

BENJAMIN JOHN HALL

Shoe Designer

WITH AN INSPIRATIONAL ASPIRATION TO TREAD A PATH THAT IS HIS OWN, GRADUATE SHOE DESIGNER BENJAMIN JOHN HALL IS CERTAINLY NOT AFRAID TO CONSTANTLY EXPERIMENT IN EXPLORING VARIOUS INNOVATIVE FOOTWEAR DESIGNS THAT QUITE FRANKLY, MESMERIZE. WITH ADMIRATION FOR PEOPLE WHO DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY, BENJAMIN HAS CHANNELLED THIS ATTITUDE, THEREFORE DESIGNING CREATIONS THAT ARE COMPLETELY INGENIOUS THAT NO ONE ELSE WOULD EVER CHALLENGE TO ENDEAVOUR.



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Photography by Paul PHUNG
Words by Katie FARLEY

Your footwear creations are certainly exceptional pieces of art. Is it your aim to push the boundaries of shoe design, crafting styles that seriously stun?
Thank you. Absolutely. I've been making shoes from the age of about 19 so it's only natural that my practice should evolve and become more advanced. Our studio is more like a research lab than a design studio, we're constantly experimenting to find new things. This way of working is extremely laborious but we do it anyway because it's our passion.

You were originally fascinated by the way a skateboarding shoe evolved into a highly functional fit for a purpose product. Explain how this unusual approach into footwear transported you into a career of shoe designing.
As a teenager I skateboarded at the Southbank every weekend. This was a time when skateboarding brands such as DC/ Globe/ Etnies were all evolving at a rapid pace. They began to design shoes more seriously, like Nike might design a running shoe but for skateboarding, so the shoes started having rubber protective sections, padding and air cushioning. This was interesting to me to see the shoes change and directly enhance my performance. This was my initial interest in shoes along with the connotations of allegiance different types of footwear give to various subcultures. Shoes say a lot.

Where do you draw your innovative inspiration?
I admire people that do things differently, most of us have financial constraints that dictate how we live and to an extent the work we do. I value people that dare to and are willing to embrace the sacrifices needed to tread a different path. My hero's are artists like Stelarc and Philippe Petit, not so much shoe designers. I guess my inspiration is a desire to tread a path that is my own.

An award-winning couture collection of yours entitled 'Birth, Life, Death and Resurrection' consists of seven pieces that are handmade 'functioning' footwear designs. What stirred you to produce such a unique anthology of works?
BLD&R began as a collaboration with the fashion designer Alexandra Groover and grew from there. It's an existential project, which stems from an interest in our differing attitudes surrounding the subject matter. Attitudes based on culture, religion, age, belief, location, spirituality etc.... The shoes themselves 'function', or operate to replicate processes represented in BLD&R. The work is open to interpretation.

It has to be said; your designs translate into astonishing futuristic works of art. What type of person do you have in mind when designing these certain styles?
We don't really work in that way at the studio, we don't do consumer profiling, with this type of work in particular, and to be honest I don't really care who wears them at all. I see this work as more of an expression than a commercial commodity.

From commercial design work to experimental processes, your broad spectrum within the footwear industry is diverse. Which avenue of works do you take most pleasure in, and why?
We do many different things in the studio, all footwear related. I think what I value the most is to have been able to create a work environment where we have the time, the skill and the resources to produce work we think is good. We have high standards and high expectations and it's not always easy to maintain that.

Throughout your career, you have achieved multiple awards for your groundbreaking works. Which honor is most important to you, and why?
Probably the International Design Award (ITS YKK) I won in 2012. At the early stage of the competition you're asked to submit a proposal. Kei Kagami, the competition mentor (a designer I do respect), actually asked me if the initial (rushed) proposal I'd made was a joke, as it was so poor in relation to my other work. So the gauntlet was set and my new proposal, a concept called 'fire lasting', won the award. This was important to me, as I graduated some time ago and had entered the competition to test myself. I thought I could win and I was right.

You teach actual shoemaking and also design at Central Saint Martins. Do you feel you would like to continue educating students who aspire to emulate you and your style of works for years to come?
Sure, I love teaching. I wouldn't say they try to emulate me, ha! But yes they are the future and it's nice to help steer their ship in the right direction.

Where do you believe your pioneering design success will lead you in the future?
At the moment we are teaching residents at a homeless shelter in Camden to make shoes (Arlington x Benjamin John Hall). It's a fantastic social project that has taken about a year and a half to get off the ground because of the delicate people involved. We're also making a new body of work for a live demo at the re-launch of the Fashion Space Gallery at the London College of Fashion.
The future, I don't know, but I'm sure it will be good, I hope.