

# inside cornwall

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# ECO CHIC

Cornish textile artists turn  
old clothes into new

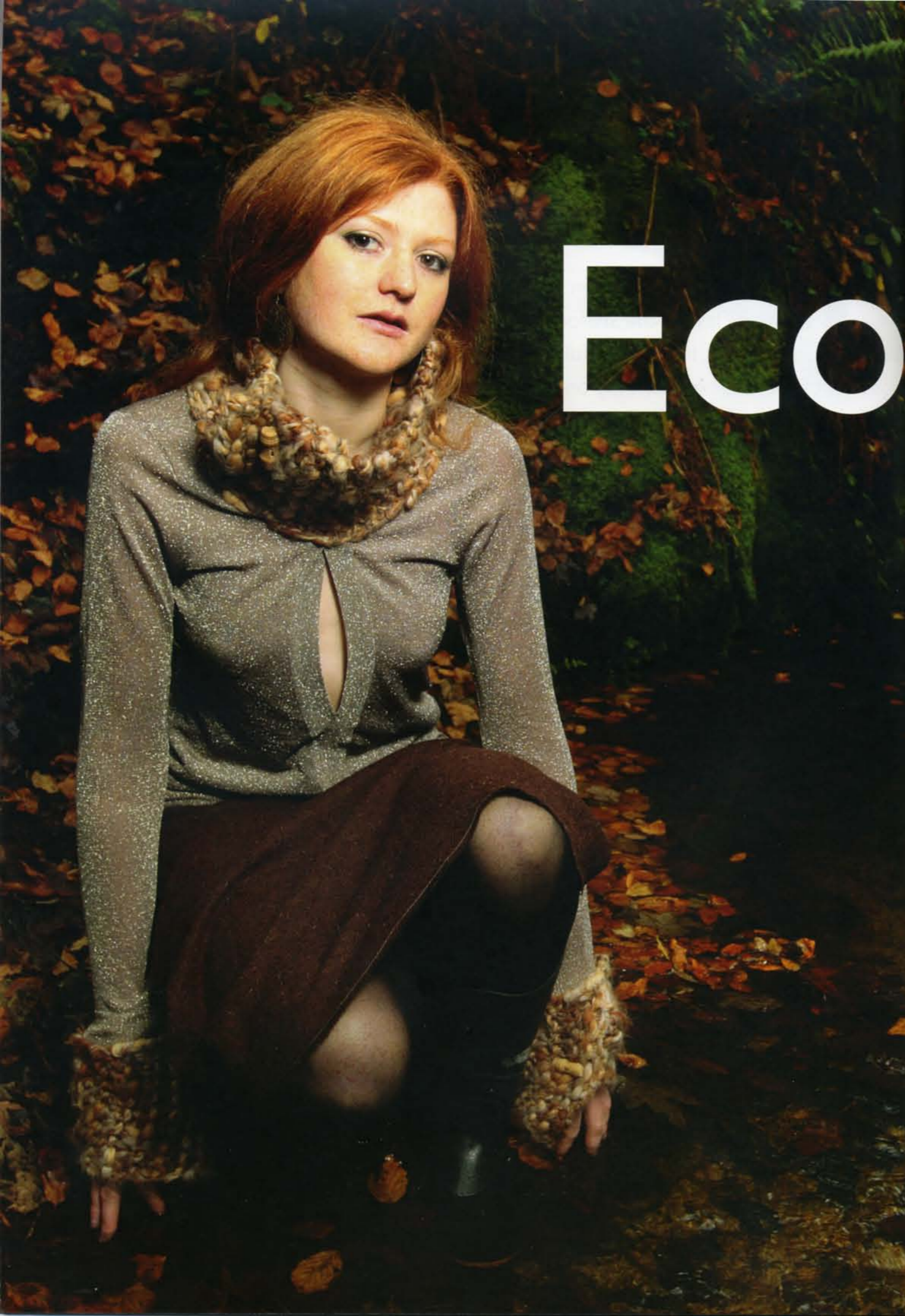
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# Eco Couture



A new kind of clothing designer is hard at work in Cornwall, with a handful of local entrepreneurs recycling old clothes into new fashion

Words by Teri Laing Photographs by Ben Ellis

Main and above Outfits by  
Mari Maurice at Sow's Ear

**B**askets of soft wools, cashmere, mohair and angora spill out in Mari Maurice's studio at Jubilee Wharf in Penryn, while collections of fine silks and old lace wait to be given a new lease of life. Mari is one of several Cornish designers offering an alternative to cheap chic and throwaway fashions by transforming old clothes and fabrics - often high-quality and durable - into unique one-off items to be cherished and worn with pride.

While we can easily lay our hands on organic food, many of us recycle and we buy more secondhand and vintage clothes than ever before, an estimated 1 million tonnes of textiles go in our bins and into landfill every year. Many of us are addicted to our quick fashion fixes and while there is no illusion that the world is about to stop shopping, a little bit of effort and not a lot of money can throw up some wonderful guilt-free options, right on your doorstep.

Mari set up Sow's Ear five years ago after realising her love of "chopping things up" could be turned into a career. Making recycled clothes from the finest of materials, she has a hoard of beautiful old garments waiting to be transformed, "leaving as little ecological impact on the planet as possible".

"We make off-the-peg garments so there is always something fresh on the rail but most of the work undertaken is commissioned by people looking for that something special. Commissioning a made-to-measure knitted dress, for example, only costs an extra £10 and means you can choose the perfect colour and material to suit your skin," says Mari.

"I love textures and always think about how material feels against the skin. Everyone is different so creating an item is very much a two-way process. I don't take a deposit because I need to have creative freedom but the customer is involved in every stage of the design process. I love what I do. It's a privilege to make something that someone has an emotional connection to." >



## Meet your maker

### DESIGNERS AND RECYCLERS

• **Re-dress** Transforms old garments you love into new and unique designs. The Old Grammar School, West Park, Redruth. 07985 282083 [www.re-dress.org.uk](http://www.re-dress.org.uk)

• **Sow's Ear** Recycled clothes made from the finest fabrics. Unit 2, Jubilee Wharf, Commercial Road, Penryn. 01326 373096 [www.sowsearstudio.co.uk](http://www.sowsearstudio.co.uk)

• **Sidekickclothing** Handmade clothes using reclaimed fabrics. Studio 6, Jubilee Wharf, Commercial Road, Penryn. 07772 638580 [www.sidekickclothing.co.uk](http://www.sidekickclothing.co.uk)

• **The Pikey Princess Boudoir Bordello Boutique** Formerly Kitten Caboodle, this vintage boutique offers re-styled fashions and monthly events. 07880 725848 [www.myspace.com/funkinpussies](http://www.myspace.com/funkinpussies)

• **Susan Irwin** A new company reviving old clothes. 01872 222398 [susan@irwin58.freemove.co.uk](mailto:susan@irwin58.freemove.co.uk)

• **Becky Crawford** Unique animals and toys made from old items of clothing. 07815 148082 [www.myspacefruit.com](http://www.myspacefruit.com)

• **Traid clothing** Turns old clothes into boutique fashion, whilst recycling and investing in poor regions around the world. [www.traid.org.uk](http://www.traid.org.uk)

• **Sarah Drew** Recycles your antique jewellery into contemporary necklace and tiara designs. 64 Gover Road, St Austell. 01726 68433 [www.sarahdrew.com](http://www.sarahdrew.com)

“ I love what I do. It's a privilege to make something that someone has an emotional connection to ” says Mari Maurice

Opposite Unique clothes and accessories by Re-dress and Sow's Ear  
Right Happy Cats by Becky Crawford

With around 35 commissions at any one time, Mari has built up a regular customer base, which is growing all the time. Charlie Guidal still shivers when she looks at her bespoke wedding dress - one of several Mari has designed for brides-to-be. "Everyone is sick of me gushing about my dress," says Charlie. "I tried all the usual shops, with lots of meringues and some gorgeous outfits but none of them felt like me, plus I really wanted something different. I found out about Mari's business and I drew some designs for her to look at. As soon as I met her I knew we were on the same wavelength. In the end my wedding had an earthy, organic, vintage theme to it and the dress was the biggest influence on that.

"The dress was made over the course of a month and I visited Mari on a couple of occasions to be measured and to make sure she was making it how I wanted. I am not the emotional type but I instantly burst into tears when I first saw it. It was everything that I had visualised yet more. The fabric was old lace and gave the perfect vintage feel I was after. It fitted like a glove and was totally made for me which was the best part. My favourite part was the low back with a bustle of material roses - it felt exquisite. Not only did Mari have the skill to produce something so beautiful but she was so laid back and sensitive about such an important item of clothing. She really listened to me and understood the things that were important to me."

Mari is not alone in her endeavours. Having just completed her MA in Contemporary Visual Art at Falmouth, Lynne Devey used her final show as a springboard for her recycled clothing company Re-dress, based at the Old Grammar School, Redruth. Not only does she offer wardrobe surgeries, whereby you can commission a unique one-off garment using some of your old precious clothing, she also leads workshops in schools and the community, teaching people how to make their own recycled clothes.

Lynne has a strong affinity with colour and pattern and is drawn to these when creating a new item of clothing. She can piece together a stunning outfit made from several old items you thought you'd never wear again, whether it's a dress you can no longer squeeze into, a favourite jumper with a stain on it or a pair of trousers you just can't bear to part with. "It's a very organic and fluid process. Once I start working with materials, they sort of talk to me and they somehow determine the final form. You get to know what happens when you join fabrics in a certain way. I want people to come away with something they love - have a unique piece of clothing that no one else in the world will have. To do this, there has to be a lot of discussion about what they like and what they don't."

All handmade garments take on average between 8 and 16 hours depending on the materials used, roughly costing £30 - £45 for a cardigan, jumper or top, £50 for a jacket and £40 - £65 for a skirt or trousers.

Advice for recycling your own clothes is to ignore all the rules. If you're told you can't cut up wool because it frays, do it anyway. It will fray, but if you catch it with a zigzag >



## Recycling alternatives

### PASS IT ON

#### Clothing banks

● There are banks for a number of charities including Sita, Oxfam and Salvation Army across Cornwall for the re-use of clothes, both in the UK and abroad. Clothes not suitable for reuse are recycled.

**Info** Find your nearest bank at 0800 612 0456  
www.recycleforcornwall.org.uk

#### Charity shops

● Still an excellent way of recycling, as well as supporting a worthy cause.

#### Vintage shops

● For one-off finds and collectable items with a past, though often a price tag to match. Try Kitts Couture - rated one of the top five outside London by Tatler.

**Info** Kitts Couture, Chapel Street, Penzance.  
01736 364507 www.kittscouture.co.uk

#### Clothes swapping parties

● Last year's hot fashion trend continues. Combining wardrobes and wine, it's a chance to recycle, renew and reinvigorate whilst having lots of fun. Why not organise your own this year?

**Info** www.getcrafty.com

#### Cornwall Scrap Store

● Collects interesting, unusual and unique materials - including fabrics - and makes available to its members for use in art, craft and play activities.

**Info** Goonmarris, St Austell. 01726 821161  
www.cornwallscrapstore.co.uk (Also at Pool and Liskeard).

#### Freecycle Cornwall

● A grassroots and non-profit movement of people giving and getting stuff for free in their own towns.

**Info** www.freecycle.org.uk

#### Make a Morsbag

● If you've got half an hour, grab yourself some unwanted fabric and download instructions from www.morsbags.com then sit back and marvel how that old curtain has saved the world from another 80 plastic monsters clogging up the eco system per year.

**Info** www.morsbags.com

#### Car boot sales

● A fun way of recycling unwanted goods among a large group of people. The season starts again this month and runs until October.

**Info** 07779 517749 www.carbootscornwall.co.uk  
01726 891860 www.jumbocarboot.co.uk

#### Ebay

● The World's Online Marketplace. If you haven't the time or energy, a drop-off shop such as GoinGoinGone will sell it for you.

**Info** GoinGoinGone, 1 New Road, Newlyn, Penzance.  
01736 333233 www.goingoingone.co.uk

#### Other useful links

**Info** www.sustrust.co.uk www.recyclenow.com  
www.textile-recycling.org.uk

**Right** Lorraine Campbell  
from Sidekickclothing  
in her Penryn studio

stitch you can come up with great results. Find things you no longer wear, chop them up, put them back together with other things and voila. For the first attempt it is best to make sure that clothing is not too precious. Try things that you think will look good together. If it doesn't work you've lost nothing and you should always have fun with it.

If you'd like help from the experts before you start hacking, workshops are currently being booked in Falmouth and Redruth. Groups and venues should contact Lynne if they're interested in hosting workshops and keep an eye on her website. No experience is needed.

"It's really easy to get started," says Lynne. "I've had people come to my workshops who are scared of sewing machines, but by the end of the day they're happily sewing and chopping away with gusto. In fact, I get slightly worried about the glee they show in taking the scissors to their wardrobe and home furnishings! People should be warned it often stops you from ever shopping again - it did with me. I have the largest collection of clothes in the world as I used to be a bit of a shopaholic but since I started to make my own I no longer buy clothes and have completely lost the urge to shop."

With a new BA Fashion course underway at Falmouth this year, there may be many more students following in Mari and Lynne's footsteps. Course leader Jane Gottelier says: "It's definitely something all students are aware of and concerned about and we're hoping to introduce recycling and sustainability as a specific project next term. We've already had one student make a jacket from fabric she found in a charity shop and another who made a shirt from old Cornish tea towels. It remains to be seen whether recycled clothing will be an area they move into when they graduate."

Eco style is not just the preserve of small makers - there are signs that organisations big and small are changing their practices. As eco fashion becomes trendier, high-street names are setting production standards for their garments and introducing organic and fairly traded fibres into their ranges. Marks & Spencer and Oxfam joined forces earlier this year to launch the M&S and Oxfam Clothes Exchange, the biggest programme in the UK to encourage consumers to recycle their clothes. Designed to raise money for Oxfam's work, whilst reducing the mountain of clothes sent to landfill, customers making a donation of M&S clothes to Oxfam will receive a £5 voucher to use at any M&S store in the UK.

If sustainable clothing is about conscious choice rather than blind consumption, it seems consuming less and differently is our next stylistic challenge. <

**Info** Sow's Ear, Mari Maurice, Unit 2, Jubilee Wharf, Commercial Road, Penryn. 01326 373096 www.sowsearstudio.co.uk  
Re-dress, The Old Grammar School, West Park, Redruth.  
07985 282083 lynne@re-dress.org.uk www.re-dress.org.uk

