

# LIFESTYLE

## Northern powerhouse

Having relocated with his family from London to Yorkshire in 2015, the furniture designer JAKE PHIPPS has taken advantage of the region's skilled workers, as well as the beautiful rural landscape and slower pace of life

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Jake Phipps working in his studio on the base of his 'Flux' console, which is made from strands of braided brass wire





**W**hen Charles Darwin pickled barnacles on board the *HMS Beagle* in 1835, he could hardly have imagined they would end up being used as a design feature on a twenty-first-century furniture piece. But when the young furniture maker Jake Phipps discovered Darwin's molluscs in the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2013, he was inspired. Now, clones of six of these barnacles, 3D printed in layers of synthetic nylon from a computerised model, cling in gilded clusters to a handsome black lacquered console. Jake calls his design 'Lost at Sea' and it was well received when he unveiled it during the London Design Festival the following year. 'I try to wear two hats,' says Jake. 'The craftsman and the artist.'

In 2015, Jake decided to move his workshop and home from London to the north of England. He and his wife Mel packed up their three-bedroom house in Battersea and moved with their two young sons, Walter and Ted, into a rented farmhouse beside the River Tees in North Yorkshire. 'For us, with such tiny children, there were lots of good reasons to leave London,' says Mel. 'Although the pace is slower in the countryside, our energy is greater and it's lovely for me to have come home – I grew up just a few miles from where we now live – and to get to know the area again.' Keeping his London studio as a hub for transporting his made-to-order furniture across the world, Jake was confident that companies in the North East could deliver the skills that his designs demanded.

He uses metals such as copper, brass and stainless ▷

ANTICLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Jake working on the 'Lost at Sea' lacquered console. Applying 3D-printed and gilded barnacles to the console. His 'Stellar' cabinet features multifaceted triangles which are laser cut and assembled numerically. John Brown at A F Brown Engineering in Darlington makes components for the 'Flux'. At The Carrosserie Company coach builders, owner Dick Francis stands with a copper disc, part of Jake's 'Cavex' mirror







ANTICLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Jake with Liliane Fawcett, owner of Themes & Variations in Notting Hill, with his 'Flux' console. The Phippses' farmhouse in North Yorkshire. Jake's wife, Mel, hosts a supper with friends



steel in innovative ways. One of his latest designs, 'Flux', a heavy, glass-topped console supported only by a sinuous coil of braided brass wire, has proved that his faith was justified. Its precise components were made by A F Brown Engineering, a Darlington-based steel fabricator. Local coach builder and vehicle restorer The Carrosserie Company polishes the rim of Jake's 'Cavex' mirror 'with elbow grease that comes in tins,' jokes Dick Francis, its director and owner since 2002. 'People might associate Durham with coal mining and Billy Elliott, but there is so much talent here,' he adds. Jake also offers internships to students from the Design and Industry faculty at the School of Design at Northumbria University.

The family's farmhouse, which is just a stone's throw from the historic market town of Barnard Castle, has a light and modern feel and is furnished with a mixture of mid-twentieth-century classics and some inherited pieces from Jake's grandmother, Lady Maclean, from Argyll. It also showcases some of his earlier, mass-produced designs: two 'Tweetie' brass pendant lights hang above the kitchen island, brass 'Shell' stools are in the sitting room and the 'Jeeves' bowler hat light – one of Jake's most recognisable designs – is in the boot room. Above the fireplace is the 'Stellar' mirror, its multifaceted, polished stainless-steel triangles unwrapping across the mirror frame like crystals.

In 1999, Jake graduated from the John Makepeace Parnham School of Design, where he acquired the exacting craftsmanship required to work with wood. His skills have stood him in good stead now that his designs have evolved to include metals. 'Understanding the capabilities of a material goes a long way to help with the design process,' he explains. As his designs become more ingenious and artful, signed and numbered, his furniture is sought after by collectors across the world. Phipps originals can be found in jewellery shops in India, ▷





palatial residences and five-star hotels in the Middle East, Hong Kong and the US, stately homes in the UK – Chatsworth House has two pieces – and at international design fairs. His ‘Stellar’ pieces have crossed the Atlantic to Todd Merrill’s gallery of contemporary design in New York. Nearer home, his work can be seen at the Themes & Variations gallery in Notting Hill.

Mel, who works as a fundraiser in the restoration and the redevelopment of historic Auckland Castle, the home of the Prince Bishops of Durham since the twelfth century, has also

polished up her interest in precious stones and fine jewellery. She is studying to become a Fellow of the Gemmological Association while assisting in the jewellery department of Tennants Auctioneers in the Yorkshire Dales. Ahead of their three annual fine-art sales, she helps to showcase the jewellery collections and to explain the pieces and their provenance to prospective bidders. She finds inspiration in the fine and decorative art shows at the Bowes Museum in Barnard Castle.

At weekends, the Phippses often entertain friends from ▷







OPPOSITE Walter in the kitchen next to his father's brass 'Shell' stool. THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT A Sixties Parker Knoll chair and Jake's 'Stellar' mirror decorate the sitting room, which also features his 'Shell' stools and an ottoman covered in Christopher Farr Cloth's 'Breakwater' fabric (bottom). The Phippses in their garden. In the main bedroom, the bed has a canopy made from Maharam fabrics



ABOVE Jake's 'Cavex' mirror reflects light in three ways. The concave polished steel inner frame bounces light back to the main mirrored surface, while the outer convex copper disc reflects light outwards





ROBSON'S ANTIQUES



LEFT Mel visits Robson's Antiques, a family business in Barnard Castle. BELOW Mel holds a diamond necklace at Tennants Auctioneers, where she helps to present jewellery collections

London and also have many local friends who, like them, have moved north to set up businesses. Among these is Manor Garden, a flower business set up in Neasham by Barney and Clarey Wrightson.

With children in tow, the Phippses enjoy exploring the rugged landscape, with its rolling moors and winding rivers, the skyline of its market towns pierced with historic castle battlements. At the local farmyard attraction, Big Sheep Little Cow in nearby Bedale, Walter and Ted got to know Suffolk and Bluefaced Leicester sheep and Bob the huge Kunekune pig; they are allowed to bottle feed lambs and kids. It seems the entire family has welcomed the new experiences that the move has presented them with □

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*Jake Phipps: jakehipps.com*



LEFT Walter feeds a lamb at the Big Sheep Little Cow farm attraction. BELOW Mel and Jake outside Bowes Museum in Barnard Castle

