

# Nature studies

Known for her glorious knits covered with flowers and leaves, Sasha Kagan shares her design secrets



**CAPTURING THE** glories of nature in knitted fabric has been a passion of Sasha Kagan for more than 45 years. During

her long and illustrious career as a handknit designer, Sasha has brought joy to knitters around the world with her colourful, exuberant intarsia and Fair Isle designs. She has been a key supporter of *The Knitter* since its inception, collaborating with us to produce distinctive, iconic patterns.

Sasha was a key player in the revolution in handknit design in the late 1970s, alongside the likes of Patricia Roberts, Kaffe Fassett and Susan Duckworth. Sasha and her fellow designers brought a fresh approach to handmade knitwear, with a focus on colour and graphic design.

Having been passionate about knitting, crochet and dressmaking from a young age, Sasha went on to study painting and printmaking at art college. She supplemented her grant at the Royal College of Art by selling knitwear designs to Twilleys; her work played with the Fair Isle technique to create geometric designs using a limited colour palette.

## A unique style

Using her artist's eye, Sasha developed her unique and instantly recognisable style. Her knitwear has been showcased in her own range of books, as well as international magazines including *Vogue Knitting*, and *Interweave Knits*; she has also collaborated with yarn companies including Rowan and Yarn Stories.

"Over the years, I have developed a repertoire of themes which I find myself returning to time and again," Sasha says. "When I first started using hand-knitting as my medium of expression (and as a way to earn

a living) back in the '70s, I took inspiration from Shetland patterns which used the Fair Isle technique. My early designs were based on geometric shapes, exploring three-dimensional motifs. I would sit down with a sheet of graph paper and see where a pencil took me. The 'Iris' jacket in this issue is an evolution of an early floral design from *The Sasha Kagan Sweater Book* [1984].

"Witty and whimsical was another favourite avenue to explore - Scotty dogs, prowling cats, dachshund and flower girls appeared dancing across my sweaters. As the imagery increased in size, I developed a different way of knitting which involved keeping an individual bobbin of yarn behind each motif and weaving the background yarn along behind it. This made a much more fluid fabric and was also more economical on yarn.

"Folk art and design is printed in my DNA, and the idea that some iconic designs have been crafted for generations touches a chord in all of us. My 'Carinthia' jacket, which I designed for Issue 9, says it all: a border taken from mid-European embroidery, ski spots from Norway, and pompoms!

"I am lucky to live in the Mid Wales countryside, and since I published my book *Country Inspiration* in 2000, my themes have been mostly inspired by flowers and leaves. The 'Paeonia' cardigan from Issue 19 is constructed with stripes of flower heads and lace to give an airy feel; the triangular 'Violets' shawl from Issue 50 has tiny flower heads bordered with a traditional Shetland trim; and the 'Sweet Briar' tunic from Issue 85 has an underlying geometry in the reversed stocking stitch diamonds which provides a picture frame around each rosebud."

Sasha is keen to encourage knitters to explore colourwork design. She hosts workshops around the country, such as her 'Designing From Nature' masterclass, which this year will be held at West Dean College in West Sussex, on 20-23 May (01243 818300, [www.westdean.org.uk](http://www.westdean.org.uk)) and at Sculpture by the Lakes in Dorset, on 7-8 September (07720 637808, [www.sculpturebythelakes.co.uk](http://www.sculpturebythelakes.co.uk)).

As a patron of The Knitting & Crochet Guild, Sasha works hard to promote our craft. "I strongly believe in the importance of keeping crafts alive," she says. "It is so important that these skills are passed down for future generations to learn and develop. The Guild was established in 1978 for education, innovation and preservation, and I was delighted to become a patron. The Guild offers study days, and has a vast collection of knitting patterns and books dating back over 100 years, all of which are available to members."

– Find out more about Sasha's books, kits and workshops at [www.sashakagan.com](http://www.sashakagan.com)



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1 Sasha designed this top for *The Knitter* issue 10 2 + 3 She draws inspiration from flowers and folk art 4 'Maroon' appears in Rowan's *Magazine 64*, which celebrated its 40th anniversary



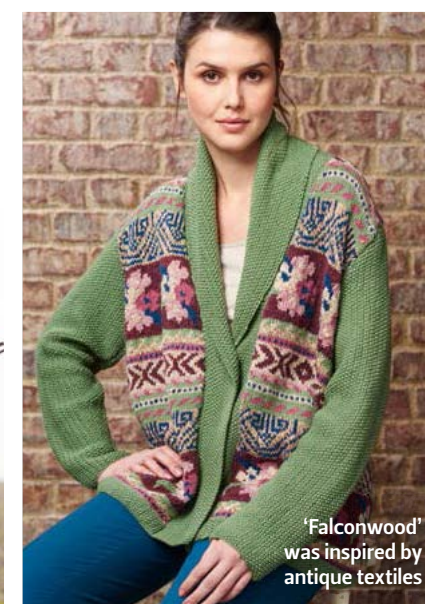
Classic Collection



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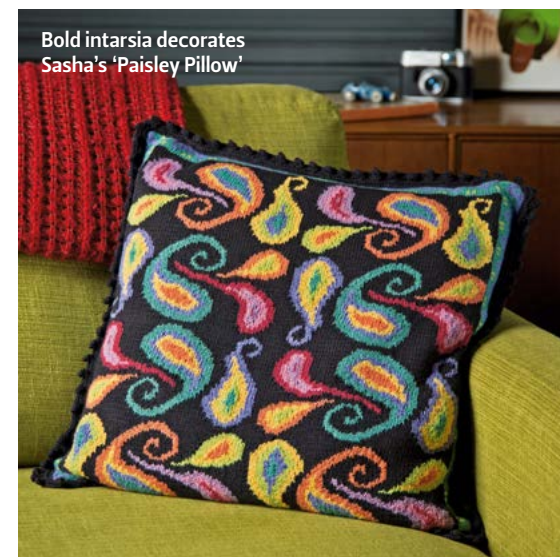
'Hazelnut' from Sasha Kagan's *Classic Collection* (2011)



'Falconwood' was inspired by antique textiles



3



Bold intarsia decorates Sasha's 'Paisley Pillow'



'Lotus Cushion' takes cues from Pakistani folk embroidery



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