

Made with Love

From chocolatiers to candle crafters these
are the Sussex artisans creating Valentine's gifts
to delight the senses and touch the heart

WORDS: Katie Scott

Sussex is home to ruined castles, parklands dotted with deer, piers to promenade, national parks and, of course, the many vineyards. It is a county of woodland, wild coastline and rolling chalk hills where all romantics can find a place to be together.

With such natural beauty abounding, Sussex is also home to creatives whose work

is inspired by what surrounds them. *Sussex Life* has found makers whose innovation and talent is reflected in creations that you are sure to love.

We asked them to share their stories, how being in Sussex informs their work and their inspirations but also to offer their pick of the best presents for your beloved to mark this St Valentine's Day.

THE CHOCOLATE ENTREPRENEUR

JAMES HULL, J.Cocoa

Nestled at the feet of The Downs in Hassocks is a chocolate factory that offers everything from hand-painted giant Easter eggs to 55 per cent coffee milk chocolate. But what sets this artisanal enterprise, J.Cocoa, apart is that each delight is made from bean to bar.

Chocolatier James Hull started on this creative path in May 2015 after seeing a chocolate demonstration at a food festival. He then researched how many companies make their own chocolate in the UK and was staggered by how low the figures were. Much experimenting

followed and finally, after deploying an Indian spice grinder he bought on Amazon, Hull, 32, achieved his aim. The trained chef was running a fish shop in Hurstpierpoint at the time but, after four and half years and increased interest in his sweet creations, he set up J.Cocoa in 2015.

Hull buys his cocoa beans direct from growers or co-operatives in Nicaragua, Venezuela, Madagascar, Tanzania, Dominican Republic and Peru enabling farmers to actually make a living from their cocoa instead of just surviving. Minimising his environmental

BELOW:

James Hull makes every part of his chocolate from bean to bar

impact has also been a key mission with zero waste packaging and minimum waste from production. The result is chocolates carefully curated for flavour from a man for who the welfare of farmers and the planet is paramount.

The Salted Caramels are his best seller, and, says Hull, 'so addictively delicious'. They are painted yellow and blue like marbles and filled with a liquid caramel centre that is also suitable for vegans. 'They took a year to perfect but I am so happy with the final flavour,' he says. They are £7 for a box of six. jcocoa.co.uk



Photo: James Hull

'I get many ideas for new products and how to progress my business when I'm out and about'



THE SKINCARE APOTHECARIST

PIPPA DE VILLIERS, 360 Botanics Natural skincare apothecarist, Pippa de Villiers creates and blends her products in her HQ in Lewes. She originally trained as a holistic aromatherapist back in the 1990s and her career has seen spells in St Lucia and France. In 2018, she launched 360 Botanics. 'The name came from my holistic approach to creating,' de Villiers explains. 'I do find that everything in life has a circular effect. For me, I feel like I've come full circle with my career and ended up back doing what I really love.'

The range is built upon natural ingredients – everything is 100 per cent vegan, cruelty-free and free from chemicals. Formulations are kept simple. De Villiers' go-to product is the Super Serum made with

grapeseed oil, with essential oils of geranium and frankincense which regenerate and nourish the skin. 'It was one of my first formulations,' she says. 'It's such a lovely easy face oil to use both at night and for under your make-up. It smells divine, glides on smoothly and completely soaks into the skin, leaving you with a nice dewy complexion. It's also suitable for all skin types.'

The serum won Best Buy at the Green Parent Beauty Awards 2019 and de Villiers' work was also recognised with a Vegan Food & Living Award for Best Overall Vegan Skincare brand.

The brand's packaging is minimalist to lower its impact on the planet. Beyond the town, she finds inspiration in the Sussex countryside, especially the coastline. She explains:

'I get many ideas for new products and how to progress my business when I am out and about! The scent for our Aventurine Soy Wax Candle was inspired by days spent beachcombing at Tide Mills near Seaford.'

De Villiers adds that that her gift sets are popular around Valentine's Day especially the Love Box. Priced at £28.50 including P&P, it includes relaxing bath salts, a warm vanilla rose candle and a bar of Rowdy & Fancy's Dark Chocolate among other beautiful products.

Sussex Life readers can sign up to the 360 Botanics newsletter for a 15 per cent discount across the store for the whole of February —Use code: **SUSSEXLIFE15** **360botanics.com**

BELOW:
Pippa de Villiers
creates her
natural skincare
range in Lewes





Photo: Daegreuz/Getty Images/Stockphoto

THE WINE MAKERS

KRISTIN SYLTEVIK, Oxney Organic Estate

It was during a camping trip to France that an idea started to grow in Kristen Syltevik's head. She and her partner, Paul Dobson, had both left careers in London – her's as co-founder of an internationally renowned PR agency and his as a golf pro – to run an organic farm. She recounts: 'I had seen the vineyards before in France, but suddenly saw them with new eyes and thought that maybe this is something I can do.'

The couple are now vintners, creating award-winning wines from a farm flourishing near the Rother River close to Rye. It is one of the few organic vineyards in our county but for Syltevik, this was always essential. She fondly remembers gardening as

a child in Norway and has loved watching the natural world bloom in Sussex. 'The change to the land when we converted to organic has been incredible, in fact immense,' she says, pointing to the plant and wildlife now flourishing. She hopes that they are early adopters in what could become a larger movement in Sussex viticulture.

Despite their remote location on the Kent border, word is out about the Oxney Estate's creations and Syltevik speaks to me from a car full of wine boxes ready for distribution. Among them, her current favourite, the Classic Rosé 2019, which she describes as a perfect pink for Valentine's Day (£40). Definitely one for the spring and grown at a farm where nature is thriving among the vines.

oxneyestate.com



Photo: Nick Wines

THE MIXED MEDIA ARTIST

Photo: Eddie Macdonald

ILONA DREW, I Drew This

It was during a recession in 2019 that Ilona Drew decided to go freelance after working for six years for two publishing companies designing greeting cards for the High Street. 'I thought, it can only get better from here,' she says. 'I ended up working part-time jobs to support myself and slowly began making connections for freelance work. It wasn't easy but things started to slowly trickle in.'

'At the same time, I put together a small range of cards using my illustrations and took them tentatively around the greeting card shops in Brighton. Thankfully, a couple of buyers took them on and I was off!'

With two artists as parents, Drew says that from an early age she was happiest when being creative. She studied Surface Pattern at Staffordshire University. 'I then went on to specialise in computer aided design when I did my MA at what was then UCE in Birmingham,' she adds.

Drew's landmark range captures beautiful places across the country but Brighton, as her home town, is a favourite subject. The Royal Pavilion, Stanmer House, the Duke of



York's Picturehouse and Brighton Station are among the city sites that she has drawn. Indeed, it was the popularity of the drawing of the Pavilion that encouraged her to create more images. Her home county continues to provide inspiration 'whether along the coast, inland or in Brighton,' she says. The designs are available on greeting cards, as prints of varying sizes, coasters, tea towels, magnets and mugs.

A Valentine's favourite has to be the You Are Made of Magic Dust card. As Drew says: 'It is just the most gorgeous way to let a loved one know you think they are super special.'

idrewthis.co.uk

THE GOLDSMITH

LEFT:

The Royal Pavilion, Stanmer House, the Duke of York's Picturehouse and Brighton are Ilona Drew's favourite subjects to draw

BELOW:

Goldsmiths Richard Talman and Hugo Johnson appear on BBC hit TV show *The Repair Shop*

RICHARD TALMAN, RTFJ

From his workshop in Wivelsfield Green, goldsmith Richard Talman and business partner Hugo Johnson create wonderful things but also save family heirlooms that have seen better days.

Indeed, Talman's talents have seen him appear on the BBC hit show, *The Repair Shop* where challenges included mending a 170-year old ring made from nuggets found in the Australian Gold Rush and a brooch that had been broken for 40 years.

Talman shares that his favourite material to work with is platinum. 'It's such a clean and malleable metal that polishes beautifully,' he says, adding: 'But I will always be a fan of the rich colour of 18 carat yellow gold.'

His commissions vary massively but seem to involve a lot of unusual requests. 'We love to work with individuals who are after something different to the norm,' he says. 'We've had made everything from skull rings, daffodil brooches, cricket bat cufflinks to solid gold whistles. I would say that most of our commissions are unusual in one way or another, but it's the really left field enquiries that get our creative juices flowing.'

rtfj.co.uk



Photo: Richard Talman

MEET THE MAKERS



Photo: Lucy Quaile

THE CHOCOLATIER

ANNYS KIRKPATRICK,

Rowdy and Fancy's

Annys Kirkpatrick, the owner of Rowdy and Fancy's, loves experimenting with flavour. Her Bee's Knee's bar brings together medium dark, dairy-free 58 per cent cocoa chocolate with local honey while organic oils are used in the Lavender and Rose bars. 'I like to make flavours that make people smile and evoke a memory or feeling,' she explains from her workshop in Forest Row.

Sourcing produce that is local and organic is key, she insists. 'I love being based in Sussex as we are surrounded by so many other companies with similar ethos to ours and the support from the people local to me is huge. There is a big interest in supporting local and artisan, which has been wonderful to be a part of.'

The Rowdy and Fancy's range includes mini-bars; 100g bars; seasonal chocolates and chocolate subscriptions. Kirkpatrick has also collaborated with local artist, Louise Mulgrew, to curate a beautiful collection of complementary cards and chocolates. 'Louise and I met working at Tory's Café in Haywards Heath and bonded over our mutual love of cake and elephants,' she recounts.

Her Valentine's favourite has got to be the Chocolate Love bar. It's dark chocolate with raspberry and comes in the 100g bar, (£4.75) and the 48g bar (£2.75).

**rowdyandfancys
chocolate.co.uk**



Photo: Annys Kirkpatrick

LEFT:

Lucy Quaile creates candles inspired by the Sussex countryside

RIGHT:

Annys Kirkpatrick, the owner of Rowdy and Fancy's, loves experimenting with flavour

THE CANDLE MAKER

LUCY QUAILE,

Little Sussex Candle Company

For candle maker, Lucy Quaile, it is the scents she's come across living in Crowborough that have formed the basis of her collections. 'The Sussex Collection was inspired by our county countryside and has evolved to incorporate some wonderful local fragrances,' she says. 'Fresh figs in our local farm shop and the crackling open fire at our local pub both came together in our Black Fig & Vetiver fragrance and inspired the use of our wooden wicks in our luxury candles.'

Quaile decided to make her passion into her career during lockdown when, like so many, she re-evaluated her life.

'I now work for a pharmaceutical company part time where I manage the UK operations but I also work for myself with the candles part-

time,' she explains. Quaile pours candles and creates fragrance blends from her home workshop creating everything from three-wick candles to wax melts – scented wax shapes that release their fragrance when heated.

'My favourite candle, if I really must choose, would be the Sussex Original – a contemporary glass bowl with the choice of either three cotton wicks or the crackling wooden wicks. It's such a classic showstopper and perfect for every season of the year,' she adds. The range is also vegan and cruelty-free and candles are made in small batches to ensure the scent will be 'thrown' perfectly.

For a sweet-smelling Valentine's, Quaile's recommendation is The Sussex Roses candle in its rose gold tin, which are £12 each.

littlesussexcandleco.com