

From student to stocked: a designer's journey into industry

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With colourful designs inspired by the luxe hues of Asian art and silk garments, combined with the harmonious aesthetics of florals and fauna, Illustration graduate Amanda West's creations prioritise craftsmanship and quality over all else.

Her latest collection is now being stocked by [Wolf and Badger](#), home to some of the world's best independent fashion, jewellery, accessory, homeware and beauty brands. We caught up with Amanda to find out more about how she made it from student to designer in the creative industries...

You graduated last year with a degree in BA (Hons) Illustration. How have you found the transition from student to graduate?

It was an exciting time to graduate, but also quite daunting because I had no idea what the future held. I had to really put the skills and knowledge that I had acquired during my years of study to good use. After the buzz of the Degree Show and exhibiting at New Designers in London there was a period where I hit a low point. I had little confidence in my work and was unsure about the direction I was going in.

So, I made use of the [Alumni Association](#) and started going back to the college to use the printing facilities and library, and essentially to immerse myself in the creative environment again. Seeing the tutors and people I knew gave my self-esteem the boost it needed. I learned it was quite normal to feel a bit low after graduation. From there I picked myself back up and focused on where I wanted to be. The support of the alumni team was (and still is) invaluable as they are always on hand with advice.



Your designs and products are being sold on Wolf and Badger - congratulations! How did you make it happen?

Thank you. I was in shock for a few days afterwards as it is literally a dream come true for me to be stocked with such a prestigious company . After signing up to do my debut trade show at Spotted, Top Drawer, London; I contacted them by phone as I wanted to send them an invite. However, I was told that they generally didn't attend the shows, so I left it at that. On the final day of the show and whilst travelling home I received an email from them announcing the opening of another store in London, and at the bottom of the email was an 'apply to be stocked' link. So I applied, and a fortnight later I received confirmation that I had been successful!

Were these designs and products something that you had made while still a student?

It was during my final major project that I started to develop the designs that are now featured in my homeware collection and fashion accessories. The other designs that are now also part of this collection were developed more recently. At the moment I am so busy with marketing, fulfilling orders and in discussion with retailers, that I haven't yet had the time to design anything new.

What is your set-up? Can you talk us through your design process and inspiration?

The theme which flows through my most recent designs is the Asian influence. My mum is from Singapore and having been on numerous trips there to visit family, and growing up with her influences, this has had a clear impact on my designs. I adore using colour and the design process I use is often mixed media, using various mark making and collage to give texture to my elements. Texture plays a huge part in my design process. Besides using collage, I also enjoy the depth that painted motifs can add to my designs, and by digitally merging all of these elements together my final pieces are formed.



Were there any issues that you faced when setting up the production of your products?

From the outset I knew what products I wanted to produce - luxury velvet cushions, quality handmade lampshades, and saffiano effect clutch bags. There were a lot of hurdles from the start, from sourcing the quality fabric, to then having each of the products made to the standard I was looking for. It was an arduous process, but nonetheless it was a process that I have taken away so much knowledge from.

I had various samples and prototypes made from about five different companies, sourced over a period of months of research. With each sample received there were differences in the colours, finish and quality. However, through a lot of communication the perfect product I was striving for was eventually made.

Once I had found the right fabric, I had a fabulous sample made. In order to make it work financially I had to tweak the design slightly, and then find a suitable seamstress. They are now made for me by an amazing seamstress, and the quality of her craftsmanship is exceptional.

After having my initial lampshade handmade for me I knew it wasn't going to be possible to pursue this route because of logistics and costings, so I decided to enrol on a lampshade making workshop and loved it! So, I am now making these myself, and this is where being a

perfectionist really comes into play.



Red Crowned Crane



Japanese Maple (Acer Palmatum)



Japanese Maple



Purple Persian Shield



Pink Acers and Persian Shield



Chrysanthemums

What has been the hardest thing about starting your career?

The hardest thing has been lack of finances. There was so much I wanted to do in the beginning, lots of ideas I wanted to put into place, and the only thing holding me back was the cost of everything. After securing a business bank loan, it made all my ideas accessible and it was like turning on a lightbulb.

What do you enjoy most about your work and where do you hope to take your work over the next year?

I actually enjoy it all. Every step has been a learning curve and making mistakes is the only way to learn. From making my own website, sourcing product developers, to trying to work out wholesale/retail prices (all mind-blowing), but totally worth stepping out of my comfort zone in every situation.

Any advice you've been given that might be helpful for others?

There are times when you will doubt yourself, your work and confidence may take a turn for the worse. But I think believing in yourself and your self-worth is key. Take yourself off social media for a while. I find Instagram really makes me feel rubbish about my work at times, so I take a break from it every now and then just to recharge and refocus. Do lots of research into where you can find help and advice, [The Design Trust](#) is particularly encouraging and helpful. And also seek financial backing if you wish to expand your business.