

Open House event – Mairi Helena – a small business with big ideas

There is an Open House with textile and wallpaper designer Mairi Helena on 16 November 2019 which anyone can register for.

Mairi showed us in her Murrayfield home that she has different feature wallpapers in each room and lots of textiles showing on different furniture pieces. For anyone looking for decorating inspiration this will be a must attend event.



Mairi Wilks owner of textile and wallpaper brand MairiHelena
PHOTO ©2019 The Edinburgh Reporter

She explained : “I get a lot of enquiries about people coming to to visit to see it in situ so I’ve decided to have an Open House event in November. There’s information about it on my [website](#) where you can RSVP to the invitation.

We had arranged to meet Mairi Wilks after becoming aware of her colourful designs at the newly refurbished Scottish Café. There the owners Victor and Carina Contini have gone all out for the Scottish theme and have a complete velvet wall featuring Mairi’s design.

When we met at Mairi’s studio in her home there really is evidence of her creativity everywhere. We asked how it began.

Mairi told us : “Well, it started three years ago – it’s into its third year now and I have brought out a new collection each year. I just had a love for photography and escaping to the outdoors, and getting stuck in my wellies outside in the mud and just taking lots of pictures of landscape, Scottish landscapes, in particular the West Coast, always any excuse to go across to the west coast and I’m there with my camera.

“And I was building up a large portfolio of pictures of textures and colours and leaves and lichens and I was trying to find a way to to showcase Scottish as a pattern, a print printing out print into repeat that had a Scottish fusion to it.

It’s all from from landscapes and built up from my photography. I work in layers in Photoshop and each design has about thirty layers in it.

“And they’re built up from using a play on tartan perhaps, and introducing it in a bit more of a contemporary way I hope.

“I take a lot of pictures close up so I blur the field of view in my camera so that I can create a sort of washed, almost like water colour effect, and then I use that as a base layer which I then build up.

“I take elements of photographs so for example I might take the skeleton of the thistle. I really just play around of the different elements until I’m happy with the section and then I put it into a repeating print.

“I started in photography. well – that’s not not my background, but that was my escape from my background, which is that I trained as a vet.

“I come from a family of artists and designers. I grew up in Melrose in the Borders which is a very textile driven area. I went on a photography course for just over a year in the Lake District and that homed in on what your USP was and what was it that you wanted to get from your photography.

“It made me think about how I could use it in a way that was personal to me. So I think from doing that course, I found this love of fusing it with textiles, and I was I was presenting my photographs alongside textiles. And from there, it sparked this idea of actually fusing the two together and printing on textiles.”

“I create digital files and sending those to printers who are printing from the file which is printed digitally, either on wallpaper and paper fabric – velvets and linens is predominantly what I’m printing on.

“I love colour I find it very uplifting and fun and quirky and it can really change a mood of a room. So I embrace colour, I love colour and I don’t shy away from it.

Tell me a little about where you where people can see your work.

“Excitingly it’s going into more commercial spaces or public spaces and most recently, The Scottish Café, which just had a new revamp just not long ago, which is just part of the National Galleries of Scotland, which looks onto Princes Street Gardens. So it’s great to have somewhere within

Edinburgh where it's showcased on such a large scale as well.

"They've used Fire Thistle velvet to create a large feature wall and have used the same design across the menus and leaflets you get down there.

"My wallpapers have also gone into the new Tom Kitchin restaurant with room – pub with rooms in Gullane, the [Bonnie Badger](#) in Gullane, so there's 14 bedrooms there and there's wallpaper featured in each one.

"And also in Edinburgh there's the Edinburgh City Chambers wedding suite which used my Grey Tailor Thistle velvet on the backs of the chairs and on upholstery within the three rooms within the wedding suite which is great."

Mairi has a new limited edition range of reversible merino lambswool throws which are only just available. This was the first time she had had something woven and she is pleased with the result. She said : "I've been amazed at how my designs which are quite intricate, and have so many layers and so much going on in them, how we've been able to simplify them to make it possible to weave and the detail that has been able to be captured in the throw."

They have been woven in Yorkshire and then finished in the Scottish Borders, which is where Mairi is from, and only a very small run has been created.

Showing herself to be someone with many talents, Mairi had already revealed that she began working life as a vet. I asked why she had given that up, but it seems it may only be a temporary thing and has a lot to do with new baby Iona in the house too.

She said : "Well, this year I will have graduated 10 years ago. It was only really since last end of last year that I have stopped being a vet for the time being – I can always go back to it.

“The great thing about being a vet is you can locum. And I was part of a practice up in Fife for a long time and have been going back there to locum so I’m always keeping my hand in.

“It’s very difficult profession to completely step away from.

“It was dogs, cats and rabbits that I saw on a day to day basis and I do miss aspects of it, but I think I enjoy the balance of both the science and the art and I think they go well together and it keeps your mind fresh.”

Mairi has a personal project that she is working on at the moment, a wallpaper more in the form of a mural for her baby daughter, Iona. She said : “I want to put it up in her in her nursery. I am making something bespoke for her from images captured from a certain area. That is something that I’m enjoying doing at the moment.

“My baby Iona is named after one of the islands on the west coast that have hugely inspired me. She’s four months old now and keeps me very busy.”

And indeed Mairi is busy creating new looks for her clients and you can see these on her website and her [Instagram](#) page.

Mairi Helena’s website is [here](#)



Mairi Wilks who designs Scottish textiles and wallpapers based on her landscape photography PHOTO ©2019 The Edinburgh Reporter

Something for you this weekend if you would like a new look for your home or business. Edinburgh based [@mairihelena](#) is holding an Open House event this Saturday Details on her website pic.twitter.com/h4P8jsSVvG

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