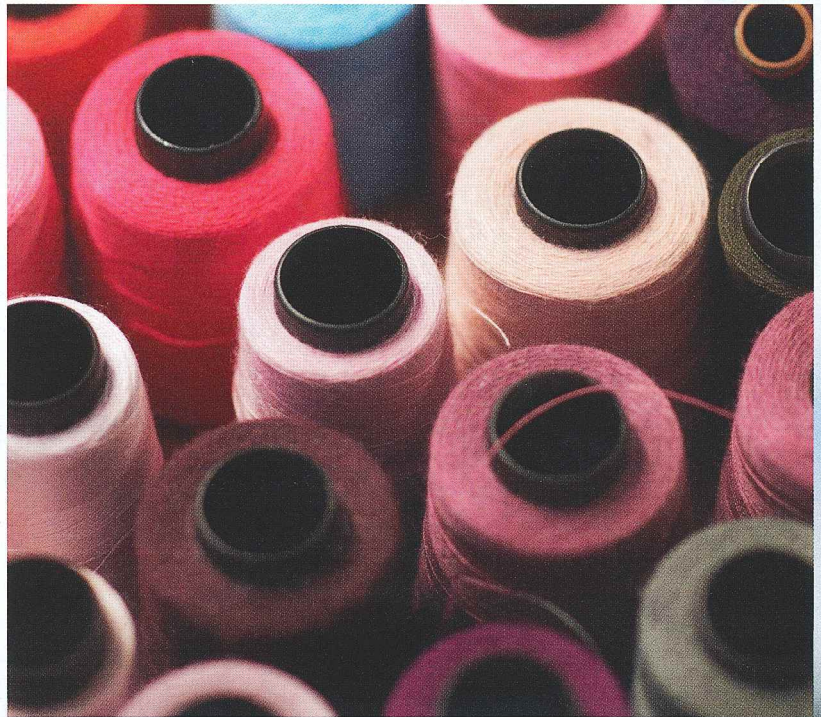


LOOMING LARGE

Hermès and Chanel have long chosen Scottish over Italian mills. Now a new generation of designers is following suit, inspired as much by technological innovation as matchless quality. Mark C O'Flaherty reports on a Scottish textile renaissance



The archive library at Johnstons of Elgin in the Scottish Highlands resembles a lavishly produced fantasy film set. There are shelves full of bulging red-leather books with weathered pages, each tome greater in size than the *Domesday Book*. Collectively, they house the mill's estate tweeds, each swatch exclusive to a single landowner, and each book marked in gilt across its giant spine with the year of production. The earliest is 1865. In the corner sits a roll of recently woven fabric, an intricately detailed marbled-grey cloth with flecks of red in it. "That's Albert Tweed," says James Sugden, a director at the company. "Prince Charles commissioned it from a sample he found in his archive. It was one of the most difficult things we've ever worked on. It took *months* to reproduce and to get precisely the right kind of red, reminiscent of the granite of Aberdeenshire and Balmoral. But that's why people come to us, because we create things that are too difficult for anyone else to do."

Johnstons is at the heart of a dramatic renaissance in Scottish textiles. As well as producing its own range (jacket, £265, pictured on final page), it has been working with native wunderkind Christopher Kane on his women's knitwear for several seasons – including this winter's green Camo cashmere jumper (£1,195) – and for several weeks in the spring, its looms are filled with swaths of cashmere for Hermès, in its vibrant autumn shades. Hermès makes selections based on quality rather than price, and so for its cashmere stoles (from £780) and other products, it comes here, to Scotland. It works with Johnstons in Elgin, and Barrie, whose factory is in the Borders town of Hawick. Barrie also featured strongly at December's lavish Chanel Métiers d'Art presentation at Linlithgow Palace, birthplace of Mary Queen of Scots. When Stella Tennant opened the show, walking around the flame-lit courtyard of the historic building, all the knitted tartans she sported were by Barrie.

Many of the most celebrated international luxury-fashion houses rely on Scottish rather than Italian mills

From far left: E Tautz wool coat, £1,265, in Johnstons of Elgin fabric. Chanel Fantasy tweed skirt, £2,747, and jacket, £4,542, created with Barrie of Hawick. E Tautz wool suit, £1,120. Spools of yarn at the Barrie factory. Main picture: Katherine Hooker Classic Harris Tweed jacket, £770





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for their fabrics. Some of the relationships go back decades; others are new and founded on innovation as much as on heritage and tradition. But all are forged on the understanding that Scottish cloth is unique. It is said that this is down to “something in the water”, as the soft-water springs that go into the world’s most highly prized whiskies also help textiles hold their texture in a completed garment. “We have our knits [including a new-season men’s sage cashmere round-neck sweater, £395] produced at Johnstons because we love their subtly unfinished feel that wears so beautifully over time,” says Jason Basmajian, creative director at Gieves & Hawkes. “Italian textiles can be overly finessed.”

Hawick Cashmere, which sells through 15 of its own stores across the world, from Tokyo to St Moritz, has a joint label with Harrods – Hawick for Harrods – and has recently launched a new range as part of Selfridges’ Bespoke service, offering women’s knits in 10 styles and 50 colours, including the Vergara, a chunky six-ply cable turtleneck (£570). “We use machines that produce seamless garments one at a time,” says Philippa Thomson, head of Hawick Cashmere’s London-based design team. “We can make one-off pieces and create unique shapes and interesting structures. The manufacturing is high-tech but, because the sweaters are produced individually, there is a sense that we have returned to our origins. It’s quite a paradox.”

The firm has been producing knits for Lucien Pellat-Finet for 15 years and recently began working with Mulberry and Saint Laurent. “Hedi Slimane worked with us at Dior,” says Thomson. “When he took over at Saint Laurent, he wanted his cashmere made in Scotland. The designs are beautiful classic shapes, with every stitch given thought – even the way the label is attached.” And

Clockwise from above:
(on man) Chanel jacket,
£3,915, in Barrie cashmere
flannel/wool. A cashmere
creation at Johnstons of
Elgin. Brora Heritage Fair Isle
cashmere jumper, £295

a similar amount of attention to detail is apparent at Barrie, which in 2012 became part of the Chanel-owned Paraffection group of select artisanal businesses – hence December’s Linlithgow Palace high-fashion extravaganza (which featured the cashmere flannel/wool jacket, £3,915, pictured above left, and the Fantasy tweed jacket, £4,542, and skirt, £2,747, pictured on opening pages). Barrie has produced the bulk of Chanel’s cashmere for 25 years, including this winter’s ankle-length navy dress with jagged white lines and geometric splashes of orange, blue and green (£3,400). The skill sets at Barrie are unique, mixing rarefied hand-finishing and high technology. “We take a rough atelier sketch with no specific dimensions and then create the garment and produce it with traditional skills in a way that no one else can match,” says managing director Jim Carrie. “There is a lot of hand-finishing, including the sewing of the pockets on the iconic Chanel cardigan. It’s all about authenticity.”

The Barrie facility is a mixture of the traditional British factory, complete with operators’ lockers adorned with family photographs, and shelves of Todd & Duncan-spun cashmere yarn in colours such as Derby Grey, Lemongrass and Lipstick and made according to forensic standards. Towards the end of the process, workers study each garment with a pair

of fine tweezers, like a chef handling the rarest of ingredients.

Barrie continues to produce its own collection of cashmere sweaters (from about £200), as does Johnstons (from about £85). And the archive at each represents a mine of inspiration for contemporary designers. Owner and creative director of E Tautz, Patrick Grant, put together the graphic, supersized tweed checks of his new-season menswear after an afternoon in Elgin, rummaging around the 1970s swatches with their kitsch, retro connotations. The result includes a fresh, largely grey and black collection of coats (example pictured on opening pages, £1,265), and one particularly bold suit with an orange check (£1,120, pictured on opening pages). The references are

clear, but it is a tasteful interpretation of the past.

For most designers and brands, heading to Scotland is a case of getting the perfect product. Brora is known for its distinctive rural knits, and this year has marked its 20th anniversary with a 10-piece Heritage collection (Fair Isle jumper pictured above, £295). It has been working with Johnstons from the outset. Meanwhile, Brooks Brothers may be the quintessential all-American outfitters, but it too works with the most prestigious Scottish mills, including Harris Tweed Hebrides and Reid & Taylor. Its cashmere crew-neck sweaters (£300) for this autumn are substantial three-ply garments woven from Todd & Duncan cashmere yarn.

Brooks Brothers, along with other classic brands such as William & Son of Mayfair, also works with Begg, a company that has been producing scarves and throws in Ayr since 1902. The company recently rebranded as Begg & Co – a makeover courtesy of Tyler Brûlé’s Winkreative agency – and launched a selection of own-label products, with additional input from consultant designers Angela Bell of luxury cashmere line Queene and Belle and Michael Drake of design consultancy Mandrake. The new pieces mix traditional craft with a directional approach to technology: the Nuance scarf (£325) fades impressively from one colour to another by way of the weave rather than dip-dye. There’s also a collection of

Clockwise from near right: Chanel Fantasy jersey jacket, £3,060, and cashmere sweater, £2,360, in Barrie fabrics. Johnstons of Elgin lambswool jacket, £265. Albam Shetland sweater, £129, made by ESK Cashmere

washed pieces, which have a rougher texture well suited to heavy twill jackets and the smarter end of men's eminently fashionable workwear styles. They'd go with anything at the modern men's outfitters Albam, whose funnel-neck sweaters (£149), Shetland sweaters (£129, pictured right) and reverse jersey hats (£45) are all made by ESK Cashmere in southwest Scotland. "We began working with them via a mutual design colleague," says James Shaw, Albam's co-founder. "When the phrase 'nothing quite like it' is used in terms of quality, then it's worth the picturesque train journey up the west coast. ESK has a handwriting learnt through time and dedication."

One of Scotland's most famous cloth exports is Harris Tweed, which is protected by an act of parliament and can only be produced in the Outer Hebrides. It can frequently appear to have the harsh, avant-garde edge of something dreamt up yesterday by Rei Kawakubo, founder of Comme des Garçons, but is in fact one of the most historic textiles in existence. The complex nature of its colours reflects the ancient, otherworldly moss, heather and rock landscapes of Harris and Lewes. "We dye the wool, not the yarn," says Mark Hogarth, creative director of Harris Tweed Hebrides, which has recently supplied RRL by Ralph Lauren and New York streetwear brand Supreme. "Every single micron is saturated in colour. It's unique. And the hand-operated looms produce a tweed that has dexterity, so designers can be more aggressive with it. Menswear designer Nigel Cabourn has been a regular customer, and his autumn collection this year is a triumph. "Our head pattern designer, Ken Kennedy, was challenged to recreate tweeds from 1914, and going by the response, the collection will be a commercial success."

Katherine Hooker favours Harris and Osprey tweeds from Lovat Mill in Hawick for much of her work. "I've been using them since I started my business 10 years ago," she says. "They have a unique handle, and I love the structure they provide." Her men's Classic jacket (£770, pictured on opening pages) and women's Jackson coat (from £760) are both prime examples of this.

The existence of such established names within Scottish textiles doesn't mean there isn't room for innovation, as a new generation of designers is developing a distinct new look for Scottish cloth. Rosie Sugden, daughter of Johnsons' James Sugden, has her own eponymous label. It produces luxury cashmere in a small workshop in Innerleithen and sells to Liberty, among others. "There are new, young designers blossoming in Scotland," she says, "who are as much a part of the future as the bigger, more established mills."

As well as tweeds and cashmere, there are designers doing interesting things with Scottish lace, produced most notably by MYB Textiles in the Irvine Valley, which weaves patterns on the 12m-wide Nottingham Lace loom. Like many other mills, it is pushing the possibilities of design forward with technology. "We recently harnessed 110-year-old looms with electronic Jacquards," says Margo Graham, MYB's design director. "With our CAD systems, we can send designs directly to the looms." Fashion-design brand Eley Kishimoto worked with MYB recently on lace for an interiors

"When the phrase 'nothing quite like it' is used in terms of quality, then it's worth the picturesque train journey up the west coast"

project, using its distinctive Flash print. Meanwhile, Minna Hepburn of the small south London design label Minna, has been creating seasonal collections using MYB lace, as well as bridalwear, including the elegant, floor-length, V-neck Elizabeth dress (£800) in lace and silk. "It's delicate and luxurious," says Hepburn. "Our clients frequently tell us how stunning they think it is."

Designer Judy R Clark uses MYB lace, Harris Tweed, Scottish wools and pheasant feathers in much of her work. Indeed, some of her new season's coats (from £2,000) combine all these elements. Clark mixes the romance of tradition with contemporary styling. "I team Harris Tweeds with old lace, silks and velvets to give them even more depth," she says.

That same richness and combination of lace, knits and tweeds was apparent when Karl Lagerfeld presented the punk-bright, tartan-rich Métiers d'Art Paris/Edinburgh collection at Linlithgow Palace (which included the Chanel Fantasy jacket, £3,060, pictured above). Lagerfeld summed up the appeal right after the show: "Without asking, Scotland has become a big fashion influence – tartan and Scottish patterns are all over the world. Its identity is used and copied. No one can do better sweaters than our factory here. We want to make new things, but with the tradition and craftsmanship of the past." Lagerfeld and Chanel are not alone. And there are plenty of exciting innovations on the way. ♦

ANYTHING BUT RUN OF THE MILL

Albam, 23 Beak St, London W1 (020-3157 7000; www.albamclothing.com) and branches. **Barrie**, 01450-365 500; www.barrie.co.uk. **Begg & Co**, 01292-267 615; www.beggandcompany.co.uk. **Brooks Brothers**, 150 Regent St, London W1 (020-3238 0030; www.brooksbrothers.com) and branches. **Brora**, 6-8 Symons St, London

SW3 (020-7730 2665; www.brora.co.uk). **Chanel**, 158-159 New Bond St, London W1 (020-7493 5040; www.chanel.com). **Christopher Kane**, see Matches and other stockists. **Eley Kishimoto**, 020-8674 7411; www.eleykishimoto.com. **ESK Cashmere**, 01461-207 500; www.eskashmere.com. **E Tautz**, 020-7287 9439; www.etautz.com. **Gieves & Hawkes**, 1 Savile Row, London W1 (020-7434 2001; www.gievesandhawkes.com). **Harris Tweed Hebrides**, 01851-700 046; www.harristweedhebrides.com. **Harrods**, 87-135 Brompton Rd, London SW1 (020-7730 1234; www.harrods.com). **Hawick Cashmere**, 71 Grassmarket, Edinburgh EH1 2HJ (0131-225 8634; www.hawickcashmere.com) and branches/stockists and see Harrods and Selfridges. **Hermès**, 155 New Bond St, London W1 (020-7499 8856; www.hermes.com) and branches. **Johnstons of Elgin**, 01343-554 000; www.johnstonsfelgin.com. **Judy R Clark**, by appointment, Studio 31, Beaverhall Artist Studios, 27 Beaverhall Rd, Edinburgh EH7 4JE (07933-658 642; www.judyrc Clark.com). **Katherine Hooker**, 19 Ashburnham Rd, London SW10 (020-7352 5091; www.katherinehooker.com). **Liberty**, Regent St, London W1 (020-7734 1234; www.liberty.co.uk). **Lovat Mill**, 01450-373 231. **Matches**, 87 Marylebone High St, London W1 (020-7487 5400; www.matchesfashion.com) and branches. **Minna**, 90 Brixton Rd, London SW9 (020-7735 3270; www.minna.co.uk). **Mulberry**, 50 New Bond St, London W1 (020-7491 3900; www.mulberry.com) and branches/stockists. **MYB Textiles**, 01560-321 210; www.mybtextiles.com. **Nigel Cabourn**, 01912-847 093; www.cabourn.com. **Ralph Lauren**, 1 New Bond St, London W1 (020-7535 4600; www.ralphlauren.com) and branches/stockists. **Reid & Taylor**, www.reidandtaylor.co.uk. **Rosie Sugden**, www.rosiesugden.com and see Liberty and other stockists. **Saint Laurent**, 32-33 Old Bond St, London W1 (020-7493 1800; www.ysl.com) and branches/stockists. **Selfridges**, 400 Oxford St, London W1 (0800-123 400; www.selfridges.com) and branches. **Supreme**, 274 Lafayette St NYC, 10012 New York, USA (+1212-966 7799; www.supremenewyork.com) and branches. **William & Son**, 10 Mount St, London W1 (020-7493 8385; www.williamandson.com).