



A design based on Gerry Ettinger's personal attaché case that was slightly smaller and considerably lighter than the traditional. It is also included as part of the company's bespoke service launched this year.

ALL CREDITS: G ETTINGER LTD

34 leathers, 20 threads, 2 linings—the choice is yours

Multiply 34x20x2 and it gives you 1,360 options to choose from.

"Our bespoke offer is an extra service that we can now provide our customers and we don't foresee any problems with it — as long as they don't all arrive on the same day," says a confident Robert Ettinger. The bespoke option is one part of the eponymous company's 85th anniversary celebrations. Another is a signed limited edition of 85 leather-covered-and-embossed notebooks, a collaboration with British artist, Rory Dobner, renowned for his idiosyncratic character Nigel the Owl.

Back in 1934, Gerry Ettinger could not possibly have imagined that what he had

started would grow into one of the most famous names in the United Kingdom for luxury leathers, with the ability to offer bespoke items to his discerning clientele without disrupting its established manufacture of the more than 900 carefully styled products in its range.

The founding father was not a natural leather manufacturer; the family roots lay in military tailoring. Breaking with tradition, Gerry's first love was producing films, which included one featuring Marlene Dietrich. World politics and war, however, intervened and he moved his family from Germany to London, armed with entrepreneurial drive and an address book of excellent contacts. "My father had a

natural ability for languages, he had worked in his native Germany, Italy and Switzerland," his son Robert explains. "You could say he was a general business enabler as well as an enthusiastic train traveller and skier. In those days, these were glamorous and adventurous activities, and he gained many social and business contacts."

These were clearly very useful when setting up his business. Initially it was as an agent representing several German factories producing leathers and jewellery and he quickly became known for supplying upmarket gifts to London's most prestigious retailers, including Harrods, Asprey and Fortnum & Mason. As his



While the sources of its range of leathers might be cowhide, pig-, sheep- and goatskin, in order to meet the requirements of the individual items the company produces it needs an extensive range of substrates and finishes, a total of more than 30 finished leathers.



Travel Pass Holder. Outside leather: bridle leather; Inside leather: vegetable tanned panel hide.



Large Zip Portfolio. Outside and side leather: goat leather.



Croco billfold wallet. Outside leather: croco embossed cowhide; Inside leather: black panel hide.



Lifestyle Collection Double Watch Roll. Outside leather: waxy cowhide; Inside leather: pig suede.



Large Zip-Around Purse. Outside and inside leather: burnishable calf.



Spectrum Glasses Case. Outside leather: dressed calf leather; Inside leather: pig suede.



business grew, he realised that having his own manufacturing capacity was essential to meet the demand.

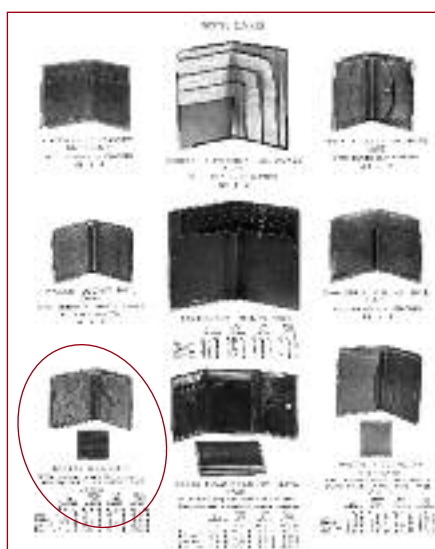
With commissions coming from the luxury end of the market, including Royal Warrant holder Asprey, (whose clientele in the 1920s included American millionaire J. Pierpont Morgan and the Maharaja of Patiala, who once ordered a huge teak travelling trunk for each of his wives, each trunk fitted with solid silver washing and bathing utensils), Ettinger began making his collection in a London workshop as well as in the traditional heart of England's leathergoods manufacturing area of Walsall, near Birmingham.

The company's reputation for high quality leathergoods and luggage grew apace. With his 'address book' and extensive travel, Ettinger was getting used to special orders and in the early 1970s he started travelling to Japan and other countries in southeast Asia. In many ways, Ettinger senior was laying the foundations for today's business, its approach to detail and quality, and its ability to meet the 21st century's demand for well-designed luxury products that are today exported to over 35 countries.

Leather is the key

"No matter how fine the design, the cutting and stitching, the key to our quality really starts with the leathers we use," states Robert, who took over the company reins in 1990. (Like father, like son — he, too, is an enthusiastic traveller, skier and linguist...and also a long-distance cyclist.) "Many attempts have been made to create an artificial substrate to match, but in our experience, but nothing can compare with leather for durability, look and feel," he continues, "and when it comes to the careful hand-folding, very fine creasing and stitching we do... faux leather is just that — fake, it doesn't meet our standards. Our quality would be compromised if we ever used it."

The company has a reputation for choosing only the finest quality leathers for its collections that range from key rings through to business bags and iPad holders as well as travel goods. It sources its



Times change: From a 1930s Asprey advertisement, the Dollar Bill Case would "...allow a large quantity of notes to be carried". Eighty-five years later, the increasingly cashless society wants an elegant, discreet credit card holder that can access more cash than any billfold of past years.

The 2019 equivalent is made in smooth calf leather with soft drummed cowhide on the inside, styled with a jacquard fabric; there are 35 stitches done by hand across the 10.2cm width of the card holder. Besides the four card pockets, the design includes a central slip pocket for receipts or a few neatly folded notes.



leather from a limited number of European tanners who are able to meet its supply demands. It is an extensive range to cover the multiplicity of items it now manufactures; not surprisingly many of the leathers are exclusive to the company.

To cope with the characteristics and requirements of each item, the leathers used fall into individual categories, each with their own distinctive touch. It would be too simplistic to say that the company uses cowhide, calfskin, pigskin, goat and sheepskin. For instance, traditional English

bridle hide is used but so is a fine bridle hide, very different in feel and finish. Some leathers are veg-tanned, others are chrome tanned. The finish of each is created to match the end product. It is why Ettinger needs such a broad range to work with. They include fine grain calfskin, soft dressed calfskin, dressed calfskin, smooth veg-tanned calfskin as well as what it calls Saint Crispin calfskin leather; then there are pig suede, specially finished goatskins and high quality skiver.

Its fine bridle leather, used extensively for its wallets, is produced from the skins of younger animals, typically yearlings, as the leather is finer, has fewer marks and is slightly softer. "This is better for making small leathergoods to our standards," Robert says, "while still being strong enough to feel like traditional bridle hide. Our bags, however, still use traditional English bridle hide as this has more structure and is more durable."

Another leather extensively used is its iconic panel hide, a veg-tanned semi-aniline, full grain cowhide. Once tanned, the company applies a waxy coloured finish to create the colour and to protect the surface. "The colour we use is our special London Tan, a deep, bright golden yellow, which has always been favoured by London tanners and merchants over the centuries; we also have a black version of it for certain products," Robert explains.

The fine grain calfskin that the company uses is sourced from among the best tanneries in Italy, France and Spain. Using the softer sides and only those areas without any imperfection, it has a very fine grain that is chrome tanned with a classical aniline finish and still retains the natural grain and suppleness. This leather is reserved for the company's finest wallets and other small items.

Another range used is called Shadow, a veg-tanned, aniline treated leather with a waxy finish that "ages beautifully and the natural smoky tones are perfect for classic home interiors". Again produced from yearlings, it is hand-finished with multiple layers of waxes and oils to generate its deep, rich character and hand, and is available in a palette of natural colours. It is



Robert Ettinger has been named as one of the Top 50 movers and shakers in the UK luxury products sector and in 2019 was included in Walpole's Legends section of high profile figures with a significant role in shaping the culture and legacy of British luxury.

Walpole is the official body for UK luxury companies in all sectors. Founded in 1992 as a not-for-profit organisation, it counts more than 250 British brands in its membership and is designed to promote and develop a sector worth £48 billion to the UK economy.

used to make what Ettinger terms simple classic and heirloom items.

Extending the family business

Ettinger takes great pride in its craftspeople. Among the dwindling number of companies to still make leathersgoods in the UK with the emphasis on handwork, the quality of its goods and attention to detail are paramount to its success. Comprehensive quality control throughout the production process is essential and it takes at least five years to fully train a craftsperson for the factory. It has an apprenticeship scheme, too, which aims to attract younger workers in order to revive the broader industry and ensure that specialist skills will not be lost. "Collectively, we have over 600 years manufacturing experience," Robert says, with some pride. As a hands-on CEO, he makes regular visits to the factory where employees are seen as part of an extended family-business. Driving up to Walsall, some 200 kilometres from his London office, he usually clocks in before 7.00am.

The client base, too, continues to extend and expand through online sales. "While leathersgoods might be seen as traditional,

there appears to be no limit to the number of people who are becoming aware of the business in the wider world," says the CEO. "We created our website really for consumers to find out more about the product and our production methods. It has turned out to be much more than an information site and is now a fully fledged trading platform."

Using the Internet, the company has reached new generations and more people in parts of the world that even the most inveterate traveller could ever reach. It has also helped the company's more conventional retail outlets to expand their business, as it is unrealistic for any outlet to carry one of every item and colour way in the collection. While spreading the word for its leather craftsmanship, it has seen the e-commerce side of the business grow and it now accounts for about 15% of annual sales. Because there are few issues regarding size or fit — the bugbear

of most companies in the clothing and footwear online sectors — the percentage of returns from its e-commerce business is close to zero.

While he continues to expand awareness for the brand, Ettinger sees his role in the industry as going beyond the confines of the company and is a keen supporter of British manufacturing and craftsmanship. A past chairman of the British Luggage and Leathersgoods Association, he is also active in the UK's Walpole association that promotes Britain's luxury companies from many different industries. He also provides direct mentoring through the Prince's Trust, QEST, the Queen Elizabeth Scholarship Trust, the charitable arm of the Royal Warrant Holder's Association (the company has held the warrant of the Prince of Wales since 1996), and Walpole Crafted to ensure young people develop the right business skills to support their talent. 🌐



Traditional bridle hide is made using a lengthy and natural process involving centuries old tanning pits and painstaking hand-finishing.



Very fine and thin leather can be folded and cut as precisely as the operative requires for the finished product.