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Village Vanguard

Accessories maven Anya Hindmarch creates a London retail empire, one unique shop at a time

By Sahar Khan

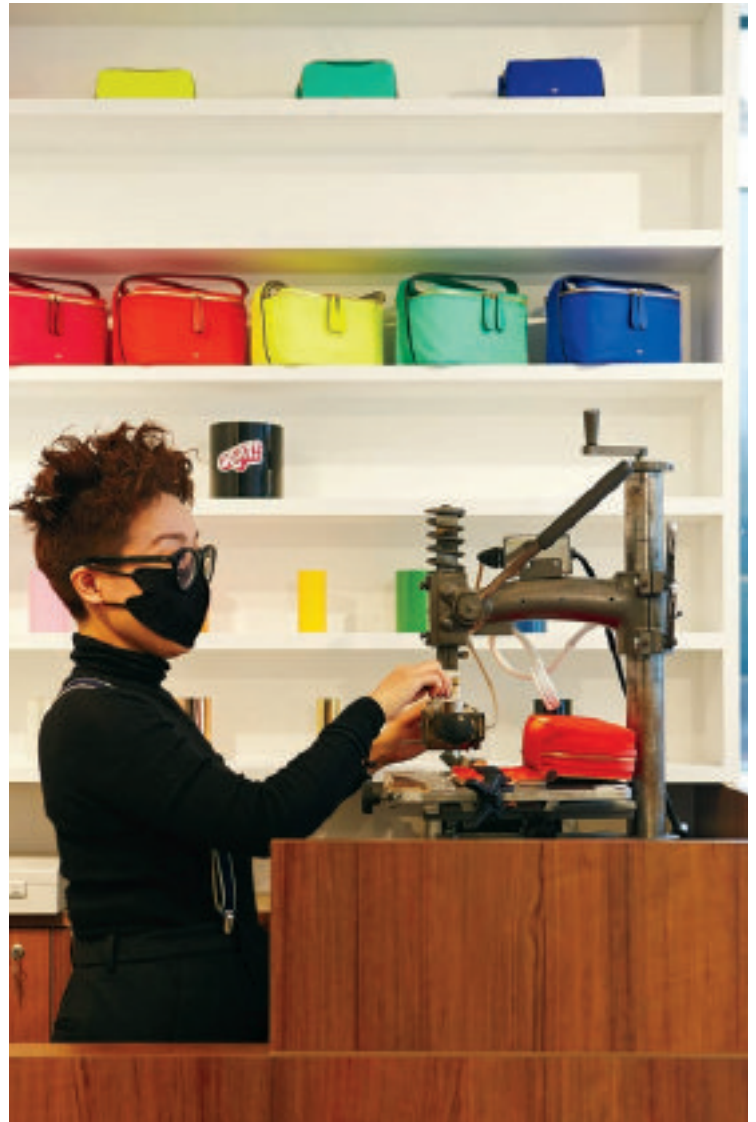
In 2019, Anya Hindmarch, the British accessories designer known for tongue-in-cheek pieces beloved by Princess Diana and Kendall Jenner alike, found herself disenchanted with the homogenization of branded stores worldwide. She had recently bought back half of the company she'd sold in 2011 and wanted to restructure the business. Her first

step was to shutter 45 of the 65 Anya Hindmarch boutiques around the world to refocus on online sales, but she also wanted to make the in-person shopping experience in the remaining brick-and-mortar stores more special.

"I wanted to go back to local overglobal," says Hindmarch,

54, who this year celebrated 35 years in business. Chatting on Zoom from her London townhouse, the designer exudes effortless chic in a "very, very old" gray Acne Studios blazer, white Alex Eagle tee, and Raey jeans. Her grandfather's watch encircles her wrist, and her long

Above:
Anya Hindmarch
outside of
The Village's
Anya Café



blond locks frame thick black eyeglasses from a dearly departed, under-the-radar store in Paris. “I loved that I could only find that lovely thing there,” she says.

This emphasis on one-of-a-kind finds led to the birth of The Village, a cluster of Anya Hindmarch-branded stores that opened in spring 2021 on tony Pont Street, in London’s Chelsea.



Among those are the Bespoke store, which offers custom-embossed accessories, and Anya Café, where members of the Household Cavalry from nearby Buckingham Palace often come in for tea and “park their horses like ‘Boris bikes.’” Hindmarch says. The sixth outlet at The Village—the World’s Smallest Department Store—is slated to open soon, featuring a variety of limited-edition

lifestyle products (pajamas, handkerchiefs) you won’t find elsewhere. “That’s what excites me about shopping,” Hindmarch says.

“When I can go, *Oh my god, I found this funny something*, and then it has a story, as opposed to being the same as everything else.”

Hindmarch has always had a knack for highlighting the unique. She founded her brand in 1987 at the age of 18, initially making bags inspired by a secondhand Gucci leather duffel she’d found in Florence. She soon gained a loyal following that included Princess Diana, who used to call Hindmarch’s clutches “cleavage bags” because she used them to cover herself when exiting cars.

The designer’s most famous bag came in 2007, when, disturbed by the vast amounts of plastic waste accumulating

Clockwise from top left: a table at Anya Café; customizing a bag at The Village’s Labelled Shop; Filing Cabinet pouches from The Labelled Shop



worldwide, she launched the I'm Not a Plastic Bag reusable tote. As many as 80,000 people lined up to purchase one on release day, and the national debate



the bags started eventually helped lead to the U.K. requiring stores to charge customers 10 pence per plastic bag. By 2010, the U.K. had reduced its usage of plastic bags by an estimated 4.5 billion per year.

Hindmarch stays true to her environmental conscience with her latest collection of bags, Return to Nature; each natural leather clutch, tote, and crossbody is fully biodegradable at the end of its lifecycle. They're available at The Plastic Shop in The Village, along with other sustainable items, including the I Am a Plastic Bag, which launched in 2020 and is made of 32 half-liter recycled plastic bottles and coated with recycled windscreens. (The goal is to keep

plastic in circulation and out of the landfills.) "It was quite groundbreaking but also beautiful," Hindmarch says.

"Sustainable doesn't need to be too 'hair shirt'; it can still be lovely."

Many would rest on laurels as impressive as Hindmarch's—in 2017, she was named a Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire—but she has no such plans. "I love being creative," she says. "I love building a company. I like having a group of people I like being with every day, and conquering the world with what we do. That's fun, right?"



Clockwise from above: The Plastic Shop; the I'm Not a Plastic Bag tote; cute snacks and coffee at Anya Café