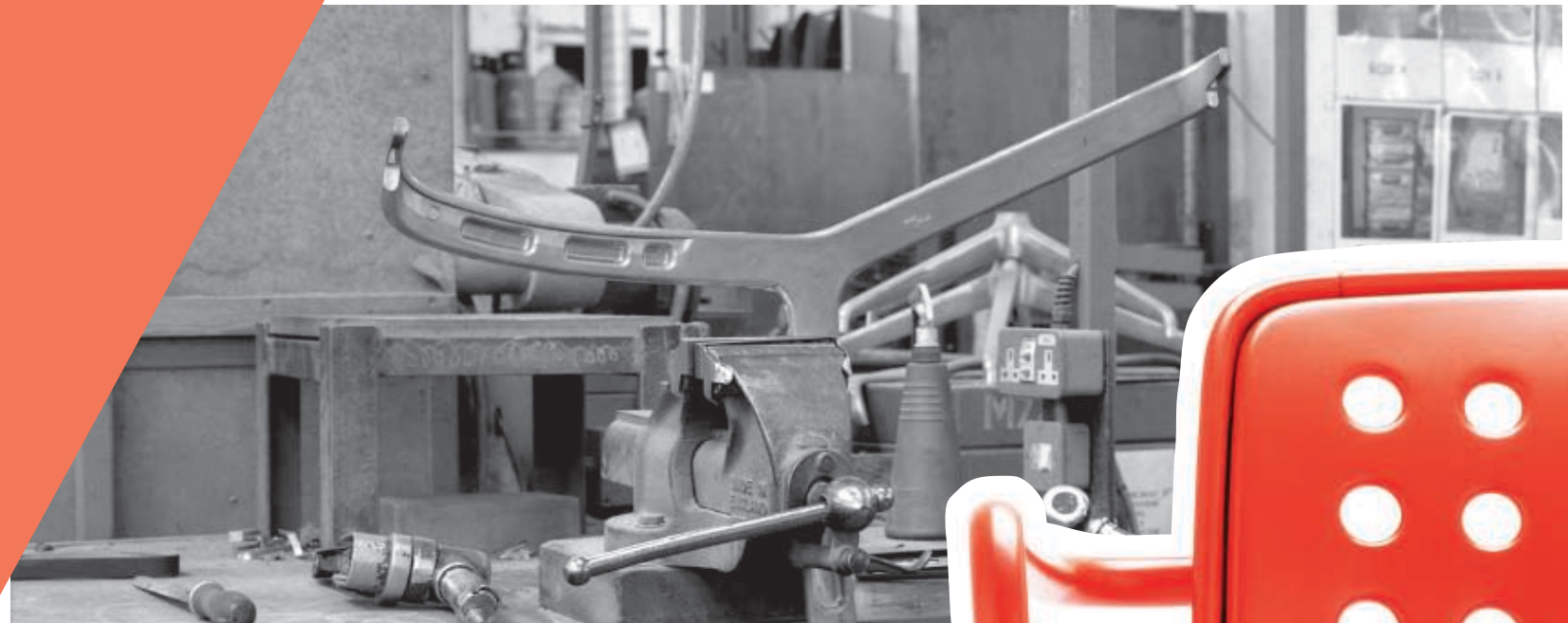


industrial

evolution



De La Warr Pavilion chair
by barber osgerby 2006

Barber Osgerby's second project with Established & Sons is manufactured using three distinct processes (opposite page): the tubular steel arms are bent, the aluminum seat and back are pressed, and the aluminum frame is die-cast.

by **Julie Taraska**



Established & Sons is proving that, contrary to popular belief, Britain still has the manufacturing capability to produce high-end furniture.

It's commonly believed that Britain no longer has an industrial base, that the once great powerhouse bottomed out in the mid-1980s, victim to Margaret Thatcher's labor reforms and the shift from a manufacturing to a service-based economy. But that assessment isn't completely accurate. A number of superspecialized and craft-oriented industries remain within the United Kingdom's borders—low-key but viable things like Formula One race cars, biotech, aerospace, and shipbuilding. These homegrown trades are providing the techniques, materials, and facilities that Established & Sons is cannily adapting to manufacture its British-made contemporary furniture and lighting.

The firm isn't the first at the party: fellow countrymen Ron Arad and Tom Dixon have been borrowing ideas from similar sources for more than two decades. The big difference is the production. While their experimental one-offs have been created by hand in their own workshops, Established has supersized the process. The company has marshaled Britain's domestic resources—high-tech factories, highly trained workers, and name-brand talent including Zaha Hadid, Barber Osgerby, and Future Systems' Amanda Levete—to produce both limited-edition and mass-market pieces. It has gotten designers and technicians to collaborate on new material applications, and even steered contemporary furniture into a lucrative new venue, the collector's market. How Established has done these things, and why it is succeeding, offers an unprecedented window onto the future of British manufacturing.

The Established story began three years ago, when Alasdair Willis, having just left his role as *Wallpaper** magazine's publishing director, met Angad Paul, the CEO of Caparo Group, a U.K. holding company for manufacturing facilities. A friend who knew of their shared passion for contemporary furniture introduced them, and it wasn't long before the conversation turned to the country's brain drain of design talent. Why did locals like Jasper Morrison and Ross Lovegrove have to go to Italy or Switzerland or Scandinavia to get their high-end pieces made? Why wasn't there a British brand that could do it, considering the United Kingdom's automotive and engineering expertise?

So the pair hatched a plan: if they pulled in Caparo's technical and manufacturing muscle—drawing upon its work in motor sports, composites, and precision tooling as well as its network of 44 factories across Britain—they could be that brand. Thus Established & Sons was born. Adopting a business model similar to those of



Caparo T1
by ben scott-geddes and graham halstead 2006

The carbon-fiber-body T1 race car is made by Caparo Vehicle Technologies, whose chairman, Angad Paul, is also Established & Sons' CEO. Seventy percent of Established's products, which use automotive- and aerospace-grade composites, are manufactured at Caparo factories.

Morrison's new series is a yellow-pine follow-up to the Douglas-fir Crate side table. The five pieces range from a bed to low-slung tables, with hinged flaps that reveal storage space below.

Crate Series
by jasper morrison 2007



This page: process photos, Andrew Cross/courtesy Established & Sons; DLWP photo, David Brook/courtesy Barber Osgerby; Opposite page: car image, courtesy Caparo Group; other images courtesy Established & Sons

Made of high-gloss polyurethane, the hollow production version of the sculptural Drift bench (below) comes in black, white, and orange, and shares the same formal structure as its limited-run beech sibling (below and background). Drift In and Drift Out (bottom)—a two-piece update being unveiled this month in Milan—is made from FordaCal, a new mineral composite that resembles marble.

Drift

by future systems,
amanda levete 2006

Drift In and Drift Out

by future systems, amanda levete 2007

Nekton

by zaha hadid 2006

Crest

by zaha hadid 2006

Swash

by zaha hadid 2006

One of the first things Wrong does with all the designers is to take them on a tour of Caparo's factories. The portfolio of resources can prove eye-opening.

Seamless, the Pritzker Prize-winning architect's furniture collection, was introduced last November at Phillips de Pury & Company (bottom), in New York. Among the nine pieces shown were a group of stools (far left), a chaise (left), and a cabinet (below).

further, meshing with Established's needs.

More critical, though, is the company's access to Caparo Group's material and technical research. Being able to consult with technicians from any of Caparo's areas of expertise saves time and presents the furniture designers with new possibilities. It's not by accident that one of the first things Wrong, director of operations, does with all the designers is to take them on a tour of Caparo's factories. The portfolio of resources can prove eye-opening, even to the experienced. "We were surprised both how technologically advanced the facilities were and how open they were to us," says Jay Osgerby, whose firm Barber Osgerby has created products for Flos, Cappellini, and Magis, among others. "Normally as designers you get a frosty reception."

The duo's Zero-In table exemplifies what can result from such a direct dialogue between design talent and skilled technicians. There are two versions of the glass-topped piece: a limited-edition one that relies on craftsmen to produce the seamless ribbonlike sides that form its base, and a second general-production take that achieves the same effect through considerable investment in machinery and technology. The first rendition is composed of aluminum sheets molded into shape by hand then welded together to create the table's inner and outer walls. Artisans who traditionally

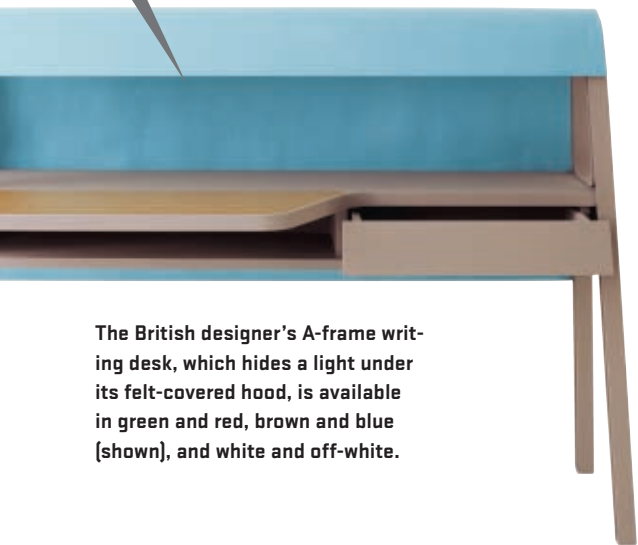
Capellini and B&B Italia, Paul and Willis settled on vertically integrated manufacturing, with small-batch production and an emphasis on craftsmanship. Paul became Established's chairman and Willis its CEO, filling out the rest of the board with Sebastian Wrong and Mark Holmes, designers and cofounders of the London-based manufacturing company The Lane, and Tamara Caspersz, the erstwhile general manager of the London trade showroom Viaduct.

The first Established & Sons collection debuted in April 2005; two years later, nearly 70 percent of the company's manufacturing occurs at Caparo factories, an arrangement that benefits both companies. Creating high-end furniture isn't—and was never intended to be—a replacement for Caparo's traditional cash streams, Paul says. Rather, these technically advanced, beautifully finished pieces "are vehicles that let me show how strong Caparo's capabilities are." Equally the venture is a novel way to utilize the company's skilled technicians and specialized equipment that, with market ebbs and flows, are at loose ends from time to time. For Established, the relationship allows a significant reduction in machinery costs. Although the company pays for the labor to make its pieces, it can skip that initial cash outlay to purchase the tooling necessary to make its goods. Caparo's recent factory acquisitions—outfitted more for low-volume, high-end production—have improved the situation

Levete's limited-edition Drift was manufactured in Caparo factories out of sheets of beech. Workers stacked laser-cut layers of wood (bottom), then hand-sanded them (opposite page, background).

Seamless photos, Jack Cobble; photo of beech Drift, Andy Barber; all images courtesy Established & Sons

Writing Desk
by michael young 2005



The British designer's A-frame writing desk, which hides a light under its felt-covered hood, is available in green and red, brown and blue (shown), and white and off-white.

The smart British manufacturers, especially the ones that survived the 1980s, now favor niche production, creating small collections or custom-made objects.

restore high-end sports cars do the work, sculpting the raw material, massaging the welded joints until they are no longer visible, and then polishing the piece until it has a faultless reflective surface. The second version's base, which is made of a high-density polyester-based composite material, is stamped out by a metal mold. The technique, which is normally used to create body panels for automobiles, "has been around for a while in the car industry, but as far as we're aware, it's the first time it has been used for furniture," Barber Osgerby's Edward Barber says.

Another example of this transfer of materials and technologies is a superstrong Future Systems table currently in development. "With a traditional furniture manufacturer, this table would be a no-no; its extremely thin structure would be impossible to make," Willis says. "We took it to Caparo Vehicle Technologies, to these guys who have worked at [luxury high-tech carmaker] McLaren and with Formula One. They said, 'Right, you need to use carbon fibers, then do this, this, and that.' Suddenly our proposition had become a reality."

The innovations have also given Established a leg up in Britain's changing contemporary furniture market. At the start of Thatcher's administration, an estimated 85 percent of the country's furniture companies were midsize, producing pieces in runs of five to six thousand each. Since that model is no longer economically viable, the smart British manufacturers, especially the ones that survived the 1980s, now favor niche production, creating small collections or custom-made objects. With the continued strength of the pound against the dollar and other currencies, U.K. companies have also increasingly had to target the upper end of the international market, where people are prepared to pay a premium for quality and a name.



Fold
by alexander taylor 2005



The lamp's name refers to its manufacturing process, which involves folding sheets of steel: 1. After being laser-cut, metal sheets sit in a stack on a worktable. 2. A hand-operated folding machine shapes the base. 3. The lamp's pieces are powder-coated.

For Established, this slots right into the game plan. Flat-pack mass-market furniture has reached a saturation point in Britain, and consumers now are looking for something more special—and consequently more pricey. Dovetailing with this is the explosion of interest in limited-edition contemporary furnishings and their crossover into art galleries, particularly in New York and London.

A case in point is Zaha Hadid's *Seamless* exhibit, held late last fall at Phillips de Pury & Company, in Manhattan. Produced as part of Established & Sons' Limited Editions collection of highly collectible designs, the nine sensually curved polyester-resin pieces—four types of shelves, a cluster of four stools, a chaise, a lounge chair, and a cabinet—were created in quantities of six to twelve each. By the close of the gallery show two weeks later, the majority of the items—priced between \$1,700 and \$114,000 apiece—had been sold, a fact hardly surprising considering that a prototype of Hadid's Aqua Table, also created for Established, was purchased at a 2005 Phillips auction for \$296,000, then a record for a piece of contemporary design.

The reality for British furniture designers is that there are no longer many companies such as the Caparo Group with the financial, technical, and manufacturing resources needed to make high-end goods efficiently. Nonetheless, elements of Established's business strategy are being replicated elsewhere in the country. One outfit doing so is Metropolitan Works, a two-year-old organization based at London Metropolitan University that pairs local factories with designers who need their services. Funded by both public money and grants from the London Development Agency, the scheme has created



Zero-In
by barber osgerby 2005

Twelve limited-edition tables (right) were hand-formed from aluminum sheets and polished by craftsmen who typically restore automobiles (background). The production version (above) is made in the same polyester composite and by the same process used to make car-body panels.

This page: desk photo and Fold photo, David Sykes/courtesy Established & Sons; process photos, Leon Chew/courtesy Established & Sons. Opposite page: all images courtesy Barber Osgerby

continued from page 222 a small furniture line, the Isos Collection, to illustrate how manufacturers can benefit from embracing new production models. IGlass, a North London company that used to generate 60,000 to 80,000 gas-meter lenses a month, now produces one of the Isos Collection's stars, the Disc, a made-to-order table available in seven sizes and configurations. "The whole direction of IGlass is changing," Metropolitan Works manager Matthew Lewis says of its collaboration with Disc designer Will Watson + Associates. "The company is producing not only furniture but also a range of bespoke glass tiles and backsplashes. It's moving away from mass production and creating new products with a much higher design content, but that still work within their factory."

Established alone will not be the savior of British heavy industry.

In a more abstract way, Established & Sons' existence has had a ripple effect through design colleges, prompting some to question where their products can be made. "Students are watching us closely," Wrong says of the company's buzz in the schools. Because of its example, he speculates, graduates "may no longer think they have to knock on the door of the big players in Italy to get their furniture into production. Instead, they could manufacture it here, or themselves."

Established alone will not be the savior of British heavy industry: even with its resources, planned showroom and gallery openings, and aggressive production schedule—the company will show 15 new products this month in Milan, with other introductions throughout the year—it is working on a microscopic level. But it can, says Marcus Fairs, the author of *Twenty-first Century Design* and editor of *Dezeen.com*, "cause people to realize that there is a skills base in the United Kingdom, that there are craftsmen and investors here." He adds, "If you want to get products to market in the U.K., you need to think differently than the old manufacturing models. You need to be more clever."

The company is also constantly looking for the next generation of talent to add to its roster: the "Sons" in the name, so to speak. But whatever happens going forward, Willis says Established will continue to remember its roots. "Our tagline—British-made—is a nod of the cap to our heritage, to the United Kingdom's rich tradition of industry," he says. "But it's not a nationalistic thing at all. We believe in the facilities we are working with; we believe them to be some of the best in the world. And if you can produce your pieces in the U.K. at a competitive price, if you can get the quality and have the provenance of being manufactured in Britain, then why go overseas?"

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