




ALBION



A STRAEL FOR ALBION

Featuring a Q&A with the brand founders

 **FAIRLIGHT**



It's always satisfying when people who work within the industry want to buy a Fairlight. That is especially true when it is people involved in the design and manufacturing of products, because they understand the importance of good design and quality. We built this Strael for Jack Howker who is one of the co-founders of British cycle clothing brand 'Albion'. I've known about Albion for a few years now and I really like their restrained aesthetic, tasteful colour palette and wonderful photography & branding. The Britishness of the brand really shines through; but in a raw, unfiltered and real way.

We decided to make this bike a bit special for Jack, so we painted it in an Olive Grey colour, complete with colour matched fork and Albion logo machined details by Mark at Bentley Components.

I'm always inquisitive about other brands and how they work, so I took this opportunity to ask Jack and fellow co-founder Charlie some questions. You can read the full Q&A at the back of this lookbook. Enjoy the ride Jack!

Dom Thomas, Fairlight co-founder

FRAME-SET SHOTS

SIZE 58R - OLIVE GREY WITH COLOUR MATCHED FORK



















Custom machined parts by Mark at
Bentley Components





FULL BIKE SHOTS

**SHIMANO ULTEGRA DI2, HOPE RS4 ON DT RR481 RIMS, CHRIS KING HEADSET
SIZE 58R**

















FAIRLIGHT

CONTINENTAL







Q&A

Questions by Dom Thomas. Answers by Albion co-founders Jack Howker & Charlie Stewart. Photos by third co-founder Rupert Hartley.



What was the motivation to start Albion?

Jack: We were three friends who rode together, all year round in Britain, and felt that no one was really telling a story of British riding that felt authentic to us. Big rides in remote places, all four seasons in a day, tough terrain and conditions. There was a romance to riding in shit weather, which evolved into a desire to make clothing for the conditions. Culturally at the time (around 2012), road cycling was still very focused on Europe and the professional sport there. It seemed like every clothing brand, particularly the British brands, felt like they needed a French or Italian name, and to pay homage to European riding and racing, in order to be accepted.

2012 was a landmark year for British road cycling, a Brit won the Tour de France for the first time, a British Team (Sky) was the emerging force in men's pro cycling, and the 2012 Olympics saw lots of success for Team GB athletes in cycling events, driving participation and take up of the sport. Britain had arrived as a cycling nation, and we felt the time was right for a brand that had an authentic British character.



How would you describe the ethos of your brand?

Jack: Fundamentally, our mission is to help people go outside and stay there for longer. That informs everything we do, from the product we make to the stories we choose to tell.

Internally, we've always talked about being an outdoor company rather than a cycling company in our approach, but one that believes the bike is the best way to spend time outdoors. When we started Albion, we were heavily influenced

and excited by what was happening in the outdoor industry, and the way in which performance products were being made in a more responsible way. That's something we felt was really lacking in cycling which at times could feel restricted by the professional sport and more akin to F1 than the way we enjoy spending time outside.

What were the biggest challenges in starting Albion?

Charlie: Literally everything! We started completely from scratch, with no industry experience, barely any contacts... we knew nothing and were only equipped with an idea, and a strong sense that it was worth pursuing! We must have been a nightmare for suppliers to deal with... but what it did mean is that we had to learn how things worked, and quickly. That has served us well because I think we really understand how our business works and we're close to it. We also weren't jaded industry people who felt like they were owed a living, we were incredibly excited about what we were doing and felt very lucky to be having the chance to make cycling gear for a living! I think that excitement, naivety perhaps at the start, was very important in driving us forward - if we'd known how hard it was going to be, we probably wouldn't have tried!



Can you recall a single decision that has been the most important factor in getting to this point?

Charlie: It's less of a single decision, but being introduced to our first factory partner in Italy was a hugely significant moment. We had been traipsing around a fabric show in Munich having caught a horribly early flight, it was the first time we had been to this type of trade show, everything was completely alien and we just wandered around trying to speak to people about getting a few jerseys made! We were speaking with someone who clearly took a bit of pity on us and suggested that we go and speak to a lady called Graziella, and he promptly walked us over to her booth. She agreed in principle that we could work together on a jersey, and we've

not looked back since. We've grown our business with her factory from nothing to something relatively substantial since, which has been very satisfying and rewarding for all of us. We've learned so much from working with them - about product, production but also about the importance of investing in and building strong partner relationships. They have supported us, helped us develop product and we'd be nowhere without them!

Can you talk a bit about your design process? Is the process collaborative or a single person's vision?

Jack: Definitely collaborative. We spent a lot of time at the start really trying to get to the essence of what Albion was, and why we thought it needed to exist. That continues to evolve in subtle ways, but fundamentally our mission is to help people go outside and stay there for longer and that doesn't change. As that informs everything we do, it's important that everyone we work with gets that so they can feel a part of something bigger than just "here's my idea, please go and execute it". Our job as founders is really to try and attract the best people, by creating a framework within which they feel they can do their best work. Where it gets exciting is when that framework is in place and is understood, and really talented people can come in and express themselves and contribute ideas that we would never have come up with and that move things to the next level.



How do ideas start? Are they flashes of inspiration or considered answers to problems and evolutions?

Charlie: I think it's both. We see what we do ultimately as problem solving - be it through trying to improve a product that already exists using insight and good design, or by creating new products that improve the experience of cycling and being outdoors. All of our ideas are essentially generated from user insight though. Our own insights, or those of people we know who ride a lot and are passionate about their gear like us. It might be based on a feeling we had on a ride about a product and what it might be able to do better, or seeing a new fabric innovation and trying

to imagine an application for it, or just the specific need of a rider doing a particular race. We're strict about use case - if it doesn't have a good one, it's probably not getting made.

Which is of greater value to a brand; Ideas and concepts themselves, or the diligence and perseverance to turn designs into shipping products?

Charlie: I'd say that you can't have one and not the other! Ideas are great, but if you can't turn them into useful products then they're going to be wasted. It's an interesting question. We've never been short of ideas, and at the start they can carry you a long way, but if you want to build a solid business then it's the unglamorous execution behind the scenes that makes all the difference. We're still very much learning that now, and will be learning for a long time. That said, there are plenty of brands that clearly execute well, but their ideas are sh*t! We don't want to be that type of brand.



I think you have a great palette of colours. Your aesthetic clothing designs are quite restrained so the colour choices are very important. What is the inspiration/process for the colour choices?

Charlie: We just all have good taste Dom! Haha. Kind of you to say, thank you. I think the same can be said of Fairlight, and whenever we've spoken about colour your knowledge in this area really comes across. We take inspiration on colour from lots of different places. Outdoor is a big influence, that blend of aesthetically pleasing colours that are also functional for the environment that the products are being used in. We speak a lot about colour as a vehicle for the brand. When we started, with only a couple of products, the colour of those products was going to be a big way in which we could be distinct and stand out. We've tried to carry that philosophy through. If you can close your eyes, think of Albion and clearly imagine a colour, then we're doing it right!

Cycle and outdoor clothing [vs fashion & every day wear] has a large element of functional design. They are products designed for a specific purpose. Would the design process be very different for 'off the bike' wear? More fashion/trend considerations?

Charlie: No. Our view is that all clothing can and should be functional, and be designed for a specific purpose. All the best clothes are designed in that way I think. We're working on some stuff in this area. It won't appear for a while, but it's a really exciting and challenging project that we're looking forward to.



I always find the most exciting part of design is when you get a first sample of an object that was previously just an idea in your head. Seeing an innovative product like the burner for the first time must have been great?

Charlie: Absolutely. Seeing your ideas come to life as physical products is hugely rewarding. The Burner was particularly satisfying because it's one of those "why didn't I think of that?" ideas that everyone is always trying to have but never does! Graeme Raeburn, who came up with that idea, is an incredible designer and problem solver. We are very honoured to get to work with him.

I love your logo. Where/what is the line?

Both: We get asked that a lot.

I always tell people manufacturing is incredibly hard and stressful. Can you [please!] confirm you agree?

Charlie: Haha, yes we can definitely confirm this. I think

because it's so process driven (and by its nature has to be), if e.g. one small detail or measurement is off or incorrect at any stage, it can have huge implications. Carefully designing things and making them to a high standard takes time, and cannot be rushed. A normal lead time for a new clothing development for us would be 18 months, which is a long time! Within that time frame the work and input of a whole variety of people and partners is reflected. It's not straightforward!



Which brands (in any field) do you admire and why?

Both: One brand whose products we've all been using this winter is Spatzwear. Based in Yorkshire, they just take a really uncompromising approach to product. Their overshoes are products that genuinely make a difference, and improve the experience of riding in bad or cold conditions. They're tested and developed by people who ride a lot, whatever the weather, and it really shows.

We've been enjoying following après sport, who are getting ready to launch. Cycling does have a habit of imitating itself, and it's refreshing to see them coming at it from a completely different perspective (how you feel afterwards).

We're also big fans of the team behind Outdoor Provisions and Second City Divide. We take a similar view on lots of things in relation to riding and the outdoors. Nice people too. We've got a couple of good projects in the works with them.

Are you able to tell us about any cool things you've got coming?

Jack: This week we launched our new ultralight capsule, featuring a 99 gram insulated jacket and an ultralight backpack. But our first Women's range is the main thing that we're really excited about. It will be out in just under a month's time, and we're just really excited to be able to engage directly with women for the first time. Beyond that, for AW21 we'll be expanding our Zoa range of gear for off,

on and around the bike with some new products that are definitely the most technical products we've created to date, and also continuing to build out the women's range.



Thank you fellas!



FIT FUNCTION FORM

mail@fairlightcycles.com



Photography:
Studio shots: Nick Hill @ NM Design
Bike shots: Lloyd J Wright