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# Family affair

*With an international award and impressive distribution already under her belt, Missoma's Marisa Hordern now wants the brand to have an impact worldwide, as she tells Frances Murch*

Just five years ago, Marisa Hordern was working at the head office of a luxury goods group and making and selling bejewelled belts in her spare time. The idea of making a living from this hobby was a distant dream – until she got together with two other members of her family and decided to take the plunge and make jewellery full time. So, in 2004, Missoma (a combination of their three names) was created.

While none of the three have been formally trained in jewellery design and making, each of them brings their own passion and style to the business – Marisa's ex-Sotheby's sister Sophie has a background in the art world, while their mother Michele was involved in creative trades such as 18th century panelling work. "My sister is very contemporary and minimalist; Mum's designs are sophisticated," says Hordern. "Mine are more funky and commercial, probably because I front the brand and go to the trade shows, so I come back with buyers' feedback and know what's popular."

This complementary skill set obviously works – Hordern scooped the award for Young British Design Talent of the Year at November's inaugural Italian Jewellery Awards. From the beginning, she says, the design process has come to her fairly easily. "The hardest part was building the designs into stories and choosing which collections to focus on," she says. "At the beginning, the business took over sporadically and I felt like I was constantly trying to catch my own tail. It took a while for me to define the brand's style and my target customer."

Distribution has grown rapidly and Missoma is now sold in 17 countries worldwide, recently expanding into Asia. In the UK, stockists range from well-known department stores such as



Octopussy ring

*"Customers want fashionable, quality jewellery that they don't have to think twice about buying"*

Harrods, Harvey Nichols and Liberty through to independent retailers including Johnny Rocket and Rockoko and multiples such as Swag. "We've got a great representation in London and we're now just trying to follow that through and expand outside of the capital and outside of the UK," says Hordern.

One method of expansion has been the creation of Missoma's online store, which

launched in October. "This is the first time ever we have worked on the retail side, going direct to our clientele, which is really exciting," she says. "Until then, we had just been wholesaling, and lots of our stockists would just buy the statement earrings or rings – we can now bring the complete story to the public and keep the jewellery in the stories they were designed to be displayed in. People didn't realise our ranges were so large."

Missoma's jewellery collections offer a range of styles to suit different customers, a mix of soft and directional lines. The spring/summer 2009 line included the sunray-inspired Apollo, the geometric shapes of Stella and the organic, sophisticated Octopussy.

Although still a work in progress, Hordern hints that autumn/winter will include motifs of thorns, lightning and snakes. "The serpent look is always so fashionable," she says, "but this is a new take on the snake. It will be more spiky and reptilian."

Missoma's on-trend collections sit alongside the brand's classic Hot Rox collection of hoops and candy-coloured stones, celebrity fans of which include Jennifer Lopez, who wore the hoops on the cover of *Elle* magazine. "We always try to evolve our style, but it's important for us to have a constant that customers know us for too. Our jewellery falls between fashion and fine, so it was a difficult market at the beginning, but now people know Missoma for its designs, bold colours and reasonable price points so we find retailers are approaching us more and more."

Most of the jewellery retails for less than £200 and Hordern says the price point is something she considers carefully. "We wanted to produce jewellery that's fun and directional but affordable too," she says. "Customers want

Cuff from the Stella collection



These Rox earrings feature interchangeable gemstones



Hoop earrings from Missoma's signature Rox collection

fashionable, quality jewellery that they don't have to think twice about buying." And she insists that affordability doesn't have to compromise quality – the jewellery is 18ct gold vermeil, set with hand-sourced natural gemstones.

Following the relaunch of Missoma's website in October, the company has undergone a complete rebranding process. Hordern says: "We have worked really hard to develop a new brand identity, something that we can be proud of that really showcases the look of the jewellery. You can have the most beautiful product, but if your marketing isn't right, it doesn't count for anything."

The new website includes style tips on how to wear the pieces and shows the jewellery from different angles. The logo and packaging have been updated and the next step is a revision of the trade show image to reflect the new brand. "We're now starting to be known, particularly in the UK, so it's all about building brand awareness," says Hordern.

She acknowledges that 2009 is going to be a challenging year economically, but says opportunities are out there. "We all expect this year to be flat, but saying that, we've had some

great orders so far, including adding Fortnum & Mason as a new stockist. But it is going to be difficult is to build up new business – that's why we're so excited to have the new online platform."

The aspirational style of the new collection, she says, is ideal for tough economic times, with its stacking rings and hoop earrings featuring interchangeable gemstones. "In this market, you've got to be creative and cater to what the audience wants right now, which is value for money." She insists it doesn't have to be doom and gloom as long as companies adapt to suit the market. "Customers are just going to buy more conservatively and you've got to expect that. You've got to look more carefully at marketing. Any brand that sees out the year will be stronger for it. We'll be cautious but you don't need to be pessimistic – just realistic."

For Hordern, this means looking at further international expansion. "I want to take what Missoma has in London and make sure it translates in cities such as Rome and Paris," she says. "I want it to be recognised outside the UK in the same way as it is here. At the moment, Missoma is an undiscovered little gem." ❏



## Retail facts

In 2009, Missoma will be exhibiting at IJL, London Fashion Week and Paris Fashion Week.

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