



Simon Sayce with one of the props he designed for the Hellraiser movie. Right, a poster for the Hellraiser movie. Below, Christopher Lambert in the lead role in Highlander

From Highlander to Midlander

The perfect pitch is key to striking a chord in the creative sector, according to Simon Sayce.

And he should know, after a career that has spanned Hollywood movies, journalism, sculpting and now working on brand strategies for a West Midland agency.

The 49-year-old, who worked on special effects on the Hellraiser and Highlander series of movies, believes the skillset for success on the silver screen is no different to any other form of business – ability to sell yourself is paramount.

And he is taking that message on the road, by lecturing to university students about how to pitch – which he believes to be a crucial skill that is often overlooked by people and businesses.

Mr Sayce, who currently lives in Oxford, but plans to set up a base in the West Midlands, said: "If you write a letter for a job that is your pitch. Once, when I was working for CAR magazine and Williams, I was watching Top Gear and I spotted that the editor was John Bentley.

"Straight away I wrote him a letter saying 'John, it was great talking to you that party over Christmas and I am delighted that you think I could be a possible Top Gear presenter, but I don't know if I can make it to lunch. I hope you got that nasty stain off your tie.'

"The next day I got a call from John and he said 'I must have had a really good party because I can't remember a thing' and I ended up screen-testing twice for Top Gear.

"That approach, where you just write a letter or pick up the phone to talk to people, can open doors."

"We are talking about teaching the students to think about what is different about them as a person," Mr Sayce added.

"In two or three years time when you leave university you are up against 20 other students and you have got to differentiate yourself with your pitch."

Mr Sayce is currently working with the education business partnership with a view to creating diplomas about pitches.

Meanwhile, the father-of-three is also working for Mere Green-based creative agency Zulu and working on a film script and a book.

He plans to set roots in the West Midlands, and said he was excited by the possibilities for the region's creative sector.

He said: "It is an interesting area. It is the second-largest media hub in the UK and while I still do quite a lot of work in London I find it is more dynamic working in places like Birmingham and Bristol.

"People are much more receptive and it is dynamic and exciting.

"My work is varied. I do a lot of work for



advertising agencies.

"Quite often they will just send me a brief and say 'can you put a creative spin on this?' or maybe we are going to see a company that wants us to do some work for them and I will go along and analyse their brand.

"A lot of the time now I make a living as a copy-writer with Zulu.

"I still do some more creative stuff as well.

"I have written a book purely for children

called The Nit Before Christmas

about a nit that goes around on Santa's beard and as Santa puts the presents down the nit jumps out and lays eggs in the children's hair."

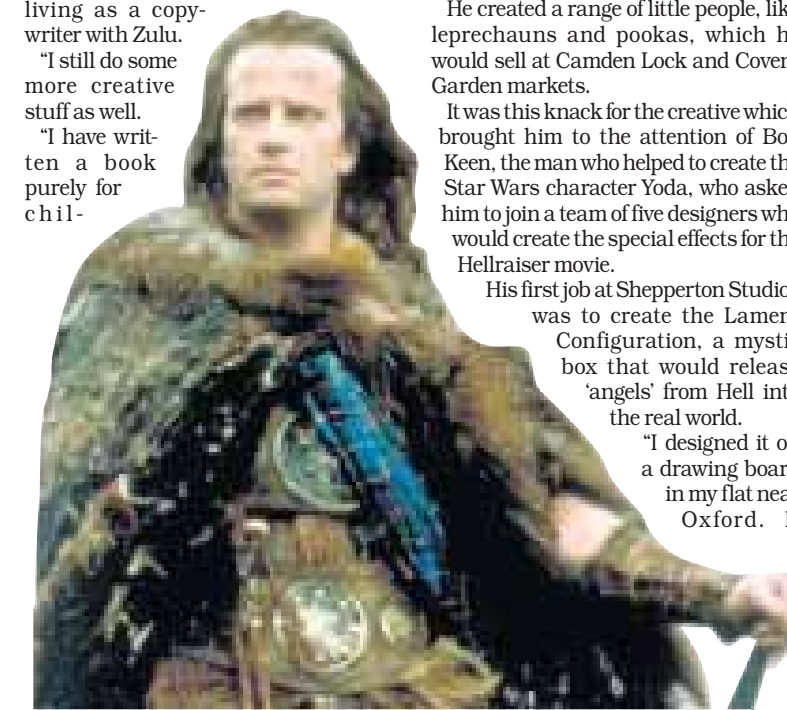
Mr Sayce left school at 17 and went to art college, which he quickly abandoned before taking up sculpting.

He created a range of little people, like leprechauns and pookas, which he would sell at Camden Lock and Covent Garden markets.

It was this knack for the creative which brought him to the attention of Bob Keen, the man who helped to create the Star Wars character Yoda, who asked him to join a team of five designers who would create the special effects for the Hellraiser movie.

His first job at Shepperton Studios was to create the Lament Configuration, a mystic box that would release 'angels' from Hell into the real world.

"I designed it on a drawing board in my flat near Oxford. It



now sells worldwide and is used as a basis for everything from kits to album covers, tattoos and Monopoly sets," he said.

The company grew over the next decade to employ, at its peak, about 40 people and Mr Sayce went on to become managing director of Image Animation.

However, the film industry in the UK was crashing as the traditional skills were taken over by computer-generated imagery and he moved into the world of advertising in 1992, working with agency Still Price Lintas.

He took a sabbatical in 1997 to work with Williams Grand Prix building the Le Mans-winning BMW LMR, working on the body structure and in the wind-tunnel and writing for CAR magazine after responding to an ad in the Guardian that read "Travel the world. Drive fast cars. Meet people. Write about it. Get paid."

He said: "I got the job, against a fair bit of competition, but was now freelance. As such, I found myself being contacted by different people and companies for advice.

"My history as a market trader, a creative, running a PLC and then working here and in the States all came together. The combination of both wide creative and business experience seems to be more rare than I thought.

"The creative thought process remains at the centre of how I work but most of

my work now is almost 'undercover'. Creative agencies call me in to help pitch for, and hopefully win, business. Wins have included SAP, Aston Martin, the DTI and General Motors."

Last year Mr Sayce was a winner at the International Screenwriters Festival, after pitching his film script idea against 1,600 entrants.

He explained: "I already had a film offer five years ago but it didn't get made in the end and now I have written another movie.

"I originally had to pitch that online in 25 words, then there was a 150-word pitch below before I got exactly 60 seconds to pitch it in front of an audience and a panel of experts, which was frightening.

"But I was lucky enough to win and we are in the early development process of taking the film forward.

"At the moment I am writing the second draft. It is called Without President and it is about a gang who kidnap the US President by mistake.

"All of this is based on pitching. You aren't going to get anywhere without it," he added.

"With the CAR stuff it is the same. You can't just say 'it's an estate car' – you have to make it interesting."

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