



CLOUD WHITE DRESS WITH BOW DETAIL FROM THE SPRING/SUMMER 2018 COLLECTION BY HUCKLEBONES LONDON © HUCKLEBONES LTD

LITTLE LUXURIES

As the playground becomes a catwalk, Kathryn Conway meets the founders of two London-based brands with a passion for crafting heirloom clothing for children



With the social media accounts of trendy tots now being followed by hundreds of thousands of people and posts frequently racking up millions of views, the popularity of children's fashion is unprecedented. Such is the obsession with pint-sized posing that clothing for kids has become big news, spawning a wave of major names to launch collections for little ones. Givenchy debuted its foray into childrenswear last year, for example, but brands such as Armani, BOSS, Burberry, Dolce & Gabbana, Lanvin and Ralph Lauren have all enjoyed success when it comes to catering to mothers and fathers keen to ensure their darlings are blessed with wardrobes that rival their own. And, as parents become ever more voracious in their appetite for pieces that offer quality and durability, it isn't just the kidswear collections of the designer labels that have flourished.

MODERN CLASSICS

Seeing a gap in the market for a children's fashion brand that offered the same feeling of quality and uniqueness that could be found in the womenswear market, Zoë India Goldsmith and Daniel Stockley launched Hucklebones London in 2008. Focusing purely on garments for girls, the label is the antithesis of the mass-produced, fast fashion

indicative of today's throwaway culture. Great design lies at the very heart of everything that Goldsmith and Stockley do, and the pair seems to have struck a sweet spot by creating timeless styles that still feel very 'now'. "Hucklebones' collections are aimed at inspiring the design conscious," says Goldsmith. "Our clothes are made with long-lasting, quality fabrics and we invest in design to ensure our clothes can be worn now and by generations to come."

Having worked for Orla Kiely, Goldsmith understands better than most the power of an iconic pattern, but it is actually Stockley who is the draughtsman behind the hand-illustrated prints that have become a hallmark of the brand. "Having grown up in the rural English countryside, I am inspired by nature; walks in the woods, gardens, plants and animals are my main sources," Stockley reveals. "I start by sketching by hand as I like the freedom that it allows, before the sketches are then digitised, coloured and crafted into the prints in each of our collections."

Hucklebones' spring/summer 2018 collection aptly demonstrates this passion for flora and fauna, offering delightful pieces that, according to Goldsmith, "hint of a bountiful delicacy, as found in the abundance of a cherry blossom tree in full bloom in a Japanese tea garden." Girls are treated to a botanical marvel in the Wallpaper Floral Jacquard Bodice Dress, which deploys Hucklebones' signature bow detailing – used in a milkshake crepe on each shoulder – to give the dress a contemporary twist. Elsewhere, Stockley's work comes to the fore in a gorgeous hand-illustrated Sweet as a Peach print, which sees sweet juicy peaches combine with soft mint green leaves to create statement pieces (parents will love the pretty cotton jumpsuit in this print). "An exuberance of florals, layers of colours, ardent patterns, rich textures, soft pastels, luxurious golds and pops of metallic cavort in a profusion of feminine extravagance," is how the collection is described.

There is also a feeling of romance and a whimsy about Hucklebones' pieces that seems to hark back to the freedom of those early

years, a point that many have argued is down to the shared history that Goldsmith and Stockley enjoy as childhood sweethearts. "Hucklebones provides us with the perfect platform to reflect on some of our memories together and share those through the DNA of the brand and the product aesthetic we offer," acknowledges Goldsmith.

It is this innate ability to draw on those childhood experiences that is a cornerstone of the eponymous label of a woman who has famously enjoyed patronage from the parents of a very special prince and princess. Indeed, when the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge decided to kit out Prince George in Rachel Riley's smocked sailboat dungarees for his first official engagement in New Zealand, its creator couldn't have anticipated the response that followed. Her 25-year-old brand instantly became a household name, winning an army of new customers who recognise that her traditional designs will never go out of fashion.

STANDING THE TEST OF TIME

Riley's foray into childrenswear was forged through a love of making things as a young girl. The designer has described how the 'make do and mend' culture of the past ensured that both her mother and grandmother became avid knitters and Riley simply followed in this crafting culture, creating elaborate pyjamas for her Paddington Bear or making dresses for the baby of her mother's friend.

"I found the process of creating something from a piece of fabric so rewarding," she says. When her own children arrived, Riley naturally began making things for them and this spawned first a successful mail-order business in the Loire Valley where the family had first set up home and later a boutique in London when it was decided that Riley wanted her children to be educated in the UK.

Referencing the decades from the 1920s through to the 60s, Riley's designs are indicative of more elegant periods in history – when classic styling and techniques such as hand-smocking and embroidery were celebrated. "I do think that in this era of fast fashion, we are less aware



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: FISH-PRINT SHIRT FROM THE SPRING/SUMMER 2018 COLLECTION BY RACHEL RILEY © RACHEL RILEY; TIERED SUN DRESS FROM THE SPRING/SUMMER 2018 COLLECTION BY HUCKLEBONES LONDON © HUCKLEBONES LTD.; STRAWBERRY-PRINT KNIT FROM THE SPRING/SUMMER 2018 COLLECTION BY RACHEL RILEY © RACHEL RILEY; BUSH AND SWEET AS A PEACH-PRINT DRESS FROM THE SPRING/SUMMER 2018 COLLECTION BY HUCKLEBONES LONDON © HUCKLEBONES LTD.



of traditional techniques,” she admits. “However, I know my customers appreciate our timeless designs which really stand the test of time. I have many customers who come into our shop who share pictures with us of when they were small, and are looking to buy similarly cute outfits for their own children.”

The designer’s passion for traditional craftsmanship is no more obvious than in the range of slippers produced in her workshop in the Loire Valley. Handcrafted from traditional lasts and designed to be worn indoors, they are the perfect party shoe for any little girl with the budding ballerina about her. “They are made using a technique that has been passed down the generations,” Riley reveals. “We work with very experienced craftspeople who are passionate about what they do and I think this is conveyed in the footwear in

terms of the quality.” The soft-as-butter kid leather takes the shape of a child’s foot perfectly and the durable suede sole and practical Mary-Jane strap with button fastening are ideal for little ones on-the-go.

Indeed, practicality is just as important as style when it comes to childrenswear and it’s an aspect of the design process that Riley has always strived to get right. “I love beautiful clothes but, above all, they have to be comfortable for children to wear,” she says. “I think it is wonderful that our designs are popular for special occasions but I think it’s just as important that they can be worn casually for no reason at all! Childhood is about discovery and adventure, so comfort and practicality is paramount.” She concludes, “nothing makes me happier than to watch a child put on one of our designs and see the joy it brings them.”