

creating selvedge...

where does someone find the courage to mortgage their own home to follow their dream?



Where does someone find the courage, inspiration and attention to detail required to mortgage their own home in order to follow their dream? The answer for Polly Leonard, Editor and Founder of 'Selvedge' bi-monthly magazine was her Grandmother. A woman who gave her, her love of textiles and who paid such attention to detail that she used a ruler to measure her sausage rolls! Polly claims that this is where she gets her 'obsession' from.

Not a trained writer but very 'opinionated'. After writing a particular article for 'Embroidery' (the Embroiderer's Guild magazine) about how easy it was to be seduced by the qualities of the fabric and 'mesmerised by the very physicality of stitching' she declared that it was all too easy to switch off your brain and not think about what you were doing!.... The postbags were huge and on the strength of this Polly was asked to be the editor and update the magazine. This she did with gusto,

although she describes it as doing 'fairly basic things'. All was well and good for a few years until the Embroiderer's Guild decided that she had taken the magazine too far and they wanted to reign it back, while Polly felt that 'actually she had got this idea and could take it much further...' If she couldn't do it there (with the Embroiderer's Guild) she decided that 'I'll just do it myself!...and so started the concept of an entirely new magazine....

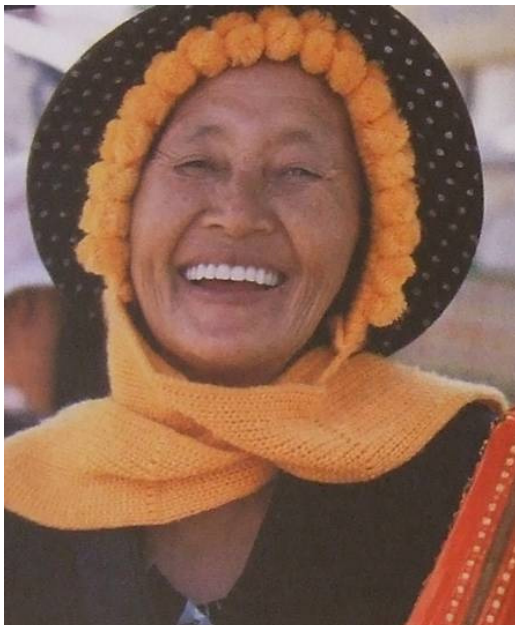
From this initial thought, it was six months before she actually had the first edition in any sort of physical form. However, in order to get to this stage there were lots and lots of decisions to make. Firstly, what was it going to be called? She wanted a name, a word that connected to all textiles (knitting, embroidery, weaving and fashion) but without having any direct connotations or already currently in use as a title by any other magazine.... The team went through a whole host of possibilities from 'Threads' to 'Bias', before finally settling on the name Selvedge. Why 'Selvedge'? the answer was because Polly thought it was a 'very beautiful' word and because you either know what a 'Selvedge' is or you don't.





THE LOOK

Polly also had very definite ideas about the appearance of the magazine and her attention to detail is apparent in the physical construction of Selvedge. She looked to textiles for elements in regards to the design. Firstly, it had to be square – because when you weave a cloth on a loom, you weave it on a grid. The size of the magazine was due to technical reasons about printing. The texture was especially important (because Textiles are about texture!) so two different papers were stocked within the magazine – a rough and a smooth with the cover being a matt lamination. The colours that were chosen for the Logo, Masthead and indeed all throughout the magazine relate to examples of ‘old washed Linen’, a whole range of subtle greys. It was interesting that throughout her talk, Polly kept coming back to textile related metaphors whether intentionally or not.

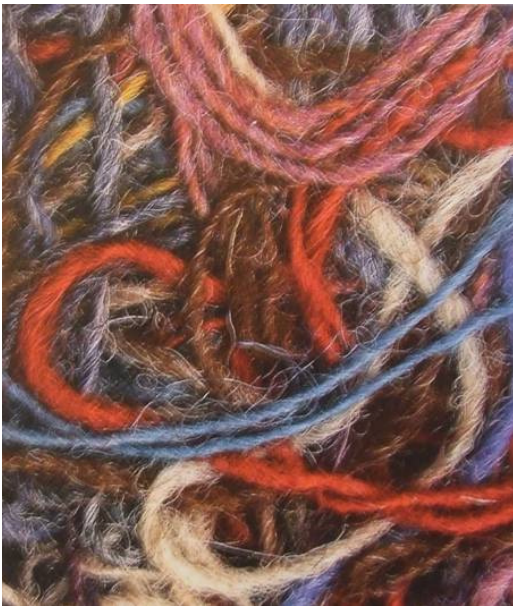


Selvedge is very much an image led magazine and Polly stated that when commissioning an article, she takes into serious consideration the quality of photographic images available and the risks involved with commissioned photography. This is due to the fact that it is always possible to alter or even rewrite a poorly written article but it is much more difficult and of course expensive to retake new images, particularly if in a foreign location. Photography is also chosen from Image Libraries, although this is by no means an easy option, as the team will often spend ‘five, six, seven hours searching for the right images’ for an article.



The image has to be more than simply of a piece of cloth, because even though Polly describes a ‘Harris tweed as warming her soul’, she believes that a picture of a Harris Tweed made into a jacket and worn by someone walking over a moor has more resonance. The important factor is that the textiles are

visually seen within a context, an aspect that is evident when we consider what the emphasis upon the written content of the magazine. Polly's background as both a student and teacher of textiles is unmistakable by her approach to locate images that would excite a textile designers or textile enthusiasts etc, for example colour, shape, repetition etc. The idea being that a textile student could pull out a page and produce a weave from it!

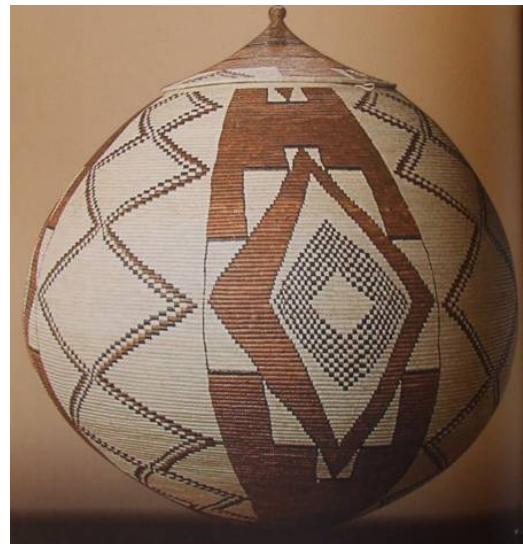


Because textiles are the most important element of the magazine, Polly is keen that nothing detracts from it, so there is no coloured text, or fancy graphics, indeed she stipulates a very limited range of Sans Serif typography.

THE CONTENTS

What was to go in? In her talk Polly stated the prevalence and indeed importance of textiles in everyday life, from the textiles that she found on her travels, to the time and effort spent choosing exactly the right fabric for the upholstery, curtains and carpets of her

first home when she got married. In fact, this was the point that Polly wanted to get across, that from the moment we are born to the moment that we die we are touching and are touched by textiles. Textiles would therefore not be seen in isolation but within their everyday context, indeed how textiles relate to Humanity. The subject areas included Fashion, Interiors, Fine Art, Travel and ethnographic textiles, Social History and the History of Textiles, Industry and Craft and other bits and pieces such as Exhibitions and of course that great favourite of all who love textiles – shopping!



The type of writing used is marked in being very 'anti-art' speak. Aware that their readership is very wide ranging from those with a passing interest in textiles but a love of beautiful things to Professors who have studied the subject for the last thirty years, the rule to writing is that if it needs to be read twice in order to make it understandable... it is out! The writing is accessible but without being patronising, with a range of length of articles from one page to several. While having won fans and

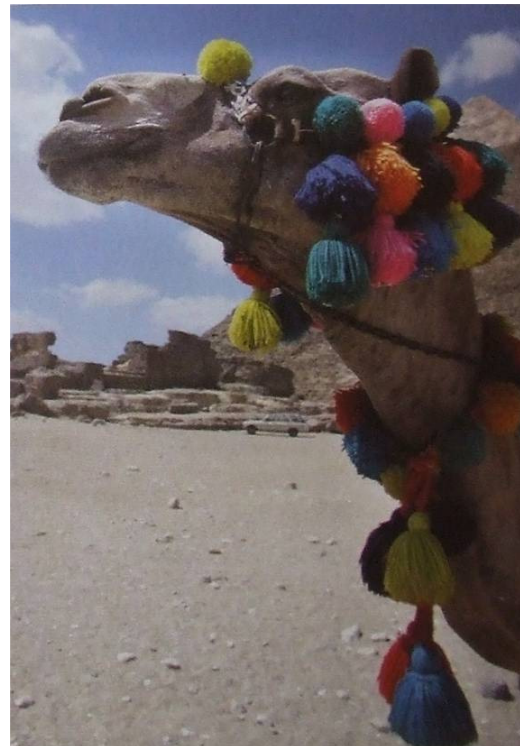
detractors in equal measures, Polly Leonard aims to make *Selvedge* a 'document for the future'.



THE PHILOSOPHY

While it is indeed true to state that the look of the magazine is of considerable importance, it would be a great injustice for the magazine to be considered simply a 'lightweight' publication, the textile equivalent of 'Hello!' for example. There is a very strong philosophy or 'driving force behind the magazine as Polly is aware of a whole generation of talented artists and designers of her college generation who through various reasons, from lack of knowledge to

promotion or opportunity were never able to fulfil their full potential. *Selvedge* seeks to promote the work of small companies, especially those that are keeping craft traditions going and who without publicity would simply die. Small designer makers, who they believe to be note worthy, are also promoted. Although only 25% of the magazine is given over to advertising (admirable considering that the magazine is so expensive to produce) they keep a number of pages for small advertising slots in order to encourage and promote young makers who find it difficult to find a home/sell their work. It is difficult for new graduates in particular find an audience, so Polly hopes that *Selvedge* offers a way forward for these designers and artists.



THE FUTURE

Selvedge has received no outside funding and so to get the initial edition of the magazine out to the public, Polly took the amazingly brave stand of taking a mortgage out on her home. This was enough to produce the first issue 6,000 copies, which were sent out free to potential readers and from this they got enough subscriptions to produce the next issue. The team then rang around craft galleries to establish a network of distribution and from there they have been going from edition to edition and from strength to strength. Selvedge has since been taken on by a magazine distributor in the U.K. then the United States, and finally Europe and the rest of the World. The next edition will go out to 20,000 customers, which is pretty impressive build up from the initial start after only ten issues.



Selvedge is produced by a small team working from a room in Polly's house. It was refreshingly honest of Polly to state that the magazine comes out every two months – as long as none of her children get sick or there is any other family crisis!

Selvedge in the words of Polly Leonard has set out to join up the dots between Fashion and Interiors, Fine Arts and Historic Textiles. They have created an 'umbrella' to encompass textiles and the way that they touch our lives. Selvedge is a stunningly beautiful magazine, with a good combination of the 'authentic' approach to business with an enjoyable degree of hedonism. Polly Leonard's strength of purpose, dedication to detail and overriding vision is truly admirable. They are an inspiration to all regardless of their field of enterprise.

Have a look at Selvedge's website, which is easy to find through our links pages.