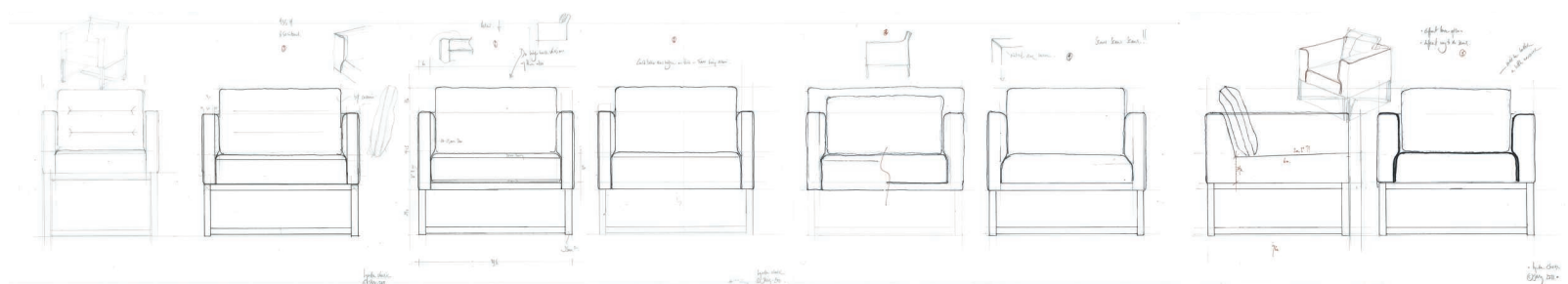


# Cheltenham Course

Those of you familiar with our Focus articles will know that we tend to concentrate such features on the development of a single product or product range. Here we're going slightly off-canter (forgive the racing pun) as we look at a much broader development.







**W**e've come to the Boss Design showroom in Clerkenwell and we will indeed be spending a good amount of time here discussing new product development with the very people who have made it happen. The real difference here, however, is that we'll also be discussing the major story behind that development – and without wishing to sound all 'Hollywood', this is a story of boardrooms, acquisitions, rebirths, change and, we suspect, an extremely happy ending.

Lyndon Design – the leading handcrafted upholstered furniture manufacturer – was, earlier this year, acquired by the Boss Design Group. We know Boss Design extremely well, of course, but what we're here to discover is how the combination of Boss' modern, dynamic business acumen and attitude and Lyndon's timeless, classical approach has led to a brilliant, exciting new chapter for the Lyndon brand.

We're joined by Boss Design Group Sales Director Marc Le Peltier, Lyndon Design

Managing Director Tim Armitt and prolific award-winning designer Mark Gabbertas. Mark has been tasked with developing the first raft of products for the 'new' Lyndon, but before we get into the concept and process behind these, we learn a little more about the new business marriage.

'Lyndon was 30 years old in April of this year,' Tim begins. 'The company was founded by Richard Pugh and Brian Murray (MD of Boss Design). Brian went off and did his Boss thing, leaving Lyndon ▶▶▶▶▶'



to sail along doing their thing – which was traditional upholstery, domestic upholstery, supplying retail companies etc – until about 10 years ago when they changed direction quite significantly and moved into the commercial world of special bespoke products that it still works in today.

‘Over that time we’ve developed a collection which crosses over from domestic products, through hospitality products and have gained a significant foothold in the commercial sector. We took over a frame building company a few years ago which has become a considerable part of the business. That frame building in Cheltenham has already become a supplier to the Boss Group generally. We have a nice capability and have been collaboratively working with Boss for a number of years.

‘A couple of years ago the management of Lyndon were looking towards retirement and approached Brian to see if he’d like to rekindle that relationship. Today, Lyndon Design is part of the Boss Design Group and we’re now building on that relationship whilst remaining true to Lyndon as a brand. We have a very definite message as part of the group; Lyndon is the timber, handcrafting specialist within the company. What we do is still very obviously identifiable as a Lyndon product.’

‘I think Lyndon also brings great flexibility to the group,’ Tim adds. ‘We are able to make products almost on an artisan level. This is about specialist products – and interesting products.’

‘Tim is spot on,’ Marc agrees. ‘What is really interesting is just how quickly the Lyndon brand has been adopted by our existing clients. It is absolutely right for the moment in terms of the domestication of the working environment, softening the workplace – and we already have great examples of clients using the products in this way.’

‘If you look at the design shows over the past few years, the number of contract firms who are now using wood as the essential material – rather than steel or castings – is extraordinary,’ Mark Gabbertas interjects.

On trend, in demand...it’s clear that the Lyndon brand can and will add a great deal to the group offering here. But this is certainly no one way street, as the group in turn has already added greatly to the autonomous Lyndon brand. ‘We’ve put massive capital investment into the factory – which Lyndon could never have afforded,’ Marc confirms.

And this is something that clearly caught the attention of Mark Gabbertas. ‘This is serious machinery we’re talking about,’ he

explains. ‘I think the idea of combining that frame-working expertise – the woodworking expertise – with the upholstery expertise Boss has is extremely exciting. There are niche companies doing interesting wooden-based upholstery, and then there are some big Italian companies, but in the UK I think there is a huge opportunity. I think that Boss’ upholstery skills and engineering capability is quite serious. I’m not saying that Lyndon weren’t up to it, but the upholstery prowess of Boss takes them to a whole different level. I think that combining that level of sophistication with a new design ethic and aesthetic – which is where I come in – gives them a lot of opportunities.

‘Another issue here is that Lyndon was historically about making furniture to order – it was about customising basic design. The volume may have been there, but not from what you’d call a standard product. The big step change has been to try and create products which are already resolved and specifiable in numerous different versions. Orten, for example, is a system that has different seat styles, different frame styles, different cushion widths – you can create an extraordinary number of standard products that are already resolved. That’s a massive step forward for Lyndon and allows them to



▶▶▶▶drastically improve delivery times and also gives much more structure to their range.'

We move on to ask Mark about the physical design of these initial ranges. 'I remember sitting down with Richard and saying 'I'm going to design you a sofa that Italian manufacturers would be proud of.' The truth is that the difference between a B&B Italia sofa and a 3rd rate Italian manufacturer's sofa is a few millimetres. I explained to Richard that this was what was needed here – that few millimetres difference.

'The great attraction for me was that I was able to start with a clean sheet and saying 'What is my vision for the brand? What is Lyndon going to look like?' I had to really create its design language from scratch. I never stopped thinking about from the moment that Brian first sat me down nearly three years ago. I had to think about where the brand will be in five years time whilst designing products that I felt would give Lyndon a competitive edge. It was quite a responsibility – it is quite a responsibility!

'We originally started by saying that we wanted classic hospitality pieces with high quality detailing. On one hand we knew where we all wanted the brand to go, and on the other hand we knew where it had

come from. Lyndon was not the most sophisticated woodworking company around at the time but it did have great ambition, enthusiasm and potential capability. First of all I figured that we shouldn't run before we can walk. The first ranges are not hugely ambitious when it comes to woodworking – Framed is slightly more ambitious – and we also weren't too ambitious when it came to the upholstery. There is a real concentration on concision of the aesthetic as well as a build-ability. At the same time there were certainly specific areas and sectors that we wanted the products to fit into.

'When you first start sketching, you're wearing lots of hats. There are lots of things that sub-consciously you're all aware of which you need to include in what you're trying to do. Then you have to try to bring these together. I didn't regard this as a constraint – rather I felt it was an opportunity.

'I knew I wanted a sofa system that would be extremely commercial and can be specified in different types and sizes. I wanted a beautifully proportioned, comfortable sofa system that could work across different types of frame and with different finishes – out of which came Orten. I remember sitting there with lots of

sketches and having quite a battle with Richard at that stage – because it was difficult for him to really see the difference between this and what they had already done. I had to explain that there really was a massive difference.

'For Framed I went back to some of the original sketches I'd done – and sometimes the best ideas are the ones you have right at the beginning. It sat well with Orten, it took things on a stage further, it's more sophisticated and has a more engineered approach, it's a softer, less structured upholstery – a different look to Orten, which has quite a rigorous, restrained, classic style, but also worked alongside Orten. That sat perfectly with the remit.

'From there we developed the two table systems – which really just happened, to be honest. They are a bit more quirky, but easily specifiable.

'All these products have to have a 'Lyndon touch' – whether that is detailing or proportion or the way that the wood is engineered. We've started to give everything a Lyndon feel.'

Looking at the first editions of 'new' Lyndon, you can automatically see that 'touch', that cohesive element. Elegant, clean, beautifully crafted and enviably commercial...a few millimetres' difference ●



Mark Gabbertas

