

## INTERVIEW

## IAN BERGIN



Ian Bergin was originally brought in to develop a full Barbour menswear offer for the global marketplace. Five years down the line, it's clear he's done a pretty fine job. Tom Bottomley discovers how he set about the task, and what to expect from the brand in the future.

**Tom Bottomley: What changes have you made since joining Barbour five years ago?**

Ian Bergin: One of the key reasons why I was originally brought in was to build a brand from the outerwear. The clothing that was being produced at the time wasn't really at the standard that it needed to be. Then it was about properly segmenting the line in terms of who we were actually selling to. We wanted to broaden the appeal of the brand, so we could sell all year around and around the world, and more than just outerwear for men and women. But if you have to explain something too much to a customer, you've lost them straight away. If you try to give them too many messages they will just turn off. So the message has to be consistent, and dividing the offer up as we have has made things a lot clearer.

**TB: How did you go about making those changes?**

IB: Although the range has got bigger, what I've tried to do is simplify things a bit. It was about looking at what Barbour stands for, because it has a certain DNA. Waxing, quilting, corduroy, tartan, an angled pocket on the International jacket, hand-warmer pockets on the country jackets – all key components of what the brand is about. So it was about building the range out from that and making sure everything we do looks and feels like it's Barbour. It needs to fit with the brand, even in other product categories. Without going down a cul-de-sac of trying to make everything look like the jackets in some way, it just needs to be a good fit with those jackets. We're quite a commercial

company too, because we've always been about providing value for people. It's not exclusive; it's inclusive as a business. There needs to be enough of a range with the right quality, but it also needs to be so people can buy into it at the right price levels. We know our place in the market, but with three Royal warrants on the label we have to have a certain standard. We're careful how we make stuff and where we make it.

**TB: Is knitwear now another key area?**

IB: Yes, that would be our biggest area outside of the outerwear. We're now doing weatherproof knitwear too, which is Teflon coated with C6 technology so it's a bit more environmentally friendly. As a brand, that kind of weatherproof element is our point of difference. We can build a whole portfolio of products, but a lot of them dovetail into that kind of rugged weatherproof side. That's important for us. There's a certain design simplicity about Barbour. Every time I go and look at Belstaff, it just looks a bit too polished to me, a bit too Italian. Barbour has that quite nice ruggedness about it. It comes from our industrial past, really: mining, shipbuilding, fishing, coastal work and so on.

**TB: Have you given the brand more of a fashion appeal as well?**

IB: Well, it's funny in that the highest 'fashion' accounts we have, such as a lot of the stores in Japan like Beams, SHIPS and United Arrows, and the higher grade stores in the UK, they all quite like the classic Barbour look but they want it to fit well. So we developed a number of fits, such as our SL fit which is slimline. That was originally developed for the Japanese market. You can put any of the classic styles in that fit and it looks appropriate for a modern consumer. Then we have our tailored fit, where the garments are articulated and shaped. It makes it very flattering when you put it on. It fits in all the right places. The classic offer is a bit more roomy, so you can get garments underneath.

**TB: Are accessories another growth area for the brand?**

IB: Accessories now represent about 10 per cent

of our sales, and that is certainly an area we are seeing strong growth in. Most of the accessories sales are unisex, like the bags and scarves.

**TB: How would you define the different Barbour offers?**

IB: We've got Barbour International and we've got Barbour. One's about motorcycling, and one's about country and coastal wear really. Within Barbour, it's like a triangle, and right at the top of that you've got Beacon Heritage, which is our experimental area where we do collaborations with designers, such as what we've done in the past with Tokihito Yoshida and Norton & Sons, and more recently with White Mountaineering. It's about bringing in a fresh pair of eyes and doing things that we wouldn't have thought of ourselves – throwing a different angle at what we do. Then in the other two corners you have the 'heritage' line, which was originally brought in to attract younger consumers to the brand, and then the 'lifestyle' collection, which is for a slightly older customer. Then, sitting just under that, is the classic and countrywear. Barbour has always been a brand for everybody.

**TB: Are you still continuing with the Steve McQueen line within the Barbour International motorcycle-inspired offer?**

IB: Yes, we are carrying on with that. It's something we thought we'd originally give two to four seasons, as special editions, but it's just proved lastingly popular in all markets. We do that through an agency called Green Light that's run by Chad McQueen, his son. He generally does sign off all the designs. Initially I thought it would appeal to a slightly older customer who would know about Steve McQueen, and who would aspire to that kind of understated coolness that he had. But it seems to appeal to a whole range of people really. We subtly brand it with his name and do some replica pieces, as well as T-shirts which offer an easy way to buy in to it. We also do a capsule collaboration collection with Triumph now, so we've got an

image of Steve McQueen wearing a Barbour jacket sitting on a Triumph bike. These are all images we had, so it seemed pretty common sense to put all that together.

**TB: How has presenting for London Collections: Men been received?**

IB: The first time we did it was with our collaboration collection with White Mountaineering last season, as well as with our 'heritage' line, and it was really well received. It surprised us to see the amount of international press coverage we got. We've just done our second time, an informal presentation at the Swiss church on Endell Street in Covent Garden, and it's becoming very important as a global showcase, and a good way of giving a snapshot of what we're doing for certain more relevant collections within our offer. It shows we're still relevant to that kind of consumer.

**TB: Was there anything particularly new you unveiled this time?**

IB: Brand new is our new Night Watch concept line, which sits together with Beacon Heritage. It's all based on lighthouse men. Every garment is named after the eight bells of the night watch. It's a very simple collection and it's all black, using Blackwatch tartan in the linings. It's all based around some great images from our archive.

**TB: Are there any plans to introduce some more technical pieces in to the Barbour offer?**

IB: That's something that is quite close to our hearts in the design team. We have had a reasonable amount of success with doing some seam-sealed and very simple, almost skeletal versions of our jackets in waterproof fabrics. In terms of 'waterproof breathables' in general, we see that as a real opportunity for Barbour. It's a good fit for us, and we're really looking in to developing that concept and how we can gain traction in that area of the market for s/s 17, and then more forcefully for a/w 17. It will have a real category focus going forward.

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DIRECTOR OF MENSWEAR  
BARBOUR