

Berwickshire Life

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Jo's knitwear going global with designs to download in demand

It's still hand knitting – but not as you know it – as expert Berwickshire designer brings the traditional craft bang up to date



Janice Gillie

KNITTING has joined the world of e-commerce thanks to the innovative idea of selling original designer patterns online – and it's all happening here in Berwickshire. Jo Storie has worked with some of the top London and New York fashion houses as an international knitwear designer, but despite now being happily settled into family life in Reston the designer in her cannot be tamed. She has found a unique way of using her sketches and designs.

"I had the contacts and knew I could keep on designing and fill sketch books. I wanted to start my own label but that stalled. I had started out with the intention of going into manufacturing and working with manufacturers to get my designs into boutiques, but found it very difficult to get into and get the service from manufacturers without the weight of a multi-million pound business behind me."

Things may not have gone quite according to Plan A, but with a mix of manufactured and handknit designs and armed with Plan B (focusing on the handknits) Jo was invited to take part in London Fashion Week, validation that her handknit designs were still up there amongst the best.

"The handknits really took off, particularly the bespoke handknits and I now have 12 knitters all over Scotland."

"Knitting patterns went through a frumpy phase. Now it's right on trend but more the design option rather than for saving money. If you are going to knit something for yourself it's going to be something special. By selling the patterns it's making designer knitwear accessible for everyone."

A prolific designer, Jo never stops coming up with new ideas, if they would develop into patches, whether or not they're ever likely to be made up into garments.

My husband suggested selling designs. I'm reading the news anyway and make the idea to go with the graphics or web design team. The next step was PDF downloads. I decided that was the way to try and in February we started up Jo Storie Handknits. Her patterns

have gone global, and people in America, Japan, Denmark, Germany – to name but a few – are now sporting some of Jo's distinctive designs.

"I still design the same way. If I was putting a collection together with a client. In the past I just had to keep coming up with the ideas but here I have to edit the ideas myself, instead of handing them over to a client to pick out the designs they want to go with."

Now she picks the best of her designs and puts them together as a collection, just as

would happen for the fashion companies she worked with, and her current collection is called Modern Heritage featuring bang on trend designs in high quality, natural yarns.

She still travels to trade shows to keep an eye on what's going on and never misses London Fashion Week so she knows that what she's producing is on trend. For the past 15 years, while working for some of the biggest names in international knitwear, Jo has visited Florence once a year to find the best of

yarns, and she continues to do so, experimenting with them to find out what yarns work best with which design.

During her career Jo established herself amongst the best in the world when it comes to knitwear design. After graduating with a first class degree in knitwear design from the Scottish College of Textiles, her first job took her straight to London. While in London she worked with TSE Cashmere, the Burton group (Richards) and Ballantyne Cashmere and from

there she was headhunted across the Atlantic to New York, joining J.Crew, The Limited, then Ann Taylor – American retailers with between 300-600 shops.

"Most of the jobs I got were through my sketch books and I still sketch constantly. I couldn't sell my books, I couldn't bear to part with them, that's when my husband came up with the idea of selling the patterns instead."

Jo may not have the fast-paced life in New York she once had but living in Reston and working from her Berwick-based office

she is still producing designs that would grace any catwalk. As soon as you walk into her office in Berwick WorkSpace you are in 'designer world' with swatches, story boards, sketch books, patterns and garments.

To date the most popular design has been the Cove hat.

"The photograph from the pattern seems to have gone viral and has popped up all over the place and so many people contacted us asking whether we sold the actual hat that it got us thinking – well why not?" says Jo.

Jo Storie is offering to render the chance to win her hats (see photo above) you need to do is log on to her website: www.jostorie.com and visit the magazine. After if you are feeling more you could download a pattern and make it in any to make, even in a small to make it. And it looks fantastic. Email: jostorie@berwickshire.com or phone: 01843 510000. Twitter: @jostorie



Creative knitwear designer Jo Storie is surrounded by inspirational ideas. Inset, Berwick model Sarah wearing the Cove hat that you could win on Jo Storie's website.

Main picture by Kirsty