

Designing the Torch

Jay Osgerby is one half of BarberOsgerby the studio that designed the Olympic Torch. He was born in Witney and attended Henry Box School. He took his Art Foundation course at Oxford Brookes, before studying at Ravensbourn College and The Royal College of Art where he met Edward Barber. They subsequently launched their successful business with the iconic Loop table.

Jay now lives in Brockley with his wife Helen and their three children. Jay's mother, an art historian and writer, lives in Shipton under Wychwood.

How do you start a project?

By making a strong coffee.

How did you get the commission for the torch?

The Olympic Committee asked for expressions of interest in 2010. There were 1,000 entrants who were whittled down to 80 then 20 then 5. We were called in to an 'immersion session' by officials who gave us background information and specific requirements for the torch. We then had ten days to design it and create a presentation for the LOCOG and Design Council. The whole team at the studio worked together seamlessly. After weeks of vetting, we were finally told that we had the commission. It was unbelievable.

What were the requirements?

They were complex. 8,000 torches were needed: heat resistant, light enough to be



carried by runners of all strengths, and able to withstand a wide range of temperatures and weather conditions. Our first attempts at creating rain and wind to test the torch were rather Heath Robinson. Later the torch was tested in extreme conditions in the BMW wind tunnel in Munich.

What was your inspiration?

We were fascinated by the recurrence of the number three. The Olympics has happened in London three times, the Olympic motto is, 'Faster, Higher, Stronger', and the vision of this year's Games is to unite 'sport, education and culture'; so the triangular form developed naturally.

We decided to break with the past and use a gold-plated aluminum alloy. The torch was engineered and manufactured in Coventry. It was important to us to emphasize the quality of British manufacture.

What was more exciting, getting Design of the Year for the torch, meeting the Queen or being awarded an honorary doctorate from Oxford Brookes University?

All three are up there, and none have ever featured in my wildest dreams.

What next?

A holiday in Puglia with my family and then work on a new gallery for the Science Museum in London.

Interview by Wendy Osgerby