

From Knutsford to Mayfair

Steven Dalton's decision to establish his own interior design business came in response to time's irresistible march



Photo by Fiona Bailey

Interior designer Steven Dalton, in his Cheshire office



Photo by Victor Zastol'skiy

RECENT research has shown that turning 29 is a watershed event in the lives of many an entrepreneur, who realises that settling into a groove, no matter how comfortable, isn't what they really want from life. It was just this realisation of a 'now or never' moment that drove Steven Dalton to establish his own interior design business, despite being perfectly happy just where he was.

Steven, who set up offices in Knutsford in 2014, started his working life with Hoopers, in Carlisle, where his role as Homewares Manager inspired him to undertake a degree in interior design, in his own time. Armed and ready to go, he moved to Cheshire to join a well-established commercial interiors company, where he joined a team of experienced and inspiring professional.

'I really enjoyed my first role in interior design,' Steven tells me. 'I worked on some great projects, including the interior for Mr Cooper's Home and Garden restaurant and bar at The Midland Hotel. This was a truly collaborative project, with a real mix of skills and imagination and the results are outstanding.'



Drawing room in Chester

'I was quite happy, but as I turned 29, I realised that if I wanted to establish myself as an interior designer in my own right then it needed to be now. If I didn't it would be very easy to settle for the regular wage and the comfortable environment I was enjoying and never leave. In March 2014 I handed in my notice and I was set up and ready to go by the October.

'I was very lucky, through word of mouth via my friends I had three clients already keen to work with me; indeed, three years later and I am still working my way room by room through one of these houses, as my client's time and budget allows.'

Word continued to spread and Steven soon found himself building a strong business across Cheshire. I asked why he thinks he's achieved this.

'I spend a lot of time talking to clients, learning who they are and how they live in their home. These very close and personal interactions really make the difference, I think. You have to build a relationship; they're trusting you with their home and their money.

'I love domestic interior design for this very

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reason. A home is a very intimate space and taking someone's home and changing the way they see it and live in it can be a profound experience for many of my clients.

'When doing a commercial space you don't get to build a relationship with the end-user, or even often the owner. I missed this opportunity to get to know my clients. I do still take on commercial briefs and have had some wonderful experiences working on boutique hotels recently, but working with the people who are going to live every day in the space I have designed is very exciting.'

Having spent some time in Steven's company myself, I can see how he engenders these vital relationships. He's genuine, sweet and funny and delightful company. Two of Steven's Cheshire-based clients asked him to work on their London homes, which led to him building a network in the capital.

'A chance meeting with a very talented interiors architect led to an introduction to a very high-end estate agent, who specialises in properties upwards of £30m in value. He asked me to take on properties that need to be taken ▶

HOMES & INTERIORS

back to a more neutral, but still very luxurious, style, to open their appeal to a wider market. My first property, on Eaton Square, was on the market for £42m. This job led to me being asked to undertake the redesign of an apartment in Washington DC and directly into a huge decision for me – to open an office in Mayfair.

‘This all means that at the moment I’m hugely busy! I do have an occasional panic but then I know I’m doing the right thing, so I calm down and simply get on with it.

‘At the moment it’s just me doing the interior designs. While I am happy to hand over marketing or accounts to a specialist, the thought of handing over my design briefs to another designer...I can’t contemplate that just yet! Until I’m ready for that I shall be strictly controlling my time and only taking on projects I know I can dedicate my time to properly.’

Does his burgeoning career in London, and even overseas, spell the death knell for his Cheshire office, I wonder?

‘Absolutely not! Cheshire is my home; this is where I live and will always live. I have a great customer base in Cheshire; I have become friends with many clients and many come back to me again or are still referring me to their friends.’

Steven offers a mix of services to fit in with his clients’ needs and their varying needs at different times.

‘I offer a full design service, of course, but also I offer a staging service, for when people want to sell their home. I can do a whole home design, or room by room. I also do staging for celebrations – Christmas, weddings, parties;



Photo by Zhu Difeng

Above: Marble and cedar bathroom in Primrose Hill

that’s always fun! Going forward I envisage launching an e-design service, via phone and email, where I can offer a bit of inspiration, give people a steer in the right direction. Not all people have big budgets or big homes, but interior design can work on many levels – I can advise about colours, links to retailers so they can buy each element themselves and manage their budgets.’

It seems that Steven has an insatiable appetite for pushing himself to offer the ultimate service to all his clients, no matter where they are.

‘I never imagined when I started, that I’d take myself here,’ he says. ‘I always wanted to differentiate myself, never be run-of-the-mill. I take this attitude into everything I do.’

I think it’s safe to say he’s achieved this; we can only wait and see what more lies ahead. Hitting 39 could be a very big year... ♦

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Below: Contemporary kitchen in Alderley Edge



Photo by Alexandre Zweijger