

# COCKPIT ARTS 3

## **Carréducker**

- *Bespoke Shoemakers*



Deborah Carré and James Ducker, of Carréducker, craft beautiful bespoke shoes using traditional English hand welted construction. Since joining Cockpit Arts 12 years ago, the company has grown to include shoe making courses, a design consultancy service, an online tool shop and a successful ongoing partnership with gentlemen's outfitters Gieves & Hawkes.

James and Deborah moved into Cockpit's Holborn incubator in 2004 at a very early stage of their business, when they were just beginning to produce samples. "Geographically and from a business point of view, Cockpit Arts was perfect for a start up," says Deborah. "It's great having a studio in central London that is well below commercial rates," agrees James.

The company is currently embarking on its biggest challenge to date: adding ready-to-wear collections to their core bespoke offering. "Doing ready-to-wear is a definite step change for us," says James. "But we've been in business for 12 years now; we're at a stage where we've got the pedigree, experience and story to do it."

They spent nine months visiting factories in the UK, taking time to find a manufacturer who could produce shoes to their exacting standards. "Our brand is known for its durability, sustainability and quality of materials," explains Deborah. "We wanted to ensure that any manufactured product not only made sense for our business, but also made sense economically and environmentally."

Cockpit Arts' Head of Business Development, David Crump, gave them one-to-one support throughout; helping them put together a critical path for marketing, manufacturing and delivery of the project. "David has been a great support and was invaluable in getting us focused and being very realistic about our business plan," says Deborah.

Deborah and James decided to get their project off the ground using the crowdfunding platform Kickstarter, but David suggested that they also apply for The Cockpit Arts & Ingenious Growth Loan Fund to bridge the gap. "The Ingenious loan came just as we were launching our Kickstarter campaign," says James. "If we'd gone to a bank it would have been much more intimidating. Even though we're a limited company, banks still require personal guarantees which are much scarier. We could have found our houses used as surety."



"As it was, the loan gave us the boost we needed for sampling and marketing and enabled us to create some real energy around the campaign," James says. This included rebranding the company to reflect the distinct strands of their business: Bespoke, Ready to Wear, School (the training courses) and Toolshed (an online shop for tools of the trade). The website was relaunched at the end of last year, with plans to add ready-to-wear to their e-shop in the near future.

The Kickstarter campaign exceeded their target and, as 2016 starts, Carréducker's ready-to-wear resort shoes have gone into production, with their launch slated for March/April. In fact, the campaign was so successful that James and Deborah are preparing four more in 2016 alone, with plans to add desert and work boots, a cycle shoe and eventually welted shoes to future collections. "We'd like to build up a portfolio of styles and attract new customers to our brand, those who want to buy ready-to-wear at a more accessible price point," explains Deborah.

Their recent move into a much larger studio space with sole occupancy has come at an opportune time, allowing them to bring their shoe making courses in-house. Originally held in Cockpit's café space, students now benefit from learning in a real workshop environment. "It's great because we can offer one-to-one training, working alongside us," says James.

They both say that the real benefit of having a studio at Cockpit Arts is the community. "Business wise, it's great having people to share ideas and experiences with," says Deborah. In the past, they have collaborated with fellow studio holders, screen-printers Thornback & Peel and textile artist Arantza Vilas, for one-off collections.

"Cockpit is a very supportive and creative environment to work in," smiles Deborah. "There is a definite energy about working here."



[www.carreducker.com](http://www.carreducker.com)

Photographs: Alun Callender.