

A Passion for Wool

The premise of the Place Textile brand is to create fabrics that are true to their materials. While the company offers a broad range of fiber options, love and respect for natural fibers such as wool are front and center. The company's 2006 introductory collection called *Sense of Place* included icons of the Place collection including Balmory, a sumptuous wool bouclé, and Oban, a worsted that wears like iron.

In 2008 Place introduced the *Bantry Bay Collection*, which paid tribute to the wool fabrics of Scotland and Ireland and brought attention to the disappearing art of spinning wool into fancy yarns such as bouclés. The *Bantry Bay Collection* became a touchstone for re-educating younger designers about the attributes of wool.

Fabrics such as Clare, a wool flannel, and Killarney, another luxurious bouclé, have been well received in residential circles, and at Herman Miller and Geiger, which have renewed their appreciation for and promotion of wool as a versatile, luxurious and durable fiber.



At top: River Aire Collection; above: Bantry Check in all color.

The Bantry Bay Collection

A European wool odyssey leads to Place Textiles

As told by Place Textile founder Kristie Strasen

The starting point for researching my master's thesis was the southwest of Ireland, where the thriving cottage industry of textiles ultimately changed the course of my career.

Working my way up the spectacular Irish coast, I was drawn to the rich textile tradition of the micro-villages dotting the wild landscape. Sheep were an integral part of that setting, as were all the activities associated with the small-scale processing of wool. I'd see someone sitting in a beam of sunlight picking through a fleece or carding and spinning wool. Steaming dye kettles with mysterious dyestuffs and drying skeins of hand-spun yarn were common sights. Soon, the wood-on-wood clacking of handlooms became a recognizable sound.

The more I traveled those narrow Irish roads the more captivated I became with everything textile. I kept going — to Scotland and up through the Orkney and Shetland Islands, through Eastern Europe, through Greece and across Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan.

All along, I had my eye on textile techniques and the critical role wool played in the production of exquisite textiles. Woven into rugs that adorned humble homes ... Manipulated



Kristie Strasen on the road in Ireland '73

into cozy blankets that were piled for sitting and transformed into beds at night ... Knitted or felted into garments that were worn against the cold. I learned how manipulating wool into fabric was a universal language that people the world over understood.

Eventually I returned from that eight-month journey and went to graduate school — in textiles.

My first position was with Knoll International. At the time, the company had many beautiful wool upholstery fabrics as well as

woolen drapery and casements. Companies like Herman Miller and Steelcase also offered wool upholstery options. Jack Lenor Larsen was producing beautiful wool fabrics and carpets of all types for the home.

In the 1980s, the huge boom in synthetic fibers began and the popularity of wool fiber products diminished. It became difficult to find wool fabrics. As a culture we collectively forgot the amazing attributes of wool — durability, ability to take color, natural luster, and ability to wick moisture.

My textile career eventually brought me to New York City. After twenty years as a textile consultant, designing and developing fabrics of all kinds for the commercial and residential markets, I launched Place Textiles in 2006. ∞



Above: Killarney/Straw; at right: wool boucle used in Killarney



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