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# Field fashionistas

*We shine the spotlight on three entrepreneurial spirits who have created successful fashion brands from their homes in the country*

WRITTEN BY ROSIE NICKERSON

**I**f you thought that living hundreds of miles from the big smoke, surrounded by moorland, woods and fields would adversely impact your chances of founding a successful fashion business, you'd be wrong. I spoke to three rural fashionistas, based full time in the country, who run their own fashion businesses from Northumberland, Shropshire and Hampshire respectively. With energy, determination and the wonders of social media, they have managed to combine a deeply rural existence whilst running their thriving fashion businesses. In many ways, living and working in the country has been the secret of their success.

When Arabella Hoskyns-Abrahall founded her fashion label, Bella Hoskyns, she looked no further than the moorland she crosses daily on the school run for her logo inspiration. She chose the profile of a peewit (or lapwing as it's known in the south) to represent her fashion label. Hoskyns-Abrahall and her family moved up to Northumberland full time in 2013, where they already had a weekend cottage on her husband Bertie's →



Above: Arabella Hoskyns-Abrahall, owner of Bella Hoskyns Clothing, in her breeks and gilet  
Right: a Bella Hoskyns field jacket



cousin's estate, next to Whitfield and Knarsdale. They'd had reservations about staying in London with three young children, so made the move, with Bertie spending three nights a week in London. Ensnared in Northumberland, Bella has embraced the variety and challenges of a rural life, far from the bright lights of London. Her children, now aged 10, eight and four, adore it. She tells me: "It's idyllic for the children, roaming free in the country. We have two lurchers and my daughter and two sons enjoy shooting and going beating and generally being quite feral. Bertie shoots a lot, I enjoy rough shooting and picking bunnies off the garden from my bedroom window."

#### FASHION BEGINNINGS

Always interested in fashion, Hoskyns-Abraham had worked for a fashion agency in London and later at *Tatler* and then for a fashion-passionate female entrepreneur. She had felt for a long time there was a real void in the country clothing.

"It was all a bit unisex or the stuff for girls looked somehow too 'new', I wanted

**It came together surprisingly easily, in many ways it feels like fate**

something flattering, feminine, like an old friend or a hand-me-down favourite. I started off with a rail at the Northumberland Show. I remember I got such a thrill from seeing people trying my clothes on, I had 'outed' myself and put myself out there, and I thought, 'It's actually happening.' It still gives me such a buzz, and my family are always so excited when a fair goes well."

Setting up a fashion business from home had proved difficult when Hoskyns-Abraham lived in London but went surprisingly smoothly once she moved to the country. "I didn't know anybody when we moved here but on my first day I went to the village shop and asked if there was anybody who could sew and it turned out there was a lady called Becca Losh who happened to sew in the room above the shop. It all gathered momentum from there. It all came together surprisingly easily, in many ways it feels like fate. Also, the school where the children are at in Whitfield, on top of a moor, seems to have the most creative of parents: a talented school mum, Gemma Koomen, helped me with my website and a school dad, Dan May, who does





farmyard adjacent to the house, Cathcart designs flattering and up-to-the-minute millinery for the smart set, under her brand, Laura Cathcart, which she set up in 2011. After training at The London College of Fashion, Cathcart originally worked in interior design but soon found she was missing working creatively with her hands. She started making hats in her kitchen after being given some vintage hat blocks by a friend's mother. Soon afterwards, she completed a two-year internship with milliner Gina Foster and went on to create her own collections.

#### BEST-SELLING STYLES

Cathcart tells me about her inspiration and her best-selling styles: "It's a nod to the vintage style. I think our bestseller must be The Dottie, a little oval button with a bow on it, that's been one of my bestsellers for years."

Cathcart has two young children, aged four and 2½, and in the summer it's a bit of a juggling act as she is also very busy with holiday lets and group tours (the house is open to the public by appointment). She explains it's only possible as she has a superb nanny, as she needs to work at least 6½ days a week all summer. Fortunately, things are quieter in winter, which allows her time to catch her breath a little.

"We probably made nearly 200 hats last year. I have no idea what it will be this year, it seems to increase every year. Half of that number are sold as stock and the other half would be commissions."

Cathcart loves the space and quiet of being based in the country and tells me she is surrounded by a lot of other artisans, which is great for creativity but the downside is there's little or no client footfall. As a result, Cathcart goes to London every week, to meet clients and also works with two fashion labels, Beulah and Eponine.

She continues: "We are very busy at the moment, we have a full order board, we are working on about a six- to eight-week turnaround now because there's quite a queue →

all the wonderful photography for me... it's all totally homegrown."

Hoskyns-Abraham's style is vintage-inspired, in beautiful soft tweeds with high-waisted tweed trousers and plus fours that wouldn't have looked out of place in the 1940s. The tweeds are sourced from Yorkshire, Northumberland and Scotland. The high-waisted culottes and breeks are mostly sold to lady guns, as are the gilets, with big pockets that are both elegant and practical. She has recently started doing men's waistcoats,

which sell very well and are regularly worn by her husband and his friends, who are walking advertisements for them. She also designs practical yet elegant swing coats and peplum jackets, which TV presenter Alice Fox-Pitt was seen wearing on Ladies' Day at Cheltenham and at the Grand National.

In the main, Hoskyns-Abraham sells online and via Instagram, and at local fairs. Logistically, with such young children, it's hard for her to do too many fairs, but she tells me she has big plans for the future.

"I plan to have a few stockists and I'd love to do Badminton, Cheltenham and the Game Fair, I haven't been able to do these larger ones as yet. But I definitely plan to. I'll have to rope in my friends and family to help me man my stand."

Milliner Laura Cathcart, originally from Norfolk, moved up to Shropshire from London when she married William Cash, in 2014. Home is a moated, medieval hall complete with a two-storey Tudor gatehouse that is located in a remote rural hamlet up a long and winding lane, four miles north of Bridgnorth. From an elegant studio in a converted coach house in

Left: high-waisted culottes by Bella Hoskyns  
Above and right: Laura Cathcart's successful millinery business is based in a converted coach house