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Meet the Bellingham entrepreneur giving glamour wings



COUNTRY COUTURE

Clothes designer **Arabella Hoskyns** discovered a niche market when she embarked on her mission to create practical outdoor wear for women

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Paying homage to all things British, country couture clothing line Bella Hoskyns combines elegance with practicality, so that even when you are knee-deep in mud from tending the paddocks, or battling the elements up the moors on a shooting trip, you can still feel warm, comfortable and chic.

For founder Arabella Hoskyns, the inspiration for her line fell from the sky during a shooting excursion with her husband Bertie in the Northumberland countryside 14 years ago.

"I was struck by how little practical, yet stylish, clothing options there were for

outdoorsy women," Arabella said. "Many of the designs were overtly masculine, or as a contrast, they were extremely feminine, but completely impractical and unable to cope with my active lifestyle."

"I decided then to take things into my own hands.

"I created a one-off, vintage-inspired tweed waistcoat with help from a local seamstress. The design ticked every box. It embodied my style, provided me with a relaxed fit for practicality, and kept me feeling snug when out and about in the cold."

It was only when Arabella's friends began swooning over her homemade waistcoat that she realised the gap in the market for





women's country clothes was much larger than she'd first anticipated.

Although Arabella's fingers were twitching to begin designing, life was choc-a-block, as she was raising three young children in bustling London.

It wasn't therefore until Arabella and Bertie decided to leave London behind and escape to the Northumberland countryside for good that the concept behind Bella Hoskyns could be brought to life.

"Moving to the country was the best decision for our family," Bella said. "The children had walked the pavements for long enough, and they needed the chance to be wild and active outdoors, like kids should be."

Once the family had settled down in a cottage in Whitfield, what happened next Arabella described as "fate."

Arabella's search for a local seamstress to help manufacture her line led her to the village store, where she planned to place an advert, only to discover from the shop's clerk that a talented seamstress called Becca Losh worked in the room just above.

"After I met Becca everything fell into place," Arabella said. "She shared my vision entirely, and really helped me find the confidence I needed to launch the brand."

The first thing the pair got to work doing was replicating the original tweed waistcoat Arabella had designed, which they then showed off across the region at vintage and county shows where it was met with instant popularity. "The first time I watched a woman try on one of my designs at a show was surreal," Arabella said. "I just kept thinking to myself 'I made that!' over and over again.

"Once the brand was more established, I remember waiting for a train at Kings Cross Station when I saw a woman on my platform wearing one of my coats. I went over and introduced myself to her, because that kind of thing just doesn't happen everyday."

After the success of the Bella Hoskyns waistcoats came the culottes, breeks and



Arabella Hoskyns, owner of
Bella Hoskyns Clothing

swing coats, all of which shared the same traditional English style that the brand had become known for.

Northumberland, Arabella said, is at the heart of Bella Hoskyns, from the logo, a Northumberland native lapwing, to the setting of all the photographs in her look book, and even the models, courtesy of Tyne Tees. One of the brand's unique selling points is its individuality, as customers are offered the chance to tailor items of clothing to their own size and colour tastes, through its bespoke store.

"I believe that clothing is a lifestyle choice, and it should represent every individual, and express their persona, so it felt important to give customers the options to personalise their style. I've even had a few people send me their Estate Tweed over to create a coat with, which was quite special," Arabella said.

"To know that someone likes your designs enough to trust you with their heritage was a lovely feeling."

Arabella's next endeavour is to expand her range of men's clothing, with the help and advice of her husband Bertie. "Bertie is my soundboard, and my biggest supporter," Arabella said. As well as her supportive husband, Arabella's other biggest fans are her three children. "They are incredibly supportive," Arabella said.

Arabella does admit it can be hard running a business alone, whilst being a mother to three children. "My office is also turned into the children's playroom," Arabella said. "So I find plenty of toy tractors, dolls and crayons mixed up with my deliveries all the time."

"There are times when things are hectic behind the smoke and mirrors, as I'm balancing being both a mother and a business woman. In the beginning stages of the business, my youngest used to have to come to the manufacturers with me before he started nursery, so it really was a juggling act."

"Now, at least I have the hours between nine to three-fifteen when the children are at school to run the business. Then I go back to being a mum, which ultimately is the best job in the world." 1

bellahoskyns.com



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