

# Profile



## Peregrine poised to make noise in 2012

Peregrine is a brand that was born in the 50s out of old-school UK knitwear manufacturer JG Glover & Co. It's another of those forgotten-about gems of British garment production that eighth-generation family member Tom Glover is now resurrecting with passion, reports Tom Bottomley.

Another one has been unearthed. A heritage British brand that is, that's due some recognition, respect and interest from a new generation of customers. It goes by the name of Peregrine, a brand name devised in 1956 by JG Glover & Co – originally a hand frame knitters set up in 1796 by one Tom Glover.

The current managing director of Peregrine is also called Tom Glover – the eight generation of the Glover family to take on the running of the business. “I took over the business in 2003, and we've been manufacturing again in England for the last six or seven years,” he says. “But we're really trying to promote the Peregrine brand again as interest in heritage labels is so huge right now.”

Of the business, Glover says, “We've been making for the likes of Wolsey, John Lewis and Celtic Sheepskin, but now we want to get our own name out there again, as it once was. We've been doing quite well overseas, particularly in the US and Japan, but now the UK market is showing more interest in us.”

Peregrine's UK distribution is currently

relatively small, supplying around 50 accounts around the country. “At the moment we're in more Country Living type accounts, and we did a winter Sloane Ranger inspired range for John Lewis that they promoted well,” says design graduate Glover, who designs most of the collection, bringing in freelance designers at times. “But I am trying to move us more into the fashion end of the market going forward, and I've taken on more agents in order to get us into the right accounts. It's where we should be.”

Because heritage is, as Glover puts it, “back in a big way”, what was Peregrine's classic crew neck Aran jumper is now back on-trend. “We've made that jumper for over 50 years,” he says. “They absolutely love it in Iceland!”

The Peregrine brand was established by Tom Glover's grandfather, Donald, but it had been “sitting dormant” for a couple of years before Tom went into the business and decided to re-light its fire in 2003. “The brand name came about because it was popular to use birds as brand symbols in the 50s, such as Lyle & Scott's flying eagle,” says Glover. “Or so I'm led to believe.”

He's very passionate about the family business, as the original factory in Leicester was very much etched into his upbringing. Unfortunately, that was sold in 1987. As manufacturers, they had been making for the likes of Bhs and the big department stores but, as has been so well documented, a massive percentage of UK production was shut down as cheaper costs from overseas were sought.

So, Tom's father, John, set up a small plant in Manchester, and they've been making there ever since, though they also make outerwear in a factory in Birmingham. In fact, everything is still made in the UK, another point of increased significance in today's market where higher-end quality and a reduced carbon footprint are rightly high on people's agenda. “We try to use as much British wool as we can, but we do a few more Merino wool knits now, only because it's softer,” says Glover. “We also use a lot of Harris Tweed and British Millerain.”

Both fabrics are high on the wishlist of buyers for this current winter and for a/w 12. “That's also a reason we've done well overseas, because they like to see Made in England,” says Glover. “It's nice to see it coming back, and what's interesting is that the likes of John Lewis are approaching us saying, “This is what we want – UK-manufactured products.” Isn't it funny how things come full circle?”

“I also think there is generally a lot more interest from people as to where garments are made, whereas previously – with such readily available throwaway fashion – no-one really cared,” says Glover. “For some of our garments, we even get the ladies in the factory to sign the swing tickets at the end of the factory line. It's a nice touch that the Japanese customers really appreciate. They can see who the garment was made by. It makes every garment personal. And we're trying to go that way more and more.”

Peregrine was originally just knitwear, but outerwear was added eight years ago. They had actually been supplying Barbour with their knitwear, and it was John who came up with the idea to dye the wool to match their waxed jackets. “That was when the old suede elbow-patch country jumper came out,” says Glover. “Then, in the US, our customers started asking for waxed jackets to go alongside our knitwear, so we started making waxed jackets from then on. We supply the likes of Orvis and Cabela's in the US – the bigger hunting, shooting and fishing type accounts. But we also



The Factory in 1902



The early days of JG Glover

now supply an increasing number of boutiques in New York.”

Peregrine will be showing at Moda next month, as well as Capsule in Berlin for the first time, with a big push for the UK planned for a/w 12. “There aren't too many manufacturers left in the UK, and I encourage people to come and have a look around the factory,” says Glover. “It's not the most glamorous place in the world, but I'm very proud of it.”

Glover took on a two-week pop-up showroom in London last November – with a window dressed like a shop – to give people a feel for the brand and to get some buyer reaction and press feedback as to what they're now doing. “The premises, at 10a Blandford Street, London W1, came about through a friend of a friend,” says Glover. “We were looking to do it as a pop-up shop for two weeks, but it was coming out too expensive to kit the whole thing out properly. We are, however, looking at taking on something else in this area (the Marylebone area is where Trunk and other more “destination” independents can be found in the West End) for a/w 12 for three months. We want to do a pop-up shop properly – with all the trimmings. There's just a nice feel to retail around there.”

Glover did actually open a small but permanent Peregrine shop in Bristol – where he currently lives – a year ago. The brand also has a permanent showroom there. “I like Bristol and always have done,” says Glover. “And we had a lot of customers down in the South West, so it made sense.” But Glover is not about to rush things, with himself and one other person along with 14 people in the factory, it's still a small family-run business. Having said that, he is certainly looking at slowly growing it, especially in light of turnover being 25 per cent up year-on-year for the past three years.

What will intrigue many UK retailers who stock the likes of Barbour, or who maybe can't, is Peregrine's keen price points. Especially when you consider that the product is indeed made in England – something that's supposed to be so crazily expensive to do these days. “We can be very competitive because we manufacture it ourselves,” says Glover. “The wholesale price of our British Millerain jackets is £60, to retail at £160.” He does say, however, prices are likely to go up this year, particular in light of wool prices. That shouldn't create too much of a problem, though, as Peregrine wool jumpers currently wholesale at just £20, to retail at around £69. “I've even had own-label customers asking me to make something specific for them and, when I've costed it up, it's been less than they've been paying to have it made in China,” says Glover. Perhaps a myth exposed there then. Own-label currently only consists of around 15 per cent of the business whereas, when Tom Glover came in to fill his dad's shoes eight years ago, it was 100 per cent of



the business. Private label is still something Glover is keen to continue with, for the moment anyhow, “to keep the factory ticking over.”

But the main emphasis is to establish Peregrine as a brand in its own right, with some great knitwear pieces – including socks and scarves and well as chunky cable-knit cardigans and jumpers, and very “now” outerwear. “Menswear-wise we want to focus on the likes of Harvey Nichols and Selfridges,” says Glover. “We're a premium brand, but affordable. You don't need to be paying hundreds of pounds for a good jumper. We will still be selling at under £100 in the foreseeable future. A brand I admire is John Smedley. It's a lovely story, and they make a great garment that sells at around £120 – a good price for what it is and considering how the garment is constructed. We'll sit a little cheaper than that, but with the same premise to make well constructed garments for not over-the-top prices.”

A Peregrine falcon is one of the fastest birds on the planet, but will the brand of the same name be one of the fastest growing in 2012? •