

CARA & THE SKY: BRITISH-MADE KNITWEAR

An article by Chloe Grant

It's a grey November night when I listen to Cara, owner of British-made knitwear brand *Cara & The Sky*, talk about her brand, but her passion for creating a sustainable knitwear company shines through and, just as her colourful jumpers aim to do, she brings a little bit of sunshine into the fashion world. Her passion for what *Cara & The Sky* stands for is contagious and I found myself smiling – and adding one of her beautiful colourful knits to my fashion wish list.

As we often address here at *People over Product* there can be a tendency to forget the social side of sustainability when initially considering ethical brands, often leaning more towards the, equally important, environmental side of things. Today, however, we discuss *Cara & The Sky*, a brand that shows off its commitment to social responsibility proudly; its British manufacture is a core part of the brand identity, allowing the brand to invest in British artisanal skill and rejuvenate a dying textile industry, something that is of the utmost importance to founder Cara.

She tells me of her time, prior to setting up her knitwear brand, when she worked as a buyer, liaising with factories across the globe; a job which left her itching to set up a company that supported the UK manufacturing community and renewed a textile trade that had once been infamous. Plus, she adds, that working directly with British manufacturers allows for complete transparency and the ability to work with fully audited factories, promising safe working conditions, and a strong element of trust between brand and manufacturer.

The dream is for the brand to become a shining light for others in the knitwear industry, proving that it is just as cost-effective to produce here in the UK, whilst paying all workers a living wage and making sure they are well cared for. Cara hopes that as the brand grows, the British knitwear manufacturing

industry will grow too, providing many more home-grown jobs and opportunities. In a world where young people are discouraged from following a career of craftsmanship or making, due to jobs often being outsourced to workers in the Global South, it is such an exciting prospect to see a brand hoping to triumphantly bring Britain's textile industry back to its heyday.

'It's a good quality product that will feel relevant the season you buy it and the seasons beyond'

I was interested to see what made *Cara & The Sky* different to other ethical knitwear brands, and Cara tells me the key is the brand's commitment to combatting over-consumption. By keeping slow fashion at the forefront of her mind, and steering the knitwear away from trend-driven designs, she has been able to create a collection of timeless 'statement classics'; pieces that are good quality products that feel relevant the season you buy them, and for endless seasons beyond.

This timeless approach to design is often reserved to brand's creating minimalist pieces that can be styled up in many different ways, but *Cara & The Sky* prove that investment knitwear can be as bold and colourful as you like, and still be worn to death. In fact, by creating well-made, slow-fashion pieces that are fun and colourful the brand caters to a whole new sector of customers who struggle to find statement pieces that match their style that are created ethically.

Cara's commitment to sustainability doesn't end at the point of transaction; the

brand offers an in-house resale marketplace, giving pre-loved knitwear a second life, where they have another chance to be loved by somebody else. This circular approach is key to forming a truly sustainable brand, as it keeps the piece from being discarded for longer, and reinforces the brand's commitment to preventing any waste going to landfill.

'I hope the fashion industry will be a bit kinder to the consumer and to the planet'

When I talk to Cara I can hear her newborn in the background, and I wondered what impact being a mum to two little ones had on her design process. *Cara & The Sky*'s collection also incorporates a Mini Me range, with child-sized versions of the knitted pieces, instilling a sense of sustainability into young children, through the connection to the clothes they wear and love.

I asked her what she hoped the fashion industry would look like once her children had grown up and she said that she hoped for a kinder industry – one that is kind to both consumer and the planet. This compassion for the consumer moved me; so often we forget that customers, more often than not, are used as pawns in a game run by fast fashion brands. Cara says that she hopes people are 'kinder to themselves so that they don't overconsume', and that, as a result, they 'buy less but buy better'. Hopefully, in time, she envisions a decrease in micro-trends and a rise in social media influencers that promote 'dressing for joy': the happiness that comes from rewearing and reinventing your own wardrobe.

Encouraging children to have a connection with their clothes, and an understanding of how the fashion industry operates, is crucial to creating this dream scenario, and Cara shares three tips she would give to young people growing up in this current fast-fashion climate.

Firstly, she emphasises the importance of falling in love with your clothes; something that is not hard to do in a *Cara & The Sky* piece that is designed to bring joy. Next, she reiterates the importance of shopping secondhand, as well as how crucial it is to destigmatise this, so that we can keep pieces in circulation for longer, and pass on pieces that we may not love anymore, so that they can be cherished by another. Lastly, she encourages young people to educate themselves and 'make informed decisions'; understanding brands' production, material composition, and what their sustainable practices are is crucial to building a more mindful and sustainable industry.

'Every brand launching now has the responsibility to be aware of their fashion footprint'

One thing that intrigued me about *Cara & The Sky* was their use of vegan materials; an unusual choice in the world of sustainable knitwear. The reason, however, was rather unexpected! 'I'm actually allergic to wool' – she explained – meaning that the brand chose to instead opt for synthetic materials, such as acrylic. When deciding to create the company Cara spotted a gap in the market for a brand producing 100% wool-free statement knitwear that prioritised the welfare of people and planet. 'Every brand launching now has the responsibility to be aware of their fashion footprint', she enthused, and currently *Cara & The Sky* have placed their focus on ethical production, the support of British manufacture, and curtailing over-consumption through small, joy-driven, not trend-led, collections.

Moving forward, Cara hopes to explore more eco-friendly and recycled yarns but explains that it's currently just not possible in the UK. 'The trade-off of producing in the

UK is that we don't have as much access to the eco yarns that are available in China,' she states, but goes on to explain how this hasn't stopped her from embedding sustainability into the brand from the get-go. As hard as it may be to land on every sustainability point as a small brand, as Cara phrases it, it is evident that *Cara & The Sky* are striving to make great change – one sustainably knitted jumper at a time.

