



building your brand with...

CHIARA PERANO

A love of lettering led Chiara to launch her own illustrated calligraphy business. We sat down to find out her creative secrets

Words: **JUDY DARLEY** Photographs: **INGRID RASMUSSEN**

After falling in love with typography as a child, Chiara Perano studied illustration and design at University of the Arts London, before developing her hand lettering further by training herself in the art of calligraphy.

After spending seven years working in the design industry, she launched Lamplighter London in 2012. She creates ornate calligraphy-based artwork, often used as a finishing touch at events ranging from weddings to fashion shows. Notable clients to date have included Nike, Nescafé, Dolce

Gusto, Jimmy Choo, Superdrug, Katharine Pooley, Selfridges, Cath Kidston, and Dove, not to mention members of the Greek Royal Family.

Today Chiara's small team is based at the Hackney Downs Studio in East London, where she admits to surrounding herself with enough creative materials to open a small art shop. We stopped by for a chat about her literary inspiration, the challenges of balancing the creative and practical sides of her role, and how she built her passion into a shining indie brand.



What drew you to train as an illustrator and designer?

Drawing has made me happy for as long as I can remember. As a child I illustrated stories written on a beloved typewriter, made birthday cards, did patterns on my nails – that kind of thing! One summer holiday, around 1996, I made an entire magazine by hand (pre computer), with drawings instead of photographs, featuring lots of bubble writing. I've been learning ever since.

What attracted you to calligraphy?

I love type, lettering and illustration, and calligraphy is an art form in itself, so I was excited to start learning a few years ago. It's harder than it looks so I'm constantly improving my styles, developing my technique and exploring new angles. The word calligraphy derives from the Greek kalligrafos, meaning 'to write beautifully', which obviously appeals to me.

How did this lead you to launch Lamplighter London?

I started the business with the aim of offering an extra-special stationery destination for people wanting creative illustrated paper goods to celebrate events. Calligraphy is a major part of this, and I personalise everything for my clients. I offer a fully bespoke design service, adding



in extras such as luxury print finishes, handmade envelopes, wax seals, ribbons, stamps, illustrations, all the way through to signage and 'on the day' stationery.

Can you tell us about the inspiration behind the company name?

Lamplighter was my favourite poem from a book by Robert Louis Stevenson that my mum and I used to read together when I was growing up. It's called *A Child's Garden of Verses* and our copy belonged to my nana, and has her name written in the

front from when she was a child in 1938. It's very special to us.

What were the major challenges in the early days?

Oh gosh, many! Getting my business hat on; reaching out to new clients; keeping on top of admin, records and invoicing were my main challenges. My chinks lie more in the business side of things – I'm a creative brain with big ambitions, so I've really had to get to grips with the admin, whilst managing a full time creative role. »

INTRODUCING tea & a chat

'Drawing has made me feel happy for as long as I can remember.'



01 Chiara's East London studio featuring her marble prints, botanics, vintage treasures – and boxes upon boxes of stationery.

02 Writing with an oblique pen holder in handmade neon pink ink.

03 A gorgeous array of bespoke wedding stationery and lined envelopes.



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01 Chiara's stippled bird artwork made from thousands of ink dots.
 02 Shimmering gold, copper and silver metallic inks – popular with this year's brides.
 03 Painting a 'selfie mural' at the Most Curious Wedding Fair in East London earlier this year.



PHOTOGRAPH: CHIARA PERANO
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How has the business developed since?
 Enormously. I run my own modern calligraphy workshops in London now; I'm working with some phenomenal clients on bespoke artwork and calligraphy jobs; I have stationery products soon to launch, and my modern calligraphy book, *Nib & Ink*, is coming out early 2016.

How did you go about attracting such a variety of notable clients?
 I didn't have a black book of contacts, I just tried to brand Lamplighter well, and worked really hard at making every job extra special. It paid off, and the business has grown through word of mouth.

What do you enjoy most about work?
 I'm a creative at heart so I absolutely love working on an exciting brief, and there's nothing better than a client coming back to me after the first round of design directions to say they love it. I'm also quite entrepreneurial, so I really enjoy working on innovative, fun projects and events, and developing the newer sides of my business, such as products and workshops.

Tell us about your workspace.
 It's mostly monochrome with pops of colour and botanical greenery. There's



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usually music playing. I'm surrounded by envelopes, ribbon, tapes, strings, pens, paints, and all coloured paper, samples, marbling... You name it I can probably dig some out.

How would you describe your style?
 In work, I don't necessarily conform to a category – I'd say quite clean and fresh, balanced with natural influences, old charm quirks and luxe finishes. In my personal style I like to juxtapose – a blouse and DMs; long plaits and biker jacket;

always in jeans, mostly in monochrome, maybe with a flower in my hair!

Which books and magazines are currently on your bedside table?
 I've acquired an enormous unread stack – the last three issues of *Kinfolk*, *Not That Kind of Girl*, *Just Kids*, *The Alchemist*, various *Wallpaper** city guides, plus a couple of spiritual and green living titles and some craft business books I've brought home from the studio. I look at them every single day willing myself time to read them. »

'I tried to brand the business well and to make every job extra special.'



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01 The gorgeous light in Chiara's sunny studio is ideal for photographing product and Instagram pics.

02 Copper, neon and patterned tapes, used to wrap client's packages.
 03 Teaching at a modern calligraphy workshop this year.

PHOTOGRAPH: LAURA MCCUSKEY



01 Calligraphy styles and handmade envelopes make a great wall feature.

02 Chiara's fun handmade inks will soon be available to buy from Lamplighter London's website.



Chiara Perano
Lamplighter London, Chiara's business, specialises in ornate calligraphy-based artwork. Catch her in action at The Handmade Fair from 18 September, where she'll be teaching Kirstie Allsopp about calligraphy. See page 94 for more info. www.lamplighterlondon.com



How does your creative process work?

I have a notebook on me at all times, and I print out or hand write my briefs to let them sink in. When I make digital type files for clients, I write them out first – in pencil then in ink – before I scan in and edit, so I still have a huge stack of handwritten words and names that ended up as vectorised finished pieces. I can't throw them away! I do use online resources, mainly to research a subject matter and gather ideas before working on the brief more organically with pen and paper.

What projects are you currently working on?

Well my newest and most exciting baby is my book *Nib & Ink*, which is in the early design stages and is going to need a lot of love and nurture! I'm also working on my Lamplighter products (think coloured inks, practise pads and stationery), planning hand-written craft workshops across London, and at the same time wrapping up all my summer wedding clients. It's a very exciting time.

Finally, what's the best piece of creative advice you've been given?

Someone once said to me "We have the most perfect colour palette in nature" and it really stuck with me. 🍷