

JUDGEMENT CALL

LAST MONTH SAW THE BTAA TEAM UP WITH AUTUMN FAIR TO PRESENT A BRAND NEW AWARD TO THE BEST NEW COLLECTION FROM ITS MEMBERS AT THE SHOW. HAVING BEEN SELECTED FOR THE JUDGING PANEL BY THE BTAA, CHRISTINA WILLIAMS WENT ALONG TO THE NEC TO HELP SELECT THE WINNER.

There was an added element of excitement for those BTAA members who were exhibiting at Autumn Fair last month. For the first time ever, the Association ran a competition to recognise the best new collection at the exhibition, taking into account the design, quality and commercial viability of each range.

The competition was open to all BTAA members showing at Autumn Fair, and a shortlist of eight brands – which can be seen overleaf – was announced shortly before the show. Along with my fellow judges – handbag designer Shona Easton and marketing consultant to the accessories industry Christine Gainsley – I visited each stand in turn to assess the new collections on offer, and soon discovered the task of choosing just one overall winner was no easy feat.

Aside from selecting the winner, however, we each agreed that just meeting the contenders and having the chance to see their latest collections was a reminder of how diverse the brand portfolio is within the BTAA. So from our bright and early start, when we first arrived at the halls of the NEC, to the presentation ceremony, here's what happened...



The three judges (l-r Shona Easton, Christina Williams and Christine Gainsley) put their heads together ahead of the day's judging.



Shona Easton and Christine Gainsley pay careful attention to the construction of each design, taking into account the stitching and lining as well as the bag's outer appearance.



The BTAA's chief executive Diana Fiveash admires a Claudia Canova handbag while the judges get to work.



Mag Mouch's Mike Dearden talks Christine Gainsley through the brand's latest designs.

EIGHT BRANDS WERE SHORTLISTED FOR THE BTAA BEST NEW COLLECTION AWARD, SPANNING THE FULL SPECTRUM OF PRODUCT SECTORS ACROSS THE ACCESSORIES INDUSTRY.



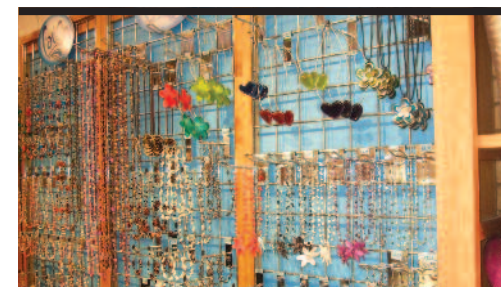
BALAGAN

Accessories supplier Balagan offers a comprehensive range of accessories with several brands in its portfolio. Shortlisted thanks to its ongoing innovation and fresh new designs, Balagan impressed the judges with its attractive POS material as well as the products themselves. www.balagan.co.uk



BRONTE TWEEDS

British manufacturer Bronte Tweeds is home to one of Britain's last remaining vertical mills and manufactures a range of pure wool accessories. The brand was shortlisted thanks to its balance between innovative design and traditional craft. www.brontebymdesign.co.uk



FATLIP

Colourful and vibrant with a hint of tropical style, Fatlip's latest collection spanned the entire spectrum of summer colour and brought together a range of innovative materials and finishes. The brand impressed with its accessible price points and wearable designs, which held a wide appeal for several consumer demographics. www.fatlip.biz



FUNKY FINGS

Having recently introduced a range of handbags to complement its core offering of chunky, contemporary jewellery, Funky Fings was recognised as a brand that was growing and developing despite challenging conditions. www.funkyfingswholesale.co.uk



LE SAC MAROC

Incorporating Fairtrade principles, traditional artisan craftsmanship and rich North African culture into each of its designs, Le Sac Maroc stood out due to its unique offering of hand-woven accessories in a striking, warm colour palette. www.lesacmaroc.com



MAG MOUCH

Offering a range of novelty men's gifts and accessories, Mag Mouch was selected as a shortlist contender because of its unique appeal. With a product offering that spans cufflinks, handkerchiefs and useful shoe-cleaning kits, the brand was commended for its commercial viability and attractive packaging. www.magmouch-sophos.com



OWEN BARRY

Dedicated to British design and production, handbag label Owen Barry was selected as a finalist due to its contemporary designs and quality production. The brand was also commended for its wearable designs, which held a wide appeal across the age spectrum. www.owenbarry.com



SMITH & CANOVA

Along with diffusion label Claudia Canova, Smith & Canova has become a firm favourite among UK retailers because of its contemporary yet accessible designs and quality finishes, which offer an element of durability for bags designed to be used and worn every day. www.smithandcanova.co.uk

AND THE WINNER IS...

Owen Barry was selected as the overall winner, having scored highly with all three judges



across the design, quality and commercial viability categories. "We were honoured to be considered, let alone win!" says Cindi Barnstaple (pictured), director at Owen Barry. "The other contestants were of such a high calibre that this really means a great deal to us." Balagan and Mag Mouch were selected as runners up.