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LET THERE BE LIGHT

New premises in Leominster have given international lighting company Hector Finch a very local presence

A major international lighting company, which has had its warehouse and manufacturing premises locally for some years, is about to become more visible with the opening of a showroom at its new Leominster headquarters.

Hector Finch started the lighting company that bears his name in the mid 1980s and first traded from a small antique centre in Preston, Lancashire. With a natural talent for engineering and an understanding of how things were made Hector was able to find the right specialist restorers to bring the antique fittings he sourced back to life.

Some of these fittings passed through the hands of metal craftsmen, glassblowers, metal finishers and challenged the most able wireers before they were presented, fully restored, to his customers.

From Preston, Hector moved to London in 1991, and set up a small shop in Chiswick Lane with two other dealers, selling to private customers and rapidly developing a loyal following of interior designers.

The business soon outgrew its premises and moved to Wandsworth Bridge Road in 1995. Still dealing in vintage fittings, many from Spain as well as England, Hector started to stock a few lines of modern manufactured lights and his was the first shop in London to introduce a vast array of Moroccan lanterns, then in vogue for restaurants and private houses.

As the new millennium approached Hector's wife, Emma, joined the business and the company started to design and manufacture a signature collection of fixtures, primarily for the design trade.

At the same time, Emma found a showroom to represent the line in New York and in 2004 they published a catalogue showcasing the high quality range that remains the backbone of the Hector Finch Collection.

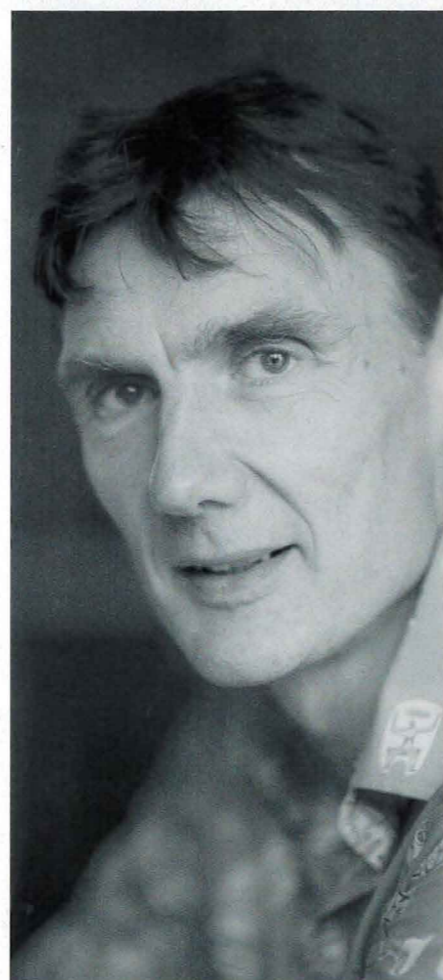
The range has grown with a design aesthetic of clean lines, correct proportions and a less-is-more philosophy. "We fuse crisp, precision metalwork by British artisans with glasswork sourced from mainland Europe.

"We believe in sustainability based on the simple premise that if something is well made and beautiful it will have a long and useful life and by sourcing local materials and components we are supporting our environment, community and economy."

A Leominster HQ seems slightly at odds for a business that has a showroom in Fulham and 14 showrooms in the USA (over half their business is in the US), but it's a development that makes perfect sense, as Emma Finch explains.

"We're in Leominster because we moved from London 15 years ago - we had three young children and decided we wanted to make the break from London and go rural.

"The other major reason was that we found it very difficult to find premises in London where we could make things and



expand. The cost of commercial property in London was not far off the cost of retail property in terms of rental.

"We knew we were going to have to go somewhere where we could get more space and we thought Herefordshire would be a good spot to land, in part because of its proximity to the Midlands - there's a lot of metal finishing in Birmingham, one of our major fabricators is in Dudley and a lot of our components are made in the Midlands.

"We initially took a small unit just outside Ludlow more than 12 years ago, but before that we had been operating underneath the arches in Parsons Green, with three guys trying to manage stuff in a very small and not very appropriate space.

"So our South African production manager Brandon came up with us and we started, with me in the office, Hector part time as he was mainly in London and one person in the office. The move made it possible for us to really make stuff and be able to keep stock."

Expansion of the business provided the catalyst for the move last year to the former Brightwells site in Leominster. Facing the looming possibility of having to sign a further nine-year lease on their existing premises, fate stepped in when, as Emma explains: "I got word about Brightwells closing down their art and antiques business and looking for someone to take on the saleroom space. I was on it like a shot, and it was just meant to be. It was and is the perfect building for us.

"It was built by Brightwells in 2001 and it's a good quality brick built building. It was built with a huge saleroom which we are using as a warehouse, and we're using the furniture store for production. We also put in a loading bay with a finishing shop and a paint shop for ➔

'We believe in sustainability based on the simple premise that if something is well made and beautiful it will have a long and useful life'

bespoke colours which people really like.”

During lockdown, the interiors industry remained buoyant and Hector Finch stayed open, but because of their inability (in the previous building) to socially distance, did have to furlough several members of staff.

“The silver lining for us was that we were able to move in at the beginning of December 2020. It’s been transformative.

“What was the cashier’s office in the middle of the building I have gutted and repainted, and it will now have a big selection of our wall lights and lanterns, pendant fixtures and hanging lanterns.

“If people want to see anything that is not displayed, we can show them samples from the warehouse and there will be a factory shop where there will be real bargains.

“In London, the showroom is a showroom, not a shop, so although there is a selection of sale goods there, we want to sell imperfect goods or samples from the warehouse floor as seconds.

“We are hoping we will get people coming down to look for bargains and then find other things they love.”

Hector Finch specialises in kitchen, bathroom and outdoor lighting as Emma explains.

“We have a range of pendants designed to hang over kitchen islands, and a lot of bathroom lights (conforming to IP44), which are one of our areas of expertise. There is a special component called an Osh lamp, which makes light fittings IP44 rated. Without it, an electrician won’t fit it.

“We also have a big range of outdoor lanterns, and our name is pretty synonymous with zinc lanterns – they start life as a silver sheet metal which is dipped in acid, and ends up with a soft grey green powdery finish. It’s very practical and goes well against myriad different stones and bricks. It doesn’t patinate or change much through its life. For people who want a very stable finish, zinc is fantastic.



“Trying to predict what we will sell from here, I have focused on these three things.

“We have a recognisable house style which is very clean, functional, smart and pared back. It is focused on quality of both metalwork and finish. A Hector Finch light has been put together very thoughtfully. And Emma concedes that they are (though not all) expensive, but that’s because they are expensively made.

“We do pride ourselves on the fact that most of our fittings are handmade in Leominster from brass components manufactured specifically for us in the UK. And because of that, a Hector Finch light is a light for life.”



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