FELT NOT SPOKEN
However, in the same way that true luxury doesn’t need to be spelled out or defined by an exacting formula, a brand’s Britishness should not be overly stated. In fact, the very act of doing so would be decidedly un-British.

Instead, Britishness needs to be managed subtly and authentically, ensuring it has a true connection to the wider brand story. This report outlines recommendations for how brands can use Britishness to their advantage and then also identifies four characteristics and behaviours—our Pillars of Britishness—that are recognised around the world.

Despite Britain’s changing reputation on the world stage, when it comes to the luxury sector, our research showed that Britishness is still an overwhelmingly positive and differentiating attribute.
In speaking to experts from renowned British brands, there was a difference of opinion when it came to defining Britishness. This is itself could be seen as rather British—a confidence in having your own opinion and individual quirks. It's also a reflection of the multi-dimensional, multi-cultural nature of Britain and therefore Britishness. Similarly, there was a difference of opinion as to how much or how little to make Britishness an overt brand story. The key learning was that Britishness needs to be managed carefully and imaginatively. Done the right way, it can be a real differentiator. Done too obviously and it can have a negative effect on your brands appeal to the discerning luxury customer.

BRITISH, YOUR OWN WAY

The first lesson for any British luxury brand is that they need to find their own, unique take on Britishness. This needs to be directly linked to the wider brand story rather than an add-on. Modern luxury customers are driven by the authenticity of a brand and in today's world, it is easier than ever to spot a fraud. The brands that use their Britishness most effectively are those which have a deep understanding of why it even matters that they are British. For example, is it to do with the fact your products are made in Britain and could not be created to such a standard anywhere else? Is it because the British landscape or culture directly inspires your designs? Is it because your founders are British through and through? It doesn't matter exactly what your British connection is, more that there truly is one.

BRITISH, IN PART

Britishness can be a point of difference for many luxury brands, particularly in sectors where the competition tends not to be British. Take watches, for example, where Swiss-Made dominates. In this case, 'Made in England' can be a differentiator for a brand such as Bremont who manufacture in Henley-on-Thames. Similarly, in luxury accessories where 75% of the leading brands are either French or Italian, Mulberry’s Englishness gives it a unique edge. However, in both these instances, Britishness is only part of the story. Indeed, in terms of the hierarchy of messaging, it is by no means top of the list. For both Mulberry and Bremont, product quality and desirability will always trump Britishness.

Britishness alone will not be the purchase driver but it can add to the list of things that justify a luxury purchase. Therefore, when a brand is figuring out its messaging framework and its visual identity toolkit, finding the right place for Britishness is key. It should rarely be a lead message or a lead visual cue, instead it should be considered as a supporting message to bolster existing brand truths and it should always have a consumer benefit. For example, when telling a brand's production story (and therefore quality story), consider how being made in the UK enhances the consumer's final experience of that brand.

“EVERYONE HAS TO FIND THEIR OWN WAY OF EXPRESSING BRITISHNESS. YOU NEED TO ASK WHY YOUR BRITISHNESS IS IMPORTANT, HOW IS IT RELEVANT TO YOUR CUSTOMER AND HOW DOES IT HELP TO MAKE YOUR BRAND DISTINCT?”

CHARLOTTE O’SULLIVAN, MULBERRY
The modern luxury customer is an educated and discerning individual, who takes pleasure in discovering the stories behind brands in their own way and in their own time. As such, Britishness should be deduced through subtle cues, rather than having the customer to figure it out for themselves. It’s fair to assume that most luxury customers today have an international, lifestyle acerbic, and acute cultural awareness. Therefore, we can rely on their ability to pick up on hints of Britishness. This is particularly the case for the younger generation of luxury customers who are very attuned to more niche cultural trends and behaviours through their constant consumption of social media. For example, many young Chinese visitors to London have an in-depth understanding of the different style tribes of different London neighbourhoods, making pilgrimage to email, leading-edge boutiques in East London as well as the luxury ‘classics’ on Bond Street.

This desire for a more subtle approach to Britishness calls into question the appropriateness of overt stamps of provenance such as ‘Made in England’ or ‘Made in Britain’ and, indeed, the need to always have a British address and postcode on branded materials. Our study revealed a mix of opinions on this issue. Some brands believe that labeling provenance does add value to their products, particularly for an international customer. However, others feel that there were other, more interesting ways for customers to find out about the British back story. Many brands make an active decision to use Britishness ‘stamps’ for some audiences but not for others. For example, Brooks makes sure to make their Bond Street address visible when creating communications material for overseas customers but does believe this is needed for British customers.

On a similar note, the Royal Warrant was seen as a ‘nice to have’ but not something that should be flaunted as this goes against the values of restraint and discretion—which were probably part of the reason for being granted it in the first place.

— WE NEED A MORE INTELLIGENT WAY OF COMMUNICATING THE BACKSTORY. A MORE PERSONAL WAY. THE LUXURY CUSTOMER DOESN’T NEED IT SPIEL OUT TO THEM — SIMON RAMUNZIO, DAVID COLLINS STUDIO

— BRITISHNESS NEEDS TO BE AUTHENTIC. YOU CAN’T JUST STICK IT ON YOUR BRAND. WHAT IS THE TRUE STORY OF YOUR BRITISHNESS AND HOW CAN IT BE MADE RELEVANT AND INTERESTING TO PEOPLE TODAY? — ANNE-MARIE VERONIQUA, Bicester Village

BRITISH BY ASSOCIATION

Many of the brands we spoke to as part of this study communicate their Britishness through the brands and people they associate with, sponsorships, collaborations, brand ambassadors and the influencers they choose to engage with online. It’s a clever way to tell the world you’re British without having to state it too overtly.

A common technique is to be visible—either as an official, sponsor or more unofficially through mere attendance—at quintessentially British events. For example, both Chapel Down and Bremont are sponsors of the most English of sports, rowing, with Chapel Down sponsoring the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race and Bremont being the lead supporter of the Henley Regatta. For Bremont, given that Henley is their hometown, it’s also an authentic connection and one that further cements their roots in an English postcode. Similarly, Bremont’s relationship with the British military is also an authentic connection and one that further cements their roots in an English postcode. The Wedgwood Flower Show, created especially for the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, is another example of Wedgwood taking its heritage of using botanicals as design inspiration to make a fitting partnership with the Royal Horticultural Society.

— WEDGWOOD IS TAKING OWNERSHIP OF BRITISH LIFESTYLE IN A WAY THAT IS RECOGNISED WORLDWIDE, FOCUSING ON THE ENGLISH TEA EXPERIENCE AND GARDENS, LED BY OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH THE ROYAL HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY. — ULRIK GARDE DUE, WEDGWOOD

BRITISH IN MORE THAN ONE WAY

It’s important to state that Britishness is not a one-dimensional characteristic. Indeed, its very complexity is what intrigues and appeals to the global audience. The contradictory nature of the British—being both orderly and rebellious, historical and modern, traditional and cutting-edge, an island nation yet open to different cultures—is the key to the appeal which is actually as true of Britain today as it was of Britain past, and it holds countless opportunities for story-telling and creative inspiration for British brands.

Speaking of opportunities Britishness presents to brands, it’s worth looking at the Ritzes of Britishness we have defined and which we believe have relevance for many modern, British brands.

— BRAND BRITAIN APPEALS TO OVERSEAS VISITORS FOR THE VARIETY OF ITS EXPERIENCES. WE HAVE AUTHENTIC HISTORY AND TRADITION WITH ELEMENTS OF FUN AND MODERNITY ON TOP. FROM FORTNUM AND MASON TO TOPSHOP, THE MIX OF OLD AND NEW IS A QUINTESSENTIALLY BRITISH CHARACTERISTIC — PATRICIA YATES, VISIT BRITAIN

— BRITISHNESS WILL SURVIVE BECAUSE IT’S BASED ON A NON-HOMOGENEITY — ROBIN DERRICK, SPRING STUDIOS

— WE BELIEVE STRONGLY THAT MODERNITY NEEDS ROOFS IN THE PAST — CHARLOTTE O’SULLIVAN, MULBERRY

The Wedgwood Flowerv Show

The Wedgwood Tea Conservatory created especially for the RHS Chelsea Flower Show.
**PILLARS OF BRITISHNESS**

**TOMORROW’S HISTORY**

Heritage is one of the first words that come to mind when thinking about many iconic British brands, but dig a little deeper and it’s clear that the most successful ones are those who manage to take their heritage and make it relevant to the modern world. It’s about being respectful of where the brand has come from but always seeking to evolve and adapt. It’s about identifying the rich stories of the past which have the potential to resonate with and connect to modern culture. Burberry is the best off-spun example, given its impressive ability to reinvigorate historical iconography and design to make it more modern, global luxury customer. Mulberry, too, talk about “Modern Heritage” as one of its core brand values. Likewise, Land Rover has “Dynamic Heritage” as one of its brand pillars, referring to the fact that they only draw on the aspects of their heritage that inspire innovation or have a place in the brand’s future. Indeed, the most successful British brands appear to specialise in having one eye on tomorrow rather than being overly nostalgic about the past. They do use their history but only when they can see how it informs and strengthens their future. Wedgwood is a good example of mixing modernity with tradition to give the brand new relevance today. They have recently re-launched the whole concept of taking tea, a traditionally English custom, but with an update and a specific point of view on it, called the Wedgwood Tea Conservatory. This includes creating a more modern tea experience with a wellness-focused menu—including healthy teas, gluten-free options, organic cucumber and so on—an inspiring environment including beautifully made Wedgwood china.

**FUNCTIONAL CREATIVITY**

Like heritage, craftsmanship is another word that is liberally applied to descriptions of British luxury brands. However, this is an overly simplistic descriptor for the hugely varied and nuanced British luxury industry. It plays down the global significance of many British luxury brands, whose experts aren’t merely endearing local craftsman, but ground-breaking creatives with expertise that has been honed over many years. In the same way that many British brands are comfortable with the duality of modernity and heritage, so too do they revel in combining functional technicality with bold creativity. This mixture of a precise skill—such as tailoring, engineering, watch-making or architecture—with witty design is a beautiful contradiction that is unique to British brands. The French and Italians have flair and the Germans and Swiss precision. The British have a bit of both. This winning combination is present across many British luxury sectors. Take Stella Artois, a perfect mix of tailoring knowledge that takes years of training with just enough quirky elements to make each out a distinctly British work of art. Similarly, British automotive brands such as Aston Martin are engineered to the highest standards but it’s the stand-out designs which are lasted after the world over. It doesn’t take long to create a list of world-famous British ‘functional creatives’—Thomas Heatherwick, Vivienne Westwood, David Chipperfield, Terence Conran, Paul Smith, James Dyson—to prove this is a shared characteristic. The challenge for brands is how to tell this story without losing some of the magic and mystery that sits behind the creation of such iconic products. It’s about revealing just enough ‘behind-the-scenes’ without giving the whole game away. ‘The British excel at elevated functionality. Function turned into a virtue. Function made pleasurable’—Robin Derrick, Spring Studios

**TOP 5**

The British characteristics that are most important to luxury brands: quality, design, creativity, heritage, service

Walpole Member Survey
“ENGLISH PEOPLE HAVE A READINESS TO CHALLENGE AUTHORITY AND TO STRIKE OUT ON THEIR OWN”

R O B I N  D E R R I C K ,  S P R I N G  S T U D I O S

Speaking of well-known British creatives, another common characteristic of British luxury brands is the character of the people behind them. These colourful characters might be the Founders, the Creative Directors, the Front-of-House staff or the Head of Housekeeping. Their job title is not important, it’s their personality that brings an extra dimension to the brand and contributes to its legendary status. The power of personality cannot be underestimated when it comes to differentiation in a global luxury market and Britain has a head-start here versus other nations.

It is the uniqueness and multi-dimensionality of the characters behind many British brands that makes them so appealing. It’s therefore impossible to extract a ‘recipe’ for exactly what character traits make a British brand have lasting appeal around the world. However there are a couple of identifiable behaviours worth mentioning.

One of these is a commitment to proper, personalised service. Bone-well, British service exudes integrity and professionalism, mixed with a dash of dry wit and eccentric British charm. Compared to American service which is deemed as overly familiar or ‘cookie-cutter’ and certain European styles of service which are perceived as overly aloof, British service strikes a balance between discretion and warmth. This is a service which is less about perfection and more about passion and long-term relationships. It’s about truly getting to know your customers and seeing them as part of the family. It’s about giving customers access to the real people behind the brand, not just the salesperson.

Boodles is a brand which takes service seriously. A family business, they take pride treating their loyal customers as an extension of the Boodles family. This includes invitations to special events, entertaining them in their intimate ‘apartment’ space rather than an impersonal store setting and knowing their preferences inside out.

“We believe the Americans appreciate the old fashioned English charm of our British sense of humour and our exclusive events.”

J A M E S  A M O S ,  B O O D L E S

Another recognisable British character trait is a desire to go against the grain, disrupt existing category norms and/or to embark on an enterprise against the odds. This can be connected to the brand founding story or even be an eccentric side project that adds to the brand’s reputation as a creative and quirky. Being deliberately different and the outsider choice can resonate well with some discerning, luxury customers who like to be early adopters or pioneers in sectors they are passionate about.

The Bremont brothers capture this spirit in more ways than one. Taking on the dominant Swiss-watching making industry is a bold enterprise, as is their hobby of flying vintage air craft. This spirited attitude, whether applied directly to the company or more broadly to its founders, is a key part of the brand story. Exactly which element the vintage air craft. This spirited attitude, whether applied

“WE ARE PROUDLY FROM ENGLAND AND TAKE A DELIBERATELY DIFFERENT APPROACH. WE CELEBRATE OUR DIFFERENCES”

M A R K  H A R V E Y ,  C H A P E L  D O W N

Like many British traits, this last characteristic has a dual meaning, referring both to being grounded in terms of being rooted in a place but also to being grounded in mentality and attitude.

Starting with the first aspect, one of the common traits of British luxury brands is the story of their provenance. Having a deep, meaningful, connection to a specific corner of the British Isles—be it an iconic neighbourhood in London or a tiny village in rural Somerset or both if you’re Mulberry—is often a significant and appealing part of a brand’s story.

“For the US customer, more than ever, Britishness is a great asset for luxury brands. As the world is becoming more global, place actually becomes more important. It’s a distinguisher.”

J A M E S  L A F O R C E ,  L A F O R C E

Brands that manage their location story well are often also able to make their home a destination for fans of the brand. Scotch whiskies have long attracted whisky fans from around the world to their distilleries. Similarly, for Wedgwood, being located in Stoke-on-Trent (The Potteries) means it has access to the world’s best ceramics and their World of Wedgwood is fast becoming a go-to destination for tourists.
Grounded is also an attitude that is decidedly British. Understated, sometimes a little reticent, not blowing one’s trumpet. These are all qualities that are recognised and valued by customers from around the world. However, this can also mean that sometimes British brands don’t necessarily recognise the potential interest in their story.

“WE’RE SO BRITISH
WE DON’T EVEN KNOW IT”
MICHAEL WAINWRIGHT, BOODLES

This self-effacing attitude is endearing but if British brands are to stand out on the global stage, they need to find a way to ensure their message and attitude is noticed by the modern luxury customer. This doesn’t mean shouting about it. But it does mean finding effective and inventive ways to both tell and then spread your story.

Most importantly, the Britishness should surface of its own accord rather than being extracted heavy-handedly. In other words—felt, but not necessarily spoken.

“IF YOU HAVE TO STATE IT, YOU’VE PROBABLY LOST”

MICHAEL WARD, WALPOLE AND HARRODS