

These beautiful parasols are inspired by traditional Keralan temple shades



I N D E P E N D E N T S P I R I T

Three British designers tell the story of how they transformed their designs into a reality



EAST LONDON PARASOL COMPANY

*Lucy Ferguson
discovered a passion
for parasols while
living in Kerala*

I first saw the parasols in temple celebrations in Kerala. They line the roads there – every celebration is an excuse for a parasol. I'd moved to Kochi, Kerala, for a romantic entanglement and spent around a year there writing and living in a gradually crumbling pink concrete house. Kochi has a very different idea of Christmas (they burn effigies of Santa!). So I decided to throw a big Christmas lunch. I decorated the corrugated iron-covered terrace with sofas made from pallets and as a final touch, put the umbrellas in painted drums.

When I moved back to London I brought parasols with me, but I wasn't in a colourful mood. I'd lost my way, which coincided with the end of my relationship. One day I had an epiphany and decided to stop beating myself up, and go and do something cheerful. I decided to create beautiful, colourful parasols to make other people and myself happy.

I had to return to India for a wedding of a childhood friend, and on my return I immediately felt like I was home. A dear friend collected me from Kochi airport with a garland of jasmine and told me he'd help me find the temple umbrella makers. I bought bales of cloth and we drove around rural Kerala finding suppliers in crazy sheds stuffed with parasols. I ended up in Jaipur trying to find solutions to the production issues in Kerala and there, as if by magic, I found a wealth of textiles and friends. I'm forever

grateful to Rajasthan: it opened its arms to me and started my love affair with craftsmanship. I now have a shack-like home in the city, and the people I work with there are more like family.

My curiosity about parasol makers took me to Indonesia where we have two villages of artisans making parasols for us, like they have for centuries. They're a joy to work with; it was a moving experience showing them how to sew the Keralan silver fringes so they float in the breeze, like fingers touching across continents.

This year has been unpredictable, but the best thing to come out of it was the launch of our UK production. I've spent the past few years meeting carpenters. Finally, I found the perfect one in Hampshire. He's hugely talented and we've spent many happy hours perfecting the pulley designs, brass hooks and all the moving parts. They'll be fitted with covers made in Rajasthan – I can't wait to unveil them. eastlondonparasols.com



WoodEdit's timeless bedside table is made from your choice of sustainably-sourced walnut, oak or ash



MONIQUE LUCAS
Twenty-four-year-old Monique Lucas left university to launch her brand, inspired by the coastlines all over the world that shaped her childhood

My designs are inspired by a love of the coast. Whether it's the exotic islands of the Far East, the sultry shores of Florida's Keys or the rugged British coastline, I find continual inspiration from coastal life and atmospheres: the surroundings of sea, greenery and its ever-changing nature. Growing up I've been fortunate enough to live all over the place, from London to South East Asia, and the Isle of Wight where we have a home, and see many different cultures through design. I was always very creative at school, but a true inspiration was my grandmother. She was an artist, and created some amazing watercolours from her time living in Jamaica.

It was while studying at the University of Westminster that I decided to start my brand. I had produced two art exhibitions, but I wanted my art and drawings to come to life in a way that was applicable to everyday life. I took the decision to drop out of my course, and deployed a local manufacturer to make a first collection of ten velvet cushions. Each of my designs is hand drawn, and a reflection of an experience I've had by the coast or an object I've seen. I love the idea of bringing elements of this into other people's homes, for people who might not necessarily live by the sea but love the feeling coastal atmospheres evoke.

Covid has enabled me to stay in one place and focus solely on developing my brand. I feel a huge sense of gratitude for that, as it's been such a difficult time for so many. It's been wonderful getting pictures and feedback from customers with my products in their homes. A huge triumph was when a product sold out – my favourite print is the lobster, which also happens to be our most popular one. In 2021, I'm most excited about launching my new designs – the new collection of prints will come out in April, just in time for the summer months. moniquelucas.co.uk ■



WOODEDIT
Responsibly-sourced wood and nature form the foundations of WoodEdit's furniture designs, created by Paul and Maria Le Mesurier

We're a husband and wife team [writes Maria] – my husband Paul was trained as a classical boat builder, and I worked in the creative world for many years, and have developed a good sense for design. Combined with Paul's love of working with wood, we knew we had to embark on this new venture.

The first piece we created was one of those fantastic inspirational moments. It was a large kitchen table in walnut, and remains our favourite piece today. It epitomises the features that define WoodEdit designs: elegant, strong and classic. From that moment, we absolutely knew this was what we wanted to do.

With five children, the biggest challenge was to hit the ground running. We had to make it work fast, but we quickly built up a strong following. As a family of seven, living minimally but cosily is our ethos, and all of our designs are infused with this. Each piece is made to bring happiness and a sense of calm into people's homes. Sustainability is also central, and all pieces are made from responsibly-sourced oak, ash, and walnut. We wanted our customers to live alongside beautiful, organic materials and benefit from their graceful beauty.

At the beginning of lockdown the timber yards closed, which was a challenge. But like everyone we worked around it, and in 2021 we're launching our Core collection as well as working on a new range, which is very exciting. Our heads are always overflowing with ideas, but what makes WoodEdit furniture particularly unique is that it's simple and unfussy – it has timeless style, and it's made to last. woodedit.co.uk



Monique's coral design is printed in the UK using eco-friendly inks on organic cotton