

Natalie Warner

Practical and beautiful: rock-solid duo

[Lead]

Her designs are stylish, timeless and a pleasure to knit. In almost every issue of Knitting Magazine you will find an ajour top, vintage-ish cardigan or a scarf or cowl with elegant cables of her hand. Full of plans to publish more independently. Meet British designer Natalie Warner.

Natalie was born and raised in London and still lives there. Her parents have always encouraged her since she was a child. "I felt like I could do anything, that I could try and figure anything out. If I wasn't good at it, I determined it myself, my parents never said that to me."

Sewing and knitting she learns as a young girl from her mother and her grandmother. Her mother does the sewing and grandma knits. "I was a mother's baby... What Mom and Grandma did, I wanted to do, too. I was a very impatient child. I ended up leaving knitting until my teens. I made my own clothes. Well, it is. I remember a summer job didn't go through and I figured I could use that time to knit. Like, if it doesn't work now, it's never going to work. But it worked.... You had that very thick yarn, 10% cotton and more acrylic. But that wasn't supposed to depress the fun. I haven't stopped since then."

[tk] From literature to fashion

After high school, Natalie has no idea what she wants to do. In the end, she chooses to study English literature, specializing in the Middle Ages. "I found that interesting, and it was also interesting. After graduating, I got a job as a research assistant at the University of London. In 2009 I thought: it can't go on like this, I want to do something else... I need to find something else. Near where I worked in Bloomsbury was a knitting shop with nice ladies and Rowan yarn. I honored the people know, talked and bought there often and a lot of yarn. They encouraged me to do something with it, if it works, it works. Why not?"

And so begins the knitting side of her career. In 2013 she publishes a small collection of winter accessories. In 2014 she was commissioned for the British Knitting Magazine: the *Leaf and Moss Stitch Sweater*. She says, "At first I didn't have much control. I came up with that first sweater in Rowan wool cotton. But the editor-in-chief turned that into a 100% alpaca. I agreed, of course, because it was the first time, but wasn't happy with it.. That's different now, I've gained a lot more self-confidence and the current editor-in-chief is less controlled and listens to why you've chosen something. " (1)

Natalie is also studying Fashion Design and Pattern Drawing at the London College of Fashion. This brings her to a lecturer in Fashion and Textiles at the University of West London, where she teaches her students the intricacies of designing knitwear. Now she is part of the Fashion Teacher Team at Morley College, an institute for adult education.

[Tk] Designing with vision

It's easy for Natalie to go off. The ideas come naturally. "Although, of course, you always look around looking for interesting things. That's almost unconscious. For a long time I did the design in addition to my work in education. Then I saw something, made a quick note and later I had no idea where it came from. I think you should get the most out of an idea. Take for example the basket braidstitch (basket weave).. You can just knit it, but you can do anything with it. You can change the proportions, do the repetitions differently, you can make it longer, or shorter, there are as many variations as possible. The original idea ends in something that no longer resembles the basket braidstitch. " (1)

Intuitive, creative and empathetic and you can see that in her designs.. Laughing, she says: "I have to be able to listen carefully, because people always tell me all kinds of things. I'm good at connecting with people. Conversely, watching people inspires me, and I mean what people do, what does their life look like. I'm a human being. I design clothes that are timeless, not trendy. I hope everyone can wear it, fashion or age are not important, you can style my designs the way you want. I want to design clothes that last a long time, also because knitting something takes a lot of time. It goes without saying to me that something that you put so much time and effort into has to last a long time. Good designs last a long time. That's why I watch people

organize their daily lives. That's where my designs have to fit. No glamour, I'm far too practical for that. " (1)

The most fun in her designs is that she takes into account the knitting pleasure. In her patterns there is regularly a 'tour free'. Where you don't need anything, in which you can relax.... "Knitting has to be beautiful, practical, but it also has to be fine knitting! It has to be nice knitting if there are children around, or if you want to knit a little bit along the way."

[tk] Shining examples

That befitting to things that are useful and beautiful is reflected in Warner's sources of inspiration. That's William Morris, the spiritual father of the arts and craft movement. Natalie: "For example, he said you shouldn't have anything in your house that you didn't know what to use it for or that you didn't think was beautiful. I'm very into that."

Frank Pick provided visual identity and style during the construction of the London Underground. He chose the distinctive logo and took care of the visual expressions: clear image and little text. "On Piccadilly Circus hangs a monument to him and his philosophy. It's about beauty, and practical design. With his views he shaped modernity. Beautiful! I'm also a fan of Donald Norman. His 'Design of Every Day Things' is so good to read. It teaches you why you design... namely for people. When I was teaching at London's Fashion College, everyone was focused on design. But actually shaping the design, that was a second step. In the past, designers drew their own patterns, most of them can't do that anymore."

In her knitting examples, Natalie is as British as she can be. She loves Kim Hargreaves. "I still like to browse 'Precious' from 2009. There's always something in her books that appeals to me. I love Jane Crowfoot's crochet designs. So resourceful and imaginative. And I love Sarah Hazell very much, even though she was the first person I showed my designs to and she was very stimulating. A warm and kind person. " (1)

[tk] Deliberately

Like most of us, Natalie has been working from home for the past few months. "I didn't have time to be a real knitter before. I was always busy realizing my own ideas. Working for magazines was good when I worked in education, you just have to take into account the deadline. But in the last year I've been working much more independently. I feel braver, realize there's a lot more in me. I test new ideas, I find new people I want to work with. The self-control over my time feels positive and the right thing to do. Right away. That to me is the yield of this coronary season.

I want to start publishing more patterns in-house. That's a load of work. Patterns that have been in magazines, I have to knit again. I want to spend the patterns in more sizes, and I have no rights over the photos. They also need to be remapped.

I'm experimenting with new constructions. For that, I now work with Kate, a technical editor who understands exactly what I'm doing. And in terms of techniques? I like everything: ajour, fair-isle, cables. Time will tell, but for now I'm very happy with what's happening. " (1)

Like most of us, Natalie missed things: "Teaching, teaching people something, I haven't done that in so long. I now give workshops in the online version of Vogue Knitting. They're sold out! I want to do, give and develop more online courses anyway. Anyway: designing and knitting give me a purpose in life. Anything is possible. That's a nice feeling."

Natalie Warner

Designer | Teacher

knit and crochet | sewing and pattern cutting

Website: <https://natalieinstitches.com/>

Take a class with me at Morley College: <https://www.morleycollege.ac.uk/study-areas/fashion>

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