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Protecting Unregistered Designs

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Protection of Unregistered Designs

1. Although designs for mass produced articles are very valuable frequently they are not protected by registration. This bulletin summarises the three categories of potential protection available to them namely:
 - a. United Kingdom Unregistered Design Right.
 - b. Copyright.
 - c. Unregistered Community Design Right.

Designs broadly relate to the shape or look of mass produced articles¹ and protection applies to whole articles or to independent components of articles. Designs are recorded in design documents (2D format) or prototypes (3D format).

A. United Kingdom Unregistered Design Right (“Design Right” or “UDR”)

2. Design Right is dealt with in Part III of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (“CDPA”) (sections 213 - 264). Most questions of detail can be answered by looking at these sections (and sections 51 -53)². Design Right

1 Contrast artistic designs for the visual arts.

2 Up to date versions of this Act (like all other acts) can be accessed directly on the web by use

deals with shape designs³. The core meaning of a design in this context is the shape or configuration of the whole or part of an article (whether internal or external)⁴. This is a UK right and in order to be actionable in the UK the **acts of infringement** must have taken place in the UK. Authorising others (say in the Far East) to manufacture what would be infringing articles if made in the UK is not an infringement of Design Right. Infringement occurs when such articles are imported into the UK.

3. **How does Design Right arise?:**

- a. Design right arises automatically when the design document or prototype embodying the design is first created.
- b. The right protects any aspect of shape or configuration⁵ of an article **but** not its surface decoration. (Surface decoration (if protected at all) is protected by copyright or unregistered community design right. Each of these rights must be considered when considering whether and if so what protection the design has).

of the search engine.

3 As we shall see surface decoration is excluded from protection and might be protected by copyright or unregistered community design right.

4 S. 213(2) of the Act.

5 Configuration refers to the relative arrangement of 3D elements.

- c. A design must be **original** to be protected - essentially this means it must not have been copied and must have resulted from the independent skill and labour of the designer.
- d. The design must not be "**commonplace in the design field in question at the time it was created**"⁶. Expert evidence is needed on this because to the untrained eye a seemingly strikingly original design to the trained eye might be considered "old hat". Identifying the precise **design field** is important because this influences the whole question of whether a design is commonplace⁷.

4. **What is excluded from design right protection? (s.213(3)):**

- a. A method or principle of construction (eg a woodwork joint).
- b. Features of shape or configuration which enable an article to be connected to or placed in, around or against, another article so that either article may perform its function (called the "must fit" or "interface" exclusion eg those parts of an electric plug which fit into the wall socket making the connection).

6 Section 213(4) CPDA.

7 There is a four stage test (*Farmers Build* [1999] RPC 461: (1) compare with other articles in the same field at time of creation (2) If it has been copied it is not original and therefore not protected (3) If it has not been copied but has many similarities with other articles it is likely that the design is commonplace (4) If it does not create a different overall impression it will be considered to be commonplace.

- c. Features of shape or configuration of an article which are dependent upon the appearance of another article of which the article is intended by the designer to form an integral part (called the “must match” exception eg the design of a car body panel which must match the rest of the car).
- d. Surface decoration.

The last three exceptions (“must match”, “must fit” and “surface decoration”) will be considered.

- 5. Note that if the design of **part** of an article is excluded from protection (eg because it is a “must fit”) the rest of the design might still be protected but when considering infringement only the parts that are not excluded are considered.
- 6. **Why the “must fit” and “must match” exceptions?** This is a matter of public policy. The exclusions are there to prevent manufacturers from monopolising the market in respect of must have consumer articles such as electric plugs that fit and car body panels that match the car.
 - a. **Must Fit:** If part of an article which interfaces with another article **has to be** shaped in a particular way in order to make the interface - like a contact lens⁸ - the part making the interface (with the eye in

the case of a contact lens) is excluded from design right protection⁹. The rest of the design might still get protection. Using the example of a baby’s stair gate parts of the gate making an interface with the wall or with the banisters¹⁰ might be excluded from protection. Parts which interface with **each other** within the article are not excluded from protection because they do not interface with **another** article.

- b. **Must Match:** The typical example is a car body panel and if these were protected car manufacturers would have a monopoly over spare parts. Some spare parts that can be made with an alternative design without a problem are not excluded (as has been held in relation to vacuum cleaner parts¹¹). It is unlikely car body panels could be made with an alternative design.

- 7. **Surface Decoration:** The surface pattern on an article (eg the floral design of a summer dress) is excluded from protection and this exclusion extends to decorative additions such as embroidery and even decorative grooves cut into door panels of a kitchen unit¹². Surface decoration (if protected at all) is protected by copyright and unregistered community design right.

8 *Ocular Sciences Ltd v Aspect Vision Care Ltd* [1997] RPC 289.

9 There might be various ways of achieving the fit but the design is still a “must fit” design.

10 *Baby Dan AS v Brevi SRL* [1999] FSR 377.

11 *Dyson v Qualtex* (2006) where there is a dependency such that an article would look radically different in appearance if the component was not the shape it was.

12 *Mark Wilkinson Furniture Ltd v Woodcraft Designs (Radcliffe) Ltd* [1998] FSR 63

8. **Design Right and Copyright:** Design Right and Copyright often each subsist in the same design and if this is so only one form of protection is enforceable. This is dealt with in sections 4, 51, 52 and 236 of the CPDA. In broad summary the position is as follows:
- a. Design Right protects mass produced shape designs and copyright protects one off artistic works¹³.
 - b. Where there is a design document¹⁴ (eg a drawing (2D)) recording a design and an article (3D) is made from the drawing the article infringes Design Right and not copyright in the drawing *unless* the drawing is for an *artistic work* such as a sculpture¹⁵. In that case a sculpture copied from the design document would infringe copyright.
 - c. Sometimes artistic works (protected by copyright) are exploited commercially - for example busts of a famous composer. If 50 or more copies are made by an industrial process the period of copyright protection for *that work* is reduced to 25 years from the end of the calendar year in which the article is first marketed¹⁶.

13 Section 4 CPDA

14 A drawing is design document if it is a drawing for a chair not if it is a drawing of a chair. Van Gogh's paintings of chairs were not design documents.

15 Sections 4 and 51 of the CPDA.

16 Section 52(2) of the CPDA. This means that copyright for surface decoration will last only for 25 years. Also if articles are made from copyright works which are not design documents (eg

- d. In one recent case¹⁷ in relation to the colourways of a Lambretta track suit top the shape and configuration of the coloured segments which made up the top in the design drawing also showed the positioning of the colours (ie the surface decoration). Shape and configuration and surface decoration could not, therefore, be distinguished in the drawing. It was held that in these circumstances the design was protected only by Design Right and copyright protection was not available for the surface decoration elements. The surface decoration as such was not protected¹⁸.

9. **Who owns the Design Right?** (See sections 217 - 221 CDPA). The question as to ownership centres on the concept of "*qualifying countries*". These are broadly the UK, members of the EEC and countries which have unregistered design right regimes and give reciprocal protection to the UK¹⁹. The US is not a qualifying country. Qualification for ownership arises in one of three ways:

- a. *The commissioner or employer* in the case of commissioned designs or designs created in the course of employment provided

cartoon characters) and are industrially exploited copyright protection will last for only 25 years

17 *Lambretta Clothing v Teddy Smith* [2005] RPC 6.

18 It was said in the CA that there might be some limited protection under unregistered community design right.

19 This is referring to very few other countries eg New Zealand.

that the commissioner or employer is a qualifying individual or company (ie a company formed in and carrying on substantial business in a qualifying country). It does not matter where the design is created. If the design was not commissioned or made in the course of employment then see b. below.

- b. **The creator** of the design provided that individual is a qualifying individual namely someone who is a citizen of or habitually resident in a qualifying country. With joint designs only one creator needs to be a qualifying individual. If these two forms of qualification do not apply then see c. below.
- c. **First marketing** in a qualifying country by a qualifying person who is exclusively authorised to put such articles on the market **in the UK**²⁰.

10. The owner of design right is, therefore, one of four people provided in each case that person is a **qualifying individual**:
- a. The creator.
 - b. The creator's employer.
 - c. The person who commissioned the design.

²⁰ The person who first markets the article must be a qualifying individual and exclusively authorised to market in the UK. If the person fits this description design right arises once the person begins marketing in any of the qualifying countries.

- d. The person who first marketed the articles.

11. Issues over ownership arise sometimes when an employee creates a design eg
- If an employee is not employed design nonetheless creates one in the course of employment.
 - If an employee who is employed design creates one outside working hours or in work time but without using the employer's resources.

As a rule of thumb if the design is made in work time or using the employer's resources the design probably belongs to the employer. Employed designers who create designs at home with their own resources probably own the designs.

12. **Duration of Design Right:** (section 216) The **maximum** period is 15 years from the end of the year in which the design was created. If the design is made available for sale **anywhere in the world** the period is reduced to 10 years from the end of the year it was first made available for sale (ie actually delivered pursuant to orders²¹).
13. **Licences of Right:** (section 237) During the last 5 years of the design right term any person is entitled as of right to take a licence to do acts which would otherwise infringe (the terms of which are settled by the Comptroller).

²¹ *Dyson v Qualtex* (2006).

14. **Infringement of Design Right:** (section 226 - 235):
- a. Primary infringement: making articles to the design or making a design document recording the design for the purpose of enabling such articles to be made.
 - b. Secondary infringement: importing into the UK or possessing for commercial purposes or selling in the course of a business.
 - c. Infringing articles: copying the design so as to produce **articles** exactly or substantially similar to the design²². Note the reference to **articles** not **parts of articles**. Thus if part only of an article attracts design right protection infringement nevertheless only occurs if **articles** are produced exactly or substantially to that design. It follows that exactly copying part of a design (in which design right protection exists) will not be enough unless the copying results in articles exactly or substantially to that design.
 - d. An article made outside the UK (which would have been an infringing article had it been made in the UK) will infringe if it is imported into the UK.
 - e. It is necessary to prove copying eg by proving opportunity to copy or more usually by showing such similarity that copying can be inferred (even subconscious copying).

²² (Section 228 CDPA. L Woolley Jewellers [2003] FSR 15 contrast with copyright infringement test.

- f. Primary infringement **does not require proof of knowledge** on the part of the infringer. It consists of manufacturing or authorising the manufacture or making a design document to enable manufacturing of an infringing article.
 - g. Secondary infringement **requires proof of knowledge**²³ on the part of the infringer. It consists of importing for commercial purposes; offering or exposing for sale or hire in the course of a business; selling, letting, hiring in the course of business; or possessing for commercial purposes (mere use in the course of business is not sufficient).
15. **Common purpose:** As in other torts two or more people may be liable for the tort (infringement) if they are acting in pursuance of a “**common purpose**” of carrying out infringing acts. Directors can be made liable for infringing acts of the company particularly in the case of companies controlled by a single director²⁴. Normally the director will have procured or induced the company to commit the infringing acts in order to become liable²⁵.
16. **Those entitled to enforce design right:** The owner or an **exclusive licensee** (provided the design right owner is joined in as a party to the action). Often the licence contract makes provision for the licensee to take action to protect the rights of the design right owner.

²³ le knew or had reason to believe.

²⁴ *Evans v Spritebrand* [1985] 2 AllER 415; *Unilever Plc v Gillette (UK) Ltd* [1989] RPC 583.

17. **Groundless Threats of Infringement:** (section 253). Be very careful indeed before writing letters alleging infringement of UK design right, unregistered Community design right (or registered UK or Community design right). Even solicitors can be sued if the threats prove groundless. Tactical (counter) claims are brought against solicitors thus driving a wedge between solicitor and client. The groundless threats provisions do not extend to threats of infringement alleged to consist of **making** or **importing** the articles. The threats provisions primarily deal with threats to suppliers and distributors. Such threats can be very damaging and those suffering loss are without a remedy without the groundless threats provision. Consider getting the client to write the letters and make them neutral merely bringing attention to the client's ownership of design right in a particular article.
18. **Remedies:** (sections 229 - 235). The usual remedies are available such as damages, injunctions, accounts (of profits) as in the case of infringement of any other property right. The remedies include delivery up and destruction on oath and the disclosure of the identity of suppliers of infringing product²⁵. Certain matters should be borne in mind:
- a. Damages for loss of profit equate to the profit the design right owner would have made on the quantity of its own sales had the infringing product not been on the market. This entails working out how many items would have been sold less **direct** expenses which

would have been incurred making them (ie ignoring overhead costs on the basis these would have been incurred anyway).

- b. Sometimes in the case of very cheap imitations the Design Right owner cannot show that its own sales have been affected by the infringing product in which case a reasonable royalty might be awarded.
- c. In the case of primary infringement (which does not require proof of knowledge for the tort to be committed) under section 233 of the CDPA if the defendant nonetheless can show that at the time of the infringement he did not know and had no reason to believe, that design right subsisted in the design (ie innocence) he is not liable for damages.
- d. In the alternative to damages it is possible to go for an account of the infringer's profits²⁶ but this is not always a good option not least because the infringer's profits are calculated by deducting general business overheads or indirect expenses.
- e. Those committing acts of secondary infringement (eg suppliers) will not have to pay damages in relation to articles sold which they did not know or have reason to believe were infringing articles at the time they acquired them but they may be liable to other remedies.

25 *The Norwich Pharmacal* ([1973] FSR 365) jurisdiction.

26 This is a discretionary remedy.

- f. When the design right is in the licence of right period damages will usually only be awarded equal to up to twice the amount of a reasonable royalty if the infringer undertakes to take a licence of right in the event that the design right owner succeeds at trial (otherwise damages will be awardable in full).
 - g. Additional damages are awardable (under section 229) if the infringement was flagrant or the infringer benefited substantially from the infringement.
19. The effect of section 236 is that design right in a design in which copyright also subsists cannot be enforced ie the design right is suppressed. However, both design right and unregistered Community design right might subsist in and be enforceable in respect of one design.

B. Copyright in Artistic Works

20. Copyright does not usually now protect 3D products and is confined to artistic works (see section 4 of the CPDA). An artistic work means:
- a. A graphic work, photograph, sculpture or collage *irrespective of artistic quality*.
 - b. A work of architecture being a building or a model for a building or

- c. A work of artistic craftsmanship²⁷.

A “graphic work” includes any painting, drawing, diagram, map, chart or plan and any engraving, etching, lithograph, woodcut or similar work.

A “sculpture” includes a cast or model made for the purpose of sculpture.

21. Most design documents or models **recording designs** are artistic works. If an article is made to the design the article will constitute an infringement of design right unless the design is for an artistic work (see section 51 of the CDPA). Where the design is for **an artistic work** making an article to the design is an **infringement of copyright**²⁸.
22. The important question is whether or not the design is **for an artistic work** because this determines whether or not the design is protected by Design Right or copyright. To be classified as a sculpture an article does not have to have artistic quality so sometimes run of the mill articles qualify as sculptures:

27 Note that b. and c. require that the work has artistic quality (whereas a. does not). Artistic quality requires a subjective judgment and the main one is whether the designer had the conscious purpose of creating a work of art (as opposed to making something for the mass market).

28 Note the reference to “designs for an artistic work”. This means that a drawing for a chair is a design document but a drawing of a chair is not.

- a. The original wooden models used to create the moulds for a Frisbee were classified as sculptures and the resultant plastic injection moulded Frisbees with circular ridges although not classified as sculptures were nonetheless classified as engravings and, therefore, copyright works protected by copyright²⁹.
- b. The plaster moulds of shapes for toasted sandwiches in a sandwich maker could be protected as artistic works being casts for a sculpture³⁰.
- c. The metal plates used to make the pattern of the underside of a rubber car mat were protected by copyright as were the resulting car mats which were held to be engravings³¹.
- d. Moulds produced for making *functional articles* should not be treated as sculptures for the purpose of attracting copyright protection³².

23. Articles might otherwise be classified as works of artistic craftsmanship to

²⁹ *Wham-O Manufacturing Co v Lincoln Industries Ltd* [1985] RPC 127. Note that “engravings” and “sculptures” do not require artistic quality to qualify as artistic works. They might still be required to have been made by an artist’s hand to qualify in common parlance as sculptures (see *Metix (UK) v Maughan* [1997] FSR 718).

³⁰ *Breville Europe plc v Thorn EMI Domestic Appliances Ltd* (1985) [1995] FSR 77.

³¹ *Hi-Tech Autoparts Ltd v Towergate Two Ltd* [2002] FSR 254.

³² *Metix v GH Maughan (Plastics) Ltd* [1997] FSR 718.

be protected by copyright. This classification requires a subjective judgment. The court was not persuaded that a prototype for a suite of furniture was a work of artistic craftsmanship³³. The article must be original and must be of artistic value. The intention of the craftsman is an important factor. It is unlikely to be considered a work of artistic craftsmanship if the primary intention was a design for functional purposes with style a secondary consideration.

24. The concept of artistic craftsmanship appears to suggest that the work must be the product of an individual who is both an artist and a craftsman. What if the article (say a designer dress) was conceived and recorded by the (artist) designer on paper and then made up by the seamstress (craftsman)³⁴? The law is unclear but it is probably the case that this would be considered to be a work of artistic craftsmanship. Designer garments which are machine made as prototypes for mass production are not likely to be considered as works of artistic craftsmanship because the designer probably would not consider himself or herself as an artist and mass production is not the product of craftsmanship³⁵.
25. As noted above with regard to the Lambretta track suit top³⁶ - where an

³³ *Hensher (George) Ltd v Restawhile Upholstery (Lancs)* [1976] AC 64.

³⁴ ie separate contributions by artist and craftsman.

³⁵ See *Guild v Eskandar* [2001] FSR 38.

³⁶ *Lambretta v Teddy Smith Clothing* [2005] RPC 6.

infringement was alleged in respect of copyright subsisting *in the design drawing* showing the layout of coloured segments making up the top³⁷ - it was held that since the configuration of the coloured shapes was shown on the design drawing which featured them as *three dimensional elements* the wording of s.51 CDPA meant that copyright protection was not available even though they were surface decoration. There is a question mark over whether or not there is any copyright or Design Right protection for many designs which combine 3D and 2D elements³⁸.

C. Unregistered Community Design Right (“UCDR”)

26. This was created by Council Regulation (EC) No. 6/2002. This regulation also created the (registered) Community Design Right. Many of the provisions are similar. The essential elements of the Unregistered Community Design Right are as follows:

- a. The right subsists in “designs” - defined as the appearance of the whole or a part of a product resulting from the features of, in particular, the lines, contours, colours, shape, texture and/or

37 ie of the different coloured fabric used for the sleeves (red) the body (blue) and the zip (white).

38 eg many fashion and furniture designs. There may be the lesser Unregistered Community Design right protection.

materials of the product itself or its ornamentation³⁹.

- b. Product means any industrial or handicraft item including parts intended to be assembled into a complex product (ie a product composed of multiple components which can be replaced permitting disassembly and reassembly of the product), packaging, get up, graphic symbols and typographic typefaces (excluding computer programs).
- c. The design must be *new* (ie not previously been made available to the public⁴⁰).
- d. The design must have *individual character* (ie must create a different overall impression on the *informed user*⁴¹ from any previous design made available to the public - the degree of design freedom may be important when determining individual character).
- e. The right subsists in any 2D or 3D design whether functional or decorative.

39 No problem here about excluding surface decoration.

40 This means disclosed eg by publication, exhibition or in the course of trade (unless it could not reasonably have become known in the normal course of business in the specialist sector concerned operating in the Community).

41 Someone with knowledge of the design field in question although not always an expert (*Woodhouse v Architectural Lighting Systems* [2005] ECPCC (Designs) 25).

- f. Designs for component parts of complex products are protected if they remain visible *during normal use*.
- g. The right applies not just to the whole product but also to individual parts. Therefore, individual parts of a product may be excluded from protection.
- h. There is no real equivalent to the must match exclusion as in UDR (UK) so a design for say lego bricks might attract protection.
- i. Exclusions:
 - Interface exclusion: No protection for products designed to enable them to interface with other products so that one or other product can perform the function it was designed to perform and to products whose designs are only attributable to the function they have to perform.
 - Must fit exclusion: No protection for features of a product which must necessarily be reproduced in their exact form and dimensions in order to permit the product in which the design is incorporated or to which it is applied to be mechanically connected to or placed in or around or against another product so that either may perform its function⁴².

42 This will probably not apply where there might be other ways of designing such features so that they perform the same function.

- Technical function exclusion: features of appearance solely dictated by their technical function are not protected⁴³.
- j. The right arises automatically once a design meeting the relevant criteria is made available to the public - an extremely wide qualification provision⁴⁴.
- k. Ownership: The designer or the designer's employer. There is no provision for commissioned works (such works are owned by the designer although the commissioner might have an equitable claim).
- l. Duration: 3 years from first being made available to the public in the Community (ie published, exhibited, used in trade or otherwise disclosed in such a way that it reasonably has become known to the circles specialised in the sector concerned operating within the Community).
- m. Infringement: when a product which does not create a different overall impression on the informed user is used⁴⁵. It is necessary to

43 NB this requires the features to be solely dictated by technical function. If the features of design also have aesthetic appeal they will still attract protection.

44 The right is presumed valid if the proprietor proves the disclosure date and indicates in what the individual character lies. Claims are brought before the Community Design Courts. It is not clear whether the first disclosure has to be in the EU. If it does most designs created by non-Europeans will have been first disclosed outside the EU and can never enjoy UCDR protection.

45 "Used" is widely defined.

show copying but there is no requirement to prove knowledge on the part of the infringer (ie strict liability). Infringement is actionable in any member state of the EU in which the infringement occurs.

- n. Defences: acts done privately for non-commercial purposes; acts done for experimental purposes and acts done for the purpose of making citations or of teaching (provided compatible with fair trade practice etc).
- o. The usual remedies for infringement are available.
- p. Licences of right are not available.
- q. The right can be assigned or licensed.

27. Summary of relationship of the rights:

- a. Copyright and Unregistered Community Design Right can both subsist in a design and both are enforceable.
- b. Copyright and UK Unregistered Design Right can both also subsist in a design but only one is enforceable.
- c. Unregistered Community Design Right and UK Unregistered Design Right can subsist and be enforced in a design (although they might not be owned by the same person!)

28. A broad summary of the rights helps give perspective:

- a. Copying must be shown if infringement of an unregistered design is alleged.
- b. Design Right deals with shape designs for mass production and protects any aspect of shape or configuration (not surface decoration) provided the design is not commonplace in the relevant design field at the time of its creation. Articles or parts of articles that must fit or must match are also excluded from protection.
- c. Design Right owners must be qualifying individuals namely citizens or habitual residents of qualifying countries (primarily the UK and EEC) and must be the creator, commissioner, employer or the person who first markets articles to the design.
- d. Design right lasts 15 years or 10 years from first marketing (licences of right apply in the last 5 years).
- e. Design Right is infringed by copying to produce articles exactly or substantially similar to the design. Primary infringement (making) does not require proof of knowledge but secondary infringement (importing or possessing) does. Threats other than to makers or importers may be subject to groundless threats claims.
- f. Design Right and copyright may both subsist in a design but only one is enforceable. Copyright (not Design Right) protects designs for artistic works (primarily sculptures (which do not require artistic quality) and works of artistic craftsmanship (which do)). Mass

produced designer garments are unlikely to be considered works of artistic craftsmanship. If an artistic work is mass produced (50 copies or more) the period of protection is reduced to 25 years from first marketing.

- g. UCDR gives very wide protection to the appearance of the whole or parts of products and arises when a design is new and has individual character. Component parts must be visible during normal use to attract protection. There are interface and must fit (but not must match) exclusions. Qualification arises automatically once the design is made available to the public. The right belongs to the employer or designer (not the commissioner) and protection lasts 3 years. The right is infringed if product copied from the design does not make a different overall impression on the informed user.

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Robert has broad experience in chancery, commercial and business related civil litigation with specialist knowledge in intellectual property and media and entertainment. His expertise extends to banking and guarantees, partnership, construction, fraud and asset tracing and professional negligence. Primarily known as a litigator he has undertaken many heavily contested often high profile trials and devoted a substantial part of his practice to specialist advice work. He is an experienced interlocutory litigator particularly in relation to freezing and search orders and other interim remedies.



His intellectual property practice ranges from trade marks to copyright, patents and design right work and he has extensive experience of defamation and privacy claims. He has chaired and for some years delivered lectures at the annual intellectual property law and sports law conferences for London Legal Training. His lecture topics have included privacy and image rights, performers' rights, performers' royalties, database rights and freedom of movement of goods.

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