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WATERFORD
 WEDGWOOD
ENGLAND 1791
 ROYAL DOULTON
LONDON 1813
 ROYAL ALBERT
ENGLAND 1904

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(sunday_stylist)

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WITH FEATURES DIRECTOR CLARE PRESS

*Design for everyone –
 it's more than the latest
 fashion statement*

Can a vase be political? It can if Wayne Hemingway has a hand in it. “We believe good design belongs to everyone,” says the iconoclastic designer, who in a former life was one half of cult UK fashion label Red or Dead. The other half was *his* other half, Gerardine, and together they were repeated winners of the British Fashion Council’s Streetstyle Designer of the Year award in the late ‘90s. Their collections made statements about everything from supermodel culture to the criminal justice system.

These days, along with two of their four grown-up children (Tilly and Jack), they run Hemingway Design, a firm that specialises in urban-living projects with a strong social focus.

Whether it’s a major development, like the regeneration of Britain’s oldest amusement park, Dreamland; a smaller concept like their new collab with Royal Doulton; or organising a crafty fete (their Festival of Thrift is in its third year in the UK), all their work is anchored by a clear remit – to improve lives through design.

“If Roman Abramovich, who owns Chelsea Football Club, came to us and said, ‘I love your style, will you design a house for me?’ we would say, ‘Only if you give up half the land to affordable housing,’” states Hemingway. He was raised



HEMINGWAY DESIGN FOR ROYAL DOULTON jug and vase, \$59.95 each, wwrdd.com.au



DESIGNING WITH DAD (from top) Wayne and Tilly; items from their collab include this jug, \$39.95, vase, \$69.95, yellow bowl, \$39.95, and pink bowl, \$59.95, wwrdd.com.au.

to appreciate good style, and to know that he deserved access to it just as much as the next guy. “I grew up not knowing what ‘design’ as a concept was; it just didn’t figure in the working-class North [of England] at that time [the ‘60s]. But my mum and my nan looked like they stepped out of *Vogue*; they were poor, but had great taste. My nan was a step scrubber, and my granddad worked in the mines. My mum worked in the post office, and had a second job as a croupier. They never had any money, but oh my god, did they look good.”

Style, says Hemingway, is all tied up with self-esteem: “People want to look good, for all sorts of reasons – you feel better, you

get laid easier, looking good gives you a higher level – that’s why the fashion industry exists. If you can do that without having to be rich, that’s a real bonus.”

Wayne and Gerardine were working-class kids from Lancashire who fell in love on the dance floor – “She had knitting needles in her hair” – and got hitched two years later. They chased the post-punk music scene to London (Hemingway was in a band) and hung out in the New Romantic clubs of Soho. “The favourite was Le Beat Route [on Greek Street]. Boy George was on the door; everybody went there. We were, what? Nineteen? At that age, music and fashion is everything.”

PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF HOUSE OF HEMINGWAY DESIGN, GETTY IMAGES



The pair started selling second-hand clothes at Camden Market to make ends meet, and soon moved on to selling fashion Gerardine created herself. “She left school at 15 with no qualifications, but she was really good at making clothes. And I’d got an eye,” says Hemingway. “I knew how to style things.” One day, a buyer from the US department store Macy’s happened by and placed a big wholesale order. Gah!

“Mum packed in her job. She said, ‘Give us some of that money from Camden; I’ll buy some second-hand machines.’” Somehow, they pulled it off. Now they needed a name. “‘Better red than dead’ was what provocative young people were saying,” says Hemingway, as in, “We’d prefer to be communist and side with the Russians than side with the aggressive Americans. We were so bloody brave. Not in the way that Alexander McQueen was kind of *calculated* brave; this was coming from the heart – we wanted [our work] to be affordable, we wanted to be political.”

The next step was a proper shop. “We opened our first Red or Dead store in Soho, with £12 a week. In Neal Street, Covent Garden, our rent was £60 a week – imagine! You could open anywhere, everywhere. The creativity in London was amazing – it was a time of opportunity.”

Were they ever afraid of failure?

“It didn’t matter – it was just a lark.”

They sold up in 1999 (the brand still exists, but they have nothing to do with it). Why? “I’d always been anti-fashion,” says Hemingway, who studied geography and town planning at university before fashion got in the way. “In interviews, I’d never allow myself to be called a fashion designer. I’d say, ‘I’m a designer. Don’t use the word fashion.’ I wanted to prove that, and also we wanted to pick and choose projects and for them to be meaningful.”

Everyone at Hemingway Design is keen on stemming “the increasing gap between the haves and have-nots, which is the worst thing you can have in society”. Hence they work on lots of social-housing projects.

Hemingway says they took the same approach with Royal Doulton: “If that vase

was going to retail at 300 quid, we’d have said no.” He waves at an orange vessel with a black handle from the Hemingway Design for Royal Doulton collection, designed by Tilly, 28. She joined the family business after studying urban design and town planning at University College London.

And she’s come with Hemingway to Australia – along with her 13-piece range of jugs, vases, bowls, tea-light holders and decorative storage jars – to help promote the project.

Is it not something of a weird fit? Royal Doulton is as posh as the Hemingways are egalitarian. Queen Victoria was a Doulton fan; she knighted the founder’s son, Henry Doulton. It was Edward VII who granted the company the rights to use “Royal” in its name.

Design director Dik Delaney laughs this off, pointing out that, to celebrate his employer’s 200th birthday, they called on all sorts of daring creatives, including a street artist who goes by the name of Pure Evil and who has designed a figurine called the Touch Me I’m Sick Bunny. “Some brands slowly evolve, but I think Royal Doulton reinvents itself all the time. We’re always looking for what’s next,” grins Delaney. “We never stand still.”

Tilly, a ceramics nut, says she was surprised to find some lovely examples of classic mid-century design in the Royal Doulton archives, and it was these that sparked her inspiration. “I love ’50s and ’60s modernism because it feels so contemporary. I think designers got it right back then – you had all these affordable brands that were really cool. It’s about creating timeless pieces – not like fashion, which can be sometimes throwaway. I like the idea of pieces being passed down generations. Royal Doulton is like that. I hope that’s what happens with my designs,” she says, and then: “Why does



IN PRINT (from top) Red or Dead’s A/W ’94’s Workwear Collection was sewn by high-security prisoners; the famous, quirky fish print from A/W ’92; beach chic S/S ’94; Luke Goss (centre), with ’80s band Bros, wears Red or Dead’s iconic watch shoes.

something beautiful have to be at a ridiculous price point?”

Sounds like someone, doesn’t she? “I like working on the social housing and regeneration projects best,” says Tilly, who is currently knee-deep in revamping a tired housing estate in King’s Lynn. “They’re the most rewarding. It’s about making a difference to other people’s lives. Most people I meet say, ‘How can you work with your family every day?’ But we get on really well. We have the same views about things.”

Visit www.royal-doulton.com

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