



# blackburn rover

‘You can’t fake passion – you either have it or you don’t. If you’re not passionate then you won’t do it well. It’s about looking beyond your own point of view. It’s about seeing something interesting on a Saturday and bringing the idea in on a Monday. It’s about helping a colleague. And I hate it when someone says ‘I don’t care about it either way’ – you’ve got to have an opinion!’

We’re in Yorkshire, chatting with the passionate Darren Clanford. The Creative Director of Burmatex is not someone for whom half measures will do. Driven, focused and fun, the expression ‘work hard, play hard’ could have been coined for the guy whose creative energy has powered the Burmatex brand forward in recent times.

The man’s good company, and self deprecating too. Constantly picking up and absorbing creative clues and pointers to share with colleagues can occasionally try the patience of the team, as Darren is quick to acknowledge. ‘I was on the web at the weekend...’ I say, and they go ‘Oh Christ!’

We’re quite impressed by Darren’s title – Creative Director – so we ask what it actually means. ‘The CEO brought the design and marketing roles together. It’s integration of the direction and how you present it. Integration is vital – covering everything from the product to the front of the press pack. It’s the fashion industry model.

‘This way of working involves a lot of trust, but it’s refreshing and it’s great creatively. As my boss says, we are going to make mistakes, but push on all the time. We made a mistake with how we launched Balance, for example. We rushed it. It’s done okay, but not as well as it should. So we had the bravery to say stop (after it had been on the market for 14 months), rethink, and do it again, better. Bravery and confidence is important to what we do – in everything from photography to the collections themselves.

‘Our way is to constantly require feedback. We say, ‘Great, you like it, but what don’t you like?’ We learn from the past, but it’s gone. You’ve got to continually look at new ways of producing, including everything from backing to packaging. Why not use wool shagpile partnered with nylon loop – or drop in a shag rug. It’s not just about the product, it’s also about the application. I like the way fashion puts things into collections, so that you can mix and match. It’s vital that we establish that thinking with what we do.’

‘One of my design heroes is Paul Smith – his style is quintessentially English, but twisted. We make fibre bonded carpet, ▶▶▶▶▶







▶▶▶▶▶ I spent 15 years at Gaskell, ending up as Head of Design at what is now Tessera, when Sirdar PLC offered me the opportunity to create a Burmatex design team. That was four years ago, then I became Creative Director for the group, now known as Airea PLC. I've handpicked a team and I work right in the heart of them, without a separate office. We work long hours, there's a great feeling

of commitment to design. It's a young team, not cynical, not grown-up! That's not to say childish – we're allowed to say 'Wow, this is new to me'. Hundreds of architects have used this facility; they come in, get it quickly, visualise, create...we haven't got a London showroom, but when we do I want it to be like an exclusive members club where you're among friends. Not 'powerpointless' presentations – get the product out, get your other finishes out, get hands on.

'We recently held a great conference in Romania. We invited architects to come and play with the products all day. Then at 6pm we said let's have a mini competition – we didn't finish until midnight! We watched architects play with the product, doing wonderful things. They were cutting tiles up, mixing stuff up – it was mental, but in a good way. We didn't just talk at them, we inspired them, playing, drinking...and dancing until 7am! It was real passion. Oh and we had Hotel Costas playing to set the mood, not some hardcore Belgian trance! The devil's in the detail...

'I love music. If I wasn't doing what I'm doing I'd like to be a superstar DJ photographer! I think that whole Mixology thing with DJs like Roger Sanchez and David Morales is great. For next year's Mixology you should talk to people like David Guetta or Sarah Main, who's a resident at Pacha in Ibiza. They'd both be great!'

The rest of our conversation veered this way and that, taking in Kissdafunk's Leeds nights to the pockets of Parisian architecture in Bucharest. Admiration for Tom Ford ('He took the Gucci brand when it was on its arse and made it mega') and for the humble Bic pen.

Darren Clanford's passionate alright. And you will never, ever hear him say 'I don't care either way!' ●