

HOW ABOUT?

with Louise Howland



What does the concept of work mean to you?

Is it merely a means to an end, or a wonderful opportunity to find happiness?

Did you know what you wanted to do when you left school? Are you one of the people who headed off with some sense of certainty to a career in which you thrive and grow, or did you go with some measure of firmness towards higher education in an area that interested you, to thrive and grow there? Or maybe you were less sure about the direction in which you wanted to head and by a process of elimination found out exactly what you didn't want.

I was most definitely the latter, and heartily wanted to be otherwise. I loathed the uncertainty of not knowing and the longing for something that was also unknown. Whatever the cause – lack of guidance, poor information or lack of confidence – choosing a career is very tough for some. Perhaps there are simply so many choices that too bewildering an array lines up and a choice or 10 beckons enticingly, waiting to reveal its less attractive side at an unexpected moment in the not so distant future.

When my generation came of age it seemed to be that hobby skills were something apart from work skills. It was considered a healthy thing to have an interest (idle hands breed the devil's work and the like) but work was work and satisfying work was a bonus. I always had the feeling though that



work was not really meant to be based on fun. Thinking about careers at an age when many of my peers are retiring provides a different perspective. Suddenly many jobs seem as if they would have a high possibility of providing me times of sheer delight. And yes, in reality I'm sure most jobs provide a goodly portion of challenging and trying times, but let's dream awhile.

Take textiles, an area of some passion for many of us, with so many opportunities to turn pro! Imagine designing patterns for bed linens and quilt covers, visualising your designs ranged alongside the well-known brands! Tea towels anyone? Yes indeed, easy methinks. So why are my tea towels stubbornly souvenir-style, complete with map outlines, floral emblems and the like?

Let's move on to curtains and upholstery fabrics with their myriad

choices of structure, weight and colours, all the while considering the final use of the fabric. I want to cook up chemical recipes to create exactly the right colour and recommend finishes or treatments to be applied following the dyeing.

Tiring of the factory setting – see how much staying power I don't have – I'm veering sharply now from the industrial to

theatre, opera and ballet, standing alongside directors, envisaging costuming, dreaming design concepts and vision. Specialising in fashion, period costumes, or maybe the culturally specific? Then there's the coordination of hats, shoes and accessories, designing and sourcing.

Speaking of history, I zoom to a museum such as the V&A and begin a career in curating and conserving. How about tapestry washing in the purpose-built studio, studying at the cloth workers' centre or archiving such treasures as Elizabeth Davenport's knitwear designs and related papers?

How fortunate we are when work is more fun than fun.

Until next month,

Louise