



NEXT GENERATION

This week the 2006 New Designers exhibition of work by the best design graduates in Britain celebrates its 21st birthday. As a snapshot of emerging talent it is unrivalled, with more than 4,000 participants whose skills include making furniture, textiles, jewellery and ceramics. For the public, the One Year On section is of particular interest, as it features objects for sale by 50 of last year's graduates. **David Nicholls** meets four of them. Photograph by **Philip Sinden**

From left Janelle Ramsey, Debra Bean, Charlie Atkin and Lorna B Hughes. New Designers Part 1 (applied arts, ceramics and glass, jewellery and metalwork, fashion, textiles and accessories) finishes tomorrow (July 2). Part 2 (product, furniture and interior design, spatial design, photography and interactive media) runs July 6-9. Both at the Business Design Centre, 52 Upper Street, London N1 (020-7288 6738; newdesigners.com)

Nelly & Jean, West Yorkshire

Nelly & Jean is the company set up by Janelle Ramsey, and is named after her grandmothers. Her work treads a fine line between the traditional and the cutting-edge. Take, for example, her Winston armchair, a buttoned leather upholstery piece that morphs the classic Chesterfield into a plump doughnut shape. It's made for sprawling on casually rather than perching with any degree of elegance. 'I love the Britishness of things,' she says. 'Not just the aesthetic - my work is about British skills.'

Winston's ply-and-MDF frame, leather upholstery and foam padding come from suppliers in Leeds; the hand-shaped cabriole legs are produced in Harpenden. Ramsey does her own upholstery. The domestic production and labour-intensive process go some way to explaining the £1,800 price tag.

At One Year On, she will present a two-seater version of Winston; this is currently at prototype stage but like the original can be made to order. Ramsey is also launching a range of wallpapers and ceramic accessories. 07887-605623; nellyandjean.com

Debra Bean, London

Bean already had a degree in philosophy, politics and economics, and had been working in the dotcom arena for several years before she began studying sculpture at Central St Martins College in London. She brings an admirable commercial nous to her design company. Couturious. She has a business manager, who helps to manufacture her textiles and wallpapers, both of which have a pop art feel.

Bean isn't completely comfortable being referred to as a designer; rather she sees her homeware range as an extension of her work as an artist. 'It's artwork that can be applied to products, whether it's a tea service or a piece of jewellery,' she says, 'although I realise people don't really care about the inspiration behind a piece - they just want to know if it's going to work in their room or not.'

One of her most successful prints is of a slightly smudged black chandelier, the idea for which came from one of the few pieces to survive when her house burnt down in 2005, six weeks before her degree show. 020-7209 1703; couturious.co.uk

Charlie Atkin, Staffordshire

Atkin is a New Designers success story. Her exhibit last year was spotted by the design store Mint, which then showed her work as part of its 2005 London Design Festival presentation. In addition the New Ashgate Gallery in Surrey placed an order, which sold out surprisingly quickly. Atkin - a graduate in ceramics design from Staffordshire University - then became one of 18 designers to contribute to the V&A's Cherry on the Cake collection, making a coffee cup inspired by the museum's Venetian lace.

Atkin works exclusively in bone china, fashioning such things as bottles, napkin holders and sake cups, on which she prints images, from segments of Rococo furniture to roses, turned wooden legs and lace. These are delicate pieces - as are the more robust-looking cakestands and candlestick holders, which are made from disparate china elements joined together. As many young designers discover, finding a manufacturer to do small-batch productions is both difficult and incredibly expensive, so Atkin is making the pieces herself. 07743-447502; charlieatkindesign.com

Lorna B Hughes, Ceredigion

When Hughes was in the second year of her BA in products and furniture design at Kingston University, she won a competition for a product to be exhibited in the foyer of Bloomberg's Norman Foster-designed London base. As a nod to the company's function as an information provider, Hughes created this witty carrier-pigeon office chair. The seat is upholstered in a hodgepodge of traditional suiting fabrics; the beak is made from silicone.

Unlike many student projects, the result is more than design folly. Rather, it is a study into the ergonomics of seating: Hughes found that the 'straddle' position encouraged by the bird's form produced an alert and upright posture. The chair is still at prototype stage (Hughes is investigating a child-size version) but can be made to order for about £350. As well as the pigeon, Hughes has designed more 'serious' pieces of wooden furniture, including mirrors and beds that incorporate baroque details. Launching at New Designers is her new range of brightly coloured birdfeeders, £29. 01559-363627; lornabhughes-designs.co.uk