

THE YORKSHIRE POST

Pursuits you

Pair a love of the countryside with a passion for fashion and you get Bella Hoskyns, designer of cool country clothing. She talks to **Stephanie Smith**.

We're all different, when it comes to what we like to wear, how we prefer to look and feel in our clothes. We have favourite fabrics and textures, colours and cuts, so often it can be hard to find exactly what we want. If only we could design something ourselves, and have it made to our particular tastes and needs.

This is the thinking behind Bella Hoskyns, the bespoke clothing brand launched last year by Arabella Hoskyns-Abrahall, a woman who loves fashion and country life in equal measure.

"I have absolutely no training in fashion," she says. Originally from rural Warwickshire, Arabella studied English and Film at Newcastle University - a mistake, she says now. "I'd always loved clothes, loved magazines, and I should have gone into it at the beginning."

However, at university she met Bertie, a lawyer, and now her husband. They moved to London, where Arabella worked for a fashion agency representing overseas designers, and then for *Tatler* magazine.

"I'd always wanted to have a country clothing range," she says. "I'd had a few things made for myself, because I hadn't been able to find anything I wanted to wear, and got great feedback, and thought 'well hang on a minute, I can do this.'"

Arabella and Bertie both enjoyed country pursuits such as shooting, but she remained less than impressed by the clothing available. She says: "The things that were out there to buy looked a bit new. They weren't

rustic enough, so I thought if I can make something that looks like you've had it forever, that's a bit more feminine than just a girl's version of a man's design, that would be a good take on it."

After 14 years in London, the couple decided to leave the city four years ago, before their children started school. Bertie is from the Barnard Castle area, and they had been renting a cottage near Haltwhistle, in Northumberland, from his cousin. Bertie had often visited there as a child, as had he and Arabella since their student days. It was the place they loved most, so they decided to move there.

Soon, Margot, now eight, and Rollo, now six, were joined by Fergus, now two. It was after the birth of Fergus that Arabella decided to go for it and start her clothing line. "Things just clicked into place," she says. "Whereas I had struggled 13 years ago to find people to make my products, I walked into the village shop here and asked if anyone knew anyone who sewed and they said 'yes, go upstairs', and there was a very talented girl at her sewing machine."

This was Becca Losh, whose expertise has proved invaluable. Not long after, Arabella found fabrics and a manufacturer. "It just seemed to come together, and that's how it's continued," she says.

Initially nervous about presenting her first, admittedly small, countrywear collection, a friend persuaded her to take part in the Northumbria County Show. "I wasn't really ready, but I got great feedback, critical and positive," she says.

Design-wise, Arabella notes how she wants a garment to look

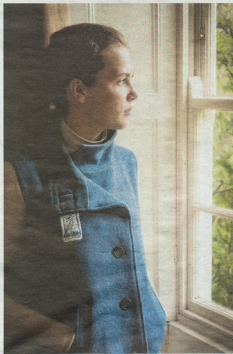
and move, gives that to sample





CATCHING A PERCH: Main picture left and above, swing coats, with prices starting from £340; right, gilets cost from £190 upwards, with men's gilets coming soon; inset opposite, hacking jacket, £290.

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