

JEWELRY

How Goldsmiths' Centre is keeping artisanship alive through education, outreach

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Exterior of Goldsmiths' Centre. Image credit: Goldsmiths' Centre

By SARAH JONES

NEW YORK London-based The Goldsmiths' Company is responding to the changing educational and training landscape in the United Kingdom with a charity centered on preserving and developing craftsmanship.

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In keynote at Initiatives in Arts and Culture's Gold Conference on April 4, an executive from the Goldsmiths' Centre shared the story of how the independent nonprofit came to be. Focusing on the pillars of creativity, craftsmanship and community, the organization is aiming to both set the next generation up for success and change public perception of the jewelry business and craftsmanship.

"We're at a really interesting time because consumers have changed," said Chris Oliver, head of professional training for **the Goldsmiths' Centre**. "And I think some of the work we've done around our business training is really important for that.

"We've all probably got a few four-figure phones in our pockets and tablets on our laps, and the idea of purchasing something like that, which could be outdated in six months, doesn't phase anyone," he said. "People queue around the block at the Apple store to get whatever number we're one right now. That same value is not applied to craft.

"But we can help that You take the car to the garage and they tell you it's \$800 for a repair, you assume they're experts and go, 'Absolutely, where do I sign?' As a jeweler when someone comes to you and goes, 'Why is that \$4,000?' We're embarrassed to go, 'That's blood, sweat and tears in there, my friend.'

"We have to educate the consumer. We can't force them to change."

Community center

Goldsmiths' Company is one of the main livery companies in the United Kingdom. While these firms are ancient, there are written records that date back to the 11th century.

In addition to preserving craft, the guilds were designed to help regulate worker conditions such as wages.

Traditionally, workers would enter the trade by completing an apprenticeship with a master, after which they would be free to go into business.

In the 1890s, the livery company founded what would become Goldsmiths' College in Newcross, marking more of a direct intervention into the trade.

Later, Goldsmiths' Company set up other initiatives such as Goldsmiths' Fair, a showcase of both established and emerging jewelers held at Goldsmiths' Hall.

In 2005, Goldsmiths' Company bought the land that would later become Goldsmiths' Centre, and two years later it founded the charity of the same name.

The building of Goldsmiths' Centre was funded by the sale of a piece of land left to the guild in the 1500s.

Opened in 2012, Goldsmiths' Centre today houses three floors of workshops and educational training space. Looking to bring members of the community in, the building also houses an exhibition space and a caf.

The educational curriculum at the center is focused on smaller class sizes, in an effort to combat what the organization saw as a market failure in higher education.

Prior to the 1990s, the United Kingdom used to have largely free university tuition, but as students were asked to begin paying for school, they became more demanding. Schools also began to look at enrollment from a business perspective, as attendee numbers determined financial stability, leading to bigger classes.

Taking a more intimate approach, Goldsmiths' Centre workshops are designed to house a maximum of 10 students.

A Foundation Programme takes 16- to 19-year-olds and teaches them about craft for an entire academic year, bringing in industry professionals as lecturers. In addition to helping students learn, the course and interactions with the center provide parents with the understanding that jewelry making can be a career.

[View this post on Instagram](#)

Our Foundation Programme course prepares young people for career in the jewellery, silversmithing & allied industries. This is year-long course where young people are taught traditional techniques, such as fine jewellery making, silversmithing & stone setting, alongside contemporary processes such as Computer Aided Design (CAD). Participants graduate with hand skills, which can enable you to become an apprentice, possibly through the prestigious @thegoldsmithscompany Apprenticeship scheme. To be eligible for this course you must be aged 16-19. Click the link in the bio for more info + guidance on how to apply. This is a FREE course that can lead to an apprenticeship or higher education. Julia Skupny #thegoldsmithscentre #silversmith #jeweller #jewellery #craft #Farringdon #courses #careers #apprenticeships #cityandguilds

A post shared by The Goldsmiths' Centre (@gsmithscentre) on Apr 6, 2019 at 4:22am PDT

Instagram post from The Goldsmiths' Centre

Older would-be jewelers can apply for an apprenticeship, where they are paired with a working jeweler. At the end of the program, the apprentices present a masterpiece to gain their freedom, continuing tradition.

Creating a cyclical training program, a number of former apprentices are now taking on mentorship roles.

For recent university graduates, the center has a course that allows them to both learn and network, providing a platform for success after college.

Emerging jewelers can also take advantage of a yearlong course on business development, which will help them develop a three-year plan for their company.

Those who work in the field can also attend short courses in business or technical skills at Goldsmiths' Centre, continuing their education.

Beyond supporting jewelers, the nonprofit aims to change the perception of the industry through events and exhibitions, such as discussions.

Trade tactics

To preserve the jewelry industry's prosperity, brands will have to remove the stigma of being a laborer and entice more young artisans to make fine jewelry.

In a panel at the 2018 Initiatives in Art and Culture's Gold Conference, speakers from across the jewelry industry talked about the need to recruit more artisans and craftsmen, the people who actually make the jewelry, in addition to designers. Many people seek to enter the jewelry business only to design, but craftsmen are just as, if not more, vital due to the complex knowledge needed to properly manufacture jewelry ([see story](#)).

British luxury organization Walpole championed the role of craftsmen in the luxury industry with a program that gave business guidance to artisan entrepreneurs.

The 2015 Walpole Crafted program, presented in partnership with patron Vacheron Constantin and in association with Fortnum & Mason, gave up to 12 individuals or businesses access to mentors and educational workshops designed to help them scale their business. While the luxury industry prides itself on the handwork that goes into its products, technology is displacing traditional production in many mainstream companies, making this type of program a necessary platform to preserve the craft and profitability of independent makers ([see story](#)).

"We have [the apprentices] working towards a City and Guild Level 4 Professional Recognition Award," Mr. Oliver said. "This particular qualification is aimed at helping an individual understand the level of professionalism they're working at. It's not related to their craft—their masterpiece looks at their craft."

"What we want to instill is a sense of achievement," he said. "In the U.K., academic and vocational learning are not still on an even keel, so actually encouraging our apprentices to view themselves as professional, to understand actually that this is a career they've set upon, and how they interpret themselves might have a role in how they are presented to the world."

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