



A BETTER BOOK THAN MY FIRST ONE

A BETTER BOOK THAN MY FIRST ONE.

by PAUL ARDEN

Often described as the world's top advertising guru, Paul Arden began his career at the age of 16, rising to creative director at Saatchi & Saatchi where he was responsible for classic campaigns such as the cut silk concept for Silk Cut, British Airways - the World's Favourite Airline, The Car in Front is a Toyota and The Independent - It Is, Are You? In 1993 he set up the London-based production company Arden Sutherland-Dodd, and in 2003 published *It's Not How Good You Are, It's How Good You Want to Be* - The World's Best-selling Book. His latest venture is a photographic gallery in West Sussex. Here, he tells **Diana Goodman** the secrets of his success

master class

I am not afraid to ask for criticism. I always say: "Look at this and tell me what's wrong." When I was at Saatchi's all the people tried to protect themselves, and if they went away hearing nice things, everyone was happy. I'm thick-skinned enough not to mind appearing foolish.

When you're advertising something, you have to believe in it in some way, otherwise you're cynical. And if you're cynical you don't care. At one stage I flew BA because it was a good airline. The Independent used to have a beautiful look when it launched. It was exquisite. So I read it then because it looked very nice. I wouldn't drive a Toyota because I don't like the image.

I've lost my passion for advertising.

I was treading water, starting to go over old ground. It was becoming necessary for me to become an elder statesman, an ambassador, which I didn't want to do - I wanted to muck about, doing other things.

So I've opened a photographic gallery. I don't

have to make a lot of money, but I still can't help trying to make it brilliant. No one can tell me what to do, and it's absolutely great.

It's a question of re-inventing yourself. My father was in advertising and very mediocre. He had a job till he was 62, and then he was a moderate artist for many years. He'd go to my mother and say: "What do you think?" And she'd say: "Oh, that's nice, dear." And then he'd do flowers so that she would like it a bit. But when my mother died and he got old, he started becoming marvellous. He lost all his inhibitions and his later stuff was outrageous.

I had a dreadful childhood. We lived on a council estate, although Mother was trying to upgrade. We had a bit more money than other boys on the estate - for example, I had a cricket bat. I was having a rotten time at school, so I was a little bit spoilt. It was miserable. I hated school, loathed school, couldn't do anything.

At 11, you went in for a thing called the 11-plus, which sent you to a grammar school. But I completely failed - even the preliminary. So my

parents paid for me to go to a private school for two years, which was awful. Gay headmaster and all that. Then at 13 I got a second chance.

I went to a technical school to do art. You know Peter Frampton of The Small Faces? His father was my teacher for three years, and he was brilliant. That's where I got lucky. Then I went to work at 16.

I don't have any regrets about not going to university. But I would have liked the Oxbridge atmosphere - and the snobbery. I find it glamorous. Dining at high table and dressing up occasionally and the way that you're treated. You're treated as a student yet you're also given respect. And you've earned your place there. I like all heraldry and pageantry - and red buses and black taxis. It's lovely.

I think it's a good idea to get young people out into the jungle at 18. Otherwise it's school, take a gap year, go to university - before you even start work. You'll still find time to read Dickens if you want. 

I've been wondering recently about the support we give our children - because we can, because we have the financial means. It's the worse thing you can do. I think we give excess help in the name of love. There's always money and stuff being given to children, and they take it for granted. But it doesn't do them any good because they don't have to bother. They've always got something to fall back on. I think we should withdraw the help and let them fight it out. They have to be hungry.

I don't expect to win awards, because they are a group consensus. A lot of people - some of whom you don't respect - will have to agree on something being acceptable. Everyone's going to have to have seen that thing before, in some form, and feel comfortable with it, so they can accept it as a group. But, usually, if you're doing anything worthwhile, it's ahead of what's being done. And they don't recognise it. But awards do have commercial value, because they bring work.

I don't watch bad advertising. I switch it off. I do watch sometimes to see what the current round is. And some ads, of course, are entertaining.

There was one recently for Ariel which was quite charming. It was in the Arctic Circle, with an Inuit mother pulling a baby suit out of a hole in the ice. It was not a great commercial, but it was very good. And for Ariel - with no words, just an end line, beautifully shot.

In a perfect world... I would like to be able to work computers. I have to get other people to do it and it's frustrating. Anything electrical, my heart rate goes up. I would like to be computer literate. I would like to be able to do Photoshop and send emails and know what a tiff is and what a jpeg is. That would make life a lot easier.

If I could relive my life... I would have liked to have been more comfortable with women. I'm not gentle enough, not soft enough. I treat them like men. I don't really understand women.

I get on fine with them once I get to know them, but I would have liked to have been a ladies' man. Money is important. It is a benchmark, and it's

such fun making it. Money makes life easier, it enables you to have things, and we're not all Immanuel Kant. Unless you're going to be an ascetic, I think you might as well make money. Which means you have to chase the days. You can't sit there and work from nine to five for 20 years and expect it to come to you. You have to say "I want more".

I never have been ashamed of being in advertising, although I'm realising now that there is a bit of a stigma attached to it. But I was proud to be in it.

And I was proud of the people who I worked with - clever people, bright people, who were basically decent. Attacking advertising is just crashing onto a bandwagon. Some advertising is rubbish but there's enough that's been done that's really quite marvellous. Really, very clever.

I believe in God. I don't have a religion, but I absolutely believe in a greater being.

I also believe that you get what you want, within reason, if you want it enough.

It might sound corny, but the person I most admire within the advertising industry is Charles Saatchi - his acumen, his intelligence, his sheer simplicity, his economy with words, his kindness to people.

He started his own agency so young and when he opened his original gallery it was just perfection. The way he kept himself back, becoming a mysterious figure, wasn't through shyness, but because he knew he'd be much more powerful if he was not seen... nothing to do with shyness. He's aware of his own power and he's an egomaniac - absolutely hopelessly. And it makes him miserable. But he has been happy. He always wanted his name on Wall Street and he got it. Creative people must also be good salesmen. We spend all our time writing and drawing, making something absolutely perfect. And we expect someone else to go and sell it - to have as much passion about the idea as we do. They can't. 

Paul Arden's new book, *A Better Book Than My First One*, will be published by Phaidon later this year. His photographic gallery - Arden & Anstruther - is in Petworth in West Sussex

