

A true Storie

Knitwear designer **Jo Storie** enjoyed working for big labels in London and New York but Scotland is the place she calls home, discovers **Clare Kelly**



Quick CV

- 1988-1992** BA in Industrial Design (textiles) at Heriot-Watt University in Scotland, graduating with a first class degree.
- 1992** Wins Grampian Woollen Mills LTD Enterprise Award.
- 1992** Final year sponsored by Grignasco, I.W.S & Johnston's of Elgin.
- 1992-1996** Designer of womens', mens' and home accessories at TSE Cashmere, London. Launched mail-order diffusion line Cashmere by Design (renamed CXD).
- 1996-1998** Design Manager at Ballantyne Cashmere, London.
- 1998-1999** Design Director at J.Crew in New York (womens' sweaters).
- 1999-2001** Senior Designer (womens' sweaters) at The Limited, New York.
- 2001-2003** Design Director of womens' fully-fashioned and cut and sew knitwear collections at Ann Taylor, New York.
- 2003-2004** Consultant Designer at Forte Cashmere, New York: design and specification of 200+ knitwear collections for women, men and for the home. Private label design and specification.
- 2004-Present** Designer and owner of Jo Storie knitwear in the Scottish Borders.

Frank Sinatra famously sang of New York: *if I can make it there, I'll make it anywhere* and for knitwear designer Jo Storie, it was this city that has shaped her career. The move to the US came in 1998 following six years in London working with cashmere and other luxury fibres designing for European, American and Japanese markets at TSE Cashmere and Ballantyne Cashmere. Jo's talent soon piqued the interest of a headhunter, who invited her to go to New York and provided the opportunity to work for a roster of high profile companies synonymous with high-end knitwear.

It's the dream of many, but behind the gloss of the big city, what is it really like working for a global brand? "Working for what are essentially billion-dollar businesses was very different to what I do today. The scale of them was unlike anything else, with tight deadlines and very specific price points to adhere to. It was important that each piece of knitwear would lend itself to as many looks as possible and I would produce a 'line sheet' detailing all the colour ways and the combinations," explains Jo.

Accepting that some designs will just never make it to production was, as Jo says: "inevitable, it's part of the job but you spend such a long time working on pieces then they would just drop it as they couldn't find a place for it. However, you'd always find a way of taking it out of the cupboard and reworking it." ▶

LEFT: Jo Storie
RIGHT: One of Jo's designs, Kelly



Jo Storie



Maintaining her own style, Jo would keep her ideas 'close by' and refer to them often; recommending new yarn choices if the garment was something she just had to have. Hand knitting is, of course, something Jo is extremely passionate about but while in New York, the scale of the operation often dictated that there was a tangible distance between her concepts and the finished garment.

One can imagine that she is now delighted to be working closely with such a talented team of knitters on her own collection. Jo's vision was to employ local knitters and in order to reach them she placed an advert in

wool is traced back to the farm it came from and its shearing date. From the farm (where every sheet is labelled), every process at the factory is tracked and labelled. Once in the skein, every skein is labelled with the name of the farm it originated from and the date of shearing'. *

Jo's own motto, 'driven by design, ecological by nature', couldn't be simpler and yet more direct. Never one to beat people with the 'green' stick, she does however feel that an ethical garment should be beautiful, something her customers can attest to.

The latest addition to her *Ecology* range

Patterns may be seen as quite a departure from a ready-to-wear collection but for Jo it was a decision she was more than happy to commit to, saying: "the success of my first collection prompted me to focus more on getting high quality contemporary and innovative designs to a wider audience. The goal was to make high quality design more accessible. It has always been about the design and the business has now been stripped back to focus on this in its simplest form; the knitting pattern."

Only available to purchase via her website, Jo made the decision not to supply any shops for one reason, and one reason only: in order to keep costs down for the end consumer. But after a successful career spent in the company of others in a busy design studio, does she miss the face-to-face interaction? "As I don't have a shop, I don't get to meet customers as often as I'd like and that's the only real drawback – though I aim to make it a personal experience with the use of blogs and Twitter and many of my customers return time and time again."

Spending so long working for fashion-forward labels must have only further enhanced Jo's natural ability to spot a trend and this year, she predicts: "naturally it's all about knits looking like knits and not imitating woven fabric which is a great trend for hand knitters as it is sculptural and highly textural. Also, I think we'll see exaggerated textures and lots of big lace with stitches that

"Driven by design, ecological by nature."

a Scottish newspaper. Those who made the shortlist were then issued with a complicated Aran cable to see how they fared. Sourcing talent was only the beginning of Jo's business and keen to take the most ecological route possible, she set about investigating high quality fibres. "All my yarns are British and I source most of them from Cornish Organic Wool – they are a great family business and I really feel that people should be aware of their yarn's origin, how it's been farmed and whether it's been man-made," believes Jo.

Provenance is one of the key features of Cornish Organic Wool as 'every skein of

(which includes chunky knit cabled cardigans with a choice of sleeves) is a range of pattern kits – *Ecology II* – to enable keen knitters to make some of her best-loved designs at home using beautiful organic yarns. Of the patterns, Jo reveals that she will be "retailing luxury, innovative knitting patterns for hand knitters of all abilities. I will be retaining an ecological dimension by making knitting kits available containing responsibly sourced and ecological yarns, along with the patterns and needles as knitting kits. This means that people can access my designs and, if they wish, the ecological dimension."

*Excerpt from *Why Organic?* provided by Cornish Organic Wool; www.cornishorganicwool.co.uk



Storie's
designs
ecology
2011



like macramé.”
 Rather than having a favourite designer, Jo swaps and changes with the season's fashions, but when pushed, reveals that Stella McCartney is a designer she really admires. Aside from the obvious beauty of Stella McCartney's work, just what is it about the brand that resonates with Jo? “Stella McCartney takes sourcing very seriously,” says Jo. “Through all my research of ethical brands and methods of manufacture, she seems to have made the contact ahead of me. I only know this because manufacturers like to boast about who they are working with; it's their advertisement.”
 Summer is without a doubt, a busy time for Jo as she works hard on the winter collections planning ahead while the rest of the year is shedding layers of clothing, rather than putting them on. Last year, she made it onto the American Express Enriched List in association with *The Daily Telegraph*; a seal of approval bestowed upon those who inspire others to follow their dreams. As she says of herself: “if there's a choice to make, I try and be the responsible one.”
 Jo's continued dedication to ethical fashion ensures that customers who choose her designs and patterns purchase something that is as beautiful as it is sustainable – whether they live in Newcastle or New York. For Jo Storie's exclusive Cove cardigan design for Knitting see page 67. ●

“Naturally it's all about knits looking like knits and not imitating woven fabric, which is a great trend for hand knitters as it is sculptural and highly textural.”

To view Jo Storie's new collection or to find out more visit www.jostorie.com
 Email: jo@jostorie.com
 Tel: 01289 309500
 01890 761728

Cornish Organics
www.cornishorganicwool.co.uk

Photographer, Nick Callaghan
www.nickcallaghan.com

