

Katie Jones' crochet embellishments can give a new lease of life to old clothing



CROCHET TO SAVE OUR PLANET!

Find out why crochet is the ideal upcycling tool

Photo: Rachel Manns

GOOD READ

You're probably aware that your fashion choices have an impact on our planet. But did it ever occur to you that instead of buying new clothes, your crochet skills can revitalise your wardrobe and protect our environment? The throwaway fashion culture, where we buy cheap and then move onto the next garment when bored, is a big problem we have the tools to alleviate. Look through your wardrobe and we're betting you'll find at least a handful of garments you're no longer interested in wearing. However, instead of throwing them out, or even sending them to charity shops, why not try using crochet to see how you can upcycle and reinvent them? A simple trim could be all you need to add a shot of colour and revitalise the mood of an item of clothing. You could even unravel an old crochet or knitted top and use the yarn to make something fresh you'll wear with pride!

RETHINKING OUR FASHION FOCUS

Sustainability consultant Jane Milburn credits growing up on a New Zealand sheep farm for her love of natural fibres and crafting. "Our great grandma, who was of Ngai Tahu (the principal Māori tribe of the South Island of New Zealand) and Scottish heritage, lived with us and taught us values that are still with me today. Most of my wardrobe is refashioned or upcycled." Jane launched Textile Beat in 2013 "to enable conversations about the way we dress," and is the author of *Slow Clothing: Finding Meaning In What We Wear*. She concedes that there are no easy answers to these complex issues. "The best we can do – as wearers of clothes – is inform ourselves, ensure every purchase counts, and use what we already have before buying more."

Jane describes slow clothing as "a holistic approach to the clothing choices we make every day in what we wear and how those choices may impact our health and the ecosystem in which we live. It's about self-empowerment through resourceful thinking and individual actions."

Katie Jones fell in love with crochet while working towards an MA in Fashion Knitwear, and soon launched her own label with the #wastenot mantra. She's a huge fan of crochet as a tool for energising old clothes. "I always loved customising clothes as a kid and it stayed with me," she comments. "It just makes sense – why not use what we have and make it better and more personal?"

EDUCATING FASHION LOVERS

Katie believes education is key to encouraging a shift away from fast fashion to a more sustainable method of creating



Clockwise from left: Jane in an upcycled shrug; Emma's crochet edging hack, and her book *Crochet Hacking*

clothing. "Most people don't know that on average only £1 from every £10 you spend on the high street has gone on material and making the piece. It's important to talk about the reality of the cost. Crafting is a great way to understand the time and cost of your materials and the make hours."

Crochet designer Emma Friedlander-Collins is the author of newly-published *Crochet Hacking: Repair and Refashion Clothes with Crochet*. She graduated with an MA in Sustainable Design in 2018 and now lectures on fashion communication at The University of Brighton. "I use my making and sustainability as a way of teaching students the fine art of creating visual stories. All my students are incredibly passionate and driven by the sustainability agenda."

Sustainability has always been a driving force for Emma and her work. "I previously worked with a local council focusing on sustainable transport, trying to convince people to walk and cycle," she comments. "As a crochet designer, I had an audience on Instagram and began wondering if I could bring them with me in seeking alternative solutions to fast fashion. When I posted about my first crochet hack, one of my followers coined #crochet hacks as a shorthand way of communicating it."

EMBRACING EXPERIMENTATION

Mastering just a scattering of crochet stitches can equip you to revive your wardrobe.

FAST FASHION FACTS

Did you know?

- 1 Thanks to fast fashion, there is currently more clothing on our planet than ever before.
- 2 More than 60 per cent of new clothing is made from acrylic, nylon and other synthetic fibres. This means that every time those clothes are washed, they shed microplastics into our environment.
- 3 The Rana Plaza factory collapse in Bangladesh in 2013 exposed the exploitative nature rife in the fashion industry. Seven years on, many garments sold on the high street are still made by people toiling in poor conditions and earning very little.
- 4 'A New Textiles Economy', a report from the Ellen MacArthur Foundation and Circular Fibres Initiative (www.bit.ly/30qLG92) states "total greenhouse gas emissions from textiles production, at 1.2 billion tonnes annually, are more than those of all international flights and maritime shipping combined."



Photo: Rachel Manns



Far left and left: knitwear embellishments by Katie; Poppy's lockdown shorts



Photo: Charmaine Lyons



Photo: Patricia Jannides

Above left and right: Jane has transformed a jumper and blanket into a vest and jacket. Unpick the arm seams then attach the sleeves to the blanket. Before cutting the sleeve holes, secure with two rows of machine sewing and reinforce again after adding the sleeves

"When we put our own energy into making clothes, we have a connection to them, we want to look after them and keep them in our wardrobe for longer," Jane says. "As our style, shape and stage in life evolve, we're then able to adapt our clothes so they can come on this journey with us."

Emma agrees that upcycling invests us on an emotional level. "When you buy a new garment, the excitement about wearing it fades. I use crochet to change clothes I've already got into something I want to wear. If I get bored again, I just rip it back and make something fresh."

Jane uses crochet for trims and sleeve extensions, but also transforms some unlikely items into clothing. She says that part of the upcycling process is gaining the confidence to play.

"I do a lot of play-based upcycling where I'm reusing existing materials I've got to hand," says Jane. "I'm attracted to texture, and turn crochet blankets and rugs into unique garments by sewing two rows of straight stitches then cutting between those rows and stitching again afterwards to further secure the fabric."

Unusual items Jane has repurposed include coat hangers crocheted by her mother-in-law for her children. "When they no longer wanted the hangers, I transformed

them into memory cuffs on my trousers."

Emma urges us to have the courage to experiment. "I make lots of mistakes. I spend as much time as ripping back as I do crocheting, but if the alternative is landfill you might as well give it a try."

THE LOCKDOWN LEGACY

Happily, you don't need to be an expert crochet designer or sustainability expert to embrace crochet as an upcycling solution. During lockdown, Poppy Fraser decided to crochet a pair of shorts when she couldn't get to the shops. "At the beginning of lockdown, I made some tops, including one using a granny square sunflower motif I thought would also look groovy as a pair of shorts. I decided to make up a pattern and just kept adding sunflower squares until the shorts were the desired length!"

Making and wearing the shorts she has made herself has provided Poppy with a huge emotional boost. "Knowing that nobody else has a pair of shorts like the ones I've made gives me more self-confidence in my abilities. Now I'm crocheting crop tops and a rainbow jumper."

It's a fantastic alternative to online shopping, which Jane warns us against. "There's a lot of wastefulness built in when you can't try before you buy, because return

items are often just dumped."

During lockdown, Emma ran an online crochet hack workshop with Domestika, an online space that provides a large number of creative courses in various fields. "Uptake was phenomenal. We had hundreds of people signing up to take part. I hope this is a sign that people are thinking differently about what they wear and people will use the skills generated and built on during lockdown to really engage with this thinking about how we can reuse stuff."

Jane points out that the interest in transitioning to slow fashion was building even before lockdown. "People were already becoming conscious of how their choices impact other people, places and the planet. There's growing awareness of regenerative actions to reduce our negative impact on the ecosystem."

We've already begun to make a move in the right direction. Now is the time to forge new, positive ways to fall back in love with the clothes we already own.

Written by Judy Darley

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 Katie Jones: www.katiejonesknit.co.uk
 Emma Friedlander-Collins: www.steelandstitch.blogspot.com and [Instagram at @steelandstitch](https://www.instagram.com/steelandstitch)
 Domestika: www.domestika.org

HOW TO...

Emma Friedlander-Collins' top upcycling crochet tips

- 1 When getting started, it's good to use tougher fabrics like denim as they don't stretch.
- 2 Always make a row of crochet stitches from the yarn you want to use first – this will let you work out the distance between any holes that you need to make.
- 3 Most importantly just have a go, there are no such thing as mistakes, it's all just learning how not to do things.

Don't forget to check out our embellishment project on page 39!