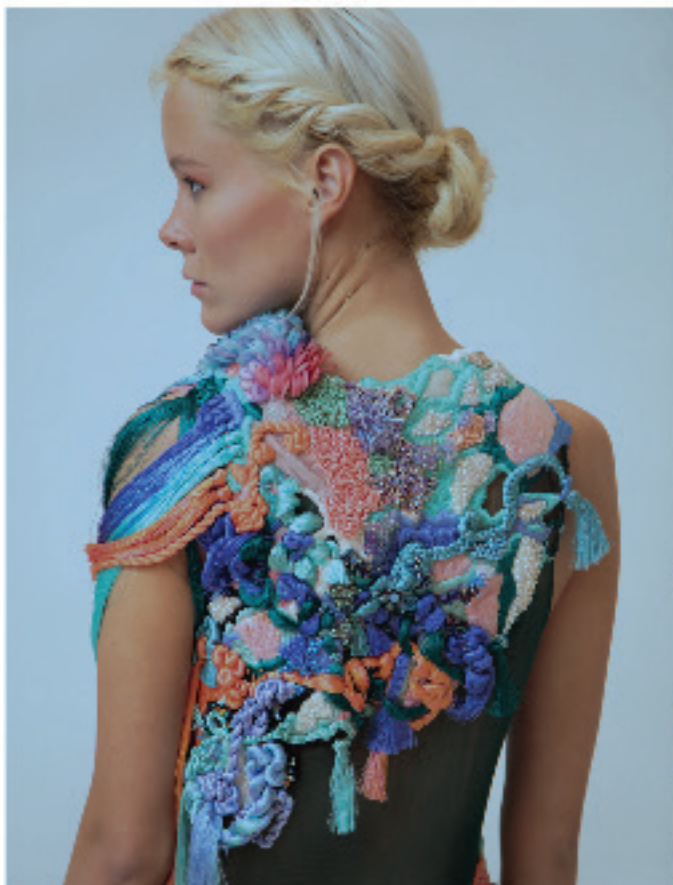
Monogramming is another speciality. Walk-in customers bring armfuls of shirts for personalisation, whilst fashion houses (including Dior, Fendi and Stella McCartney) visit for bespoke in-store monogramming events. Plus, there is often work and exciting projects with new and emerging designers. "We have a lot of students and new designers coming to collaborate with us and it's great because they bring us new ideas which we can combine with historical techniques," explains Hand & Lock tutor, Janika Mägi.

The Hand & Lock team is a small but dynamic team of just seven, almost all in their mid to late twenties. Expert freelancers are drafted in when additional manpower is required, such as for a one-of-a-kind Nicholas Oakwell gown for the Great Festival of Creativity in Shanghai, where 400 hours of ombre featherwork were squeezed into six days by 17 embroiderers!

The young team is eager to emphasise the importance of hand-embroidery within a fashion industry that is becoming increasingly steered by mass production and pinched margins. For spring/summer 2015, Hand & Lock launched an in-house collection to showcase the team's talents and to "push things forward – making sure that we are out there and we're known" explains Jessica.

Hand & Lock no longer consider themselves simply craftspeople, they are also teachers and promoters of the fine art of embroidery. With a long heritage to protect and a timeless craft to preserve, the team operate classes around the world teaching the traditional skills of embroidery and highlighting the quality of British crafts. They are committed to sharing their embroidery know-how and inspiring the next generation of embroiderers. Since 2001 they have taught a programme of embroidery workshops in worldwide locations that have proved incredibly popular. ➤







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And then there is their annual, international embroidery competition 'The Hand & Lock Prize for Embroidery'. For the 2017 prize there is \$42,000 prize money at stake and the competition receives strong interest and applications from many pioneering embroiderers, their own Prize Coordinator Sophie Carr was a one-time prize-winner herself.

Apart from the introduction of a few computers, little has changed at Hand & Lock over the past 250 years. Trestles with organza or velvet pulled tight between two runners edged with paper (so as not to damage the fabric) look just as they would have done two centuries ago – only now the wooden frames are slightly raised to accommodate modern, taller staff! In a recent audit, the team discovered a ledger containing records of sales of military badges dating back to pre-First World War. The artefacts underwent a two-year restoration process, before embarking on an international tour. "You do feel a sense of legacy," says Head Designer Scott Heron. "We've got an archive that spans the entire history of our company. It's important for us to continue to bang the drum for hand embroidery and keeping the historic tradition alive. Hand embroidery is time-intensive; there are no short cuts. You can never rush it".

This year, Hand & Lock are celebrating their 250th year of embroidery expertise with a series of special conferences, workshops and exhibitions in Sydney, Chicago and London. Each city will feature a touring exhibit curated in collaboration with the University of the Arts London and the Textile Research Centre, which will highlight Hand & Lock's role at the forefront of fashion and military embroidery for the last 250 years. Each exhibit will showcase drafts, samples and historical ledgers from the private archives, making this a rare and exciting opportunity to see some of the finest embroideries in the world.

Demonstrating that embroidery is not just rooted in the past but also thriving in the present, all three exhibitions will include commissioned one-of-a-kind designer handbags from the 'The Embellished Handbag' project, showcasing specially designed pieces from some of the UK's top fashion designers.

With all this on offer – it's a great opportunity to get involved and celebrate this British embroidery company still at the forefront of its craft.



## Further Information

Hand & Lock, 86 Margaret Street London W1W 8TE  
Call 0207 580 7488

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