

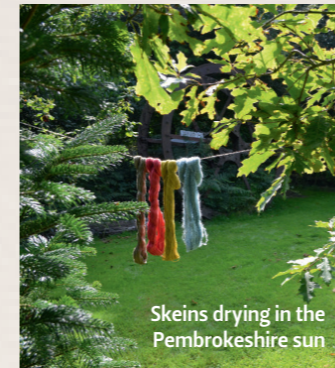
1 Karen runs workshops in her dye studio 2 She works with UK-sourced yarns, some of which she gets from local smallholders in West Wales 3 Her yarns are all dyed using natural dye materials



Karen offers mini skeins on a range of fibre bases



4 Karen loves using indigo in her hand-dyed scarf ranges 5 She uses a range of dyeing techniques including immersion dyeing and hand painting 6 FelinFach sells a range of hand-turned wooden yarn bowls



Skeins drying in the Pembrokeshire sun



Karen works with madder, cutch, lac and logwood dyes



Colours of sea, sky & hedgerow

Taking inspiration from the landscapes of the Pembrokeshire coastline, Karen Morgan of FelinFach produces gorgeous, natural hand-dyed yarns



FELINFACH is a natural textiles company based at a 200-year-old former flour mill in the Preseli Mountains area of Pembrokeshire. Owner and founder Karen Morgan offers a selection of Welsh tapestry blankets and Welsh tartan scarves, yarn bowls, handmade candles and soap, and also a range of hand-dyed yarns which Karen produces herself using natural dyes. Having recently renovated and upgraded the FelinFach Dye Studio facilities, Karen is looking forward to running workshops on hand dyeing with natural dyes this autumn. We caught up with Karen to find out more about the background to

FelinFach, the hand-dyed yarns she produces, and her colour inspirations.

When did you first try your hand at dyeing yarn?

"I started my yarn and fabric journey a long time ago, and as my life changed with the arrival of my children, and my career in the finance sector taking more of my time, it was set aside but revisited many times. We relocated from Cardiff to our current home in Pembrokeshire some ten years ago, and I was in the lucky position of being able to take up my journey once more. I could spend time designing Welsh blankets and hand-dyeing yarn, and delving into the world of natural dyes - something I had wanted to do for some time."

Can you remember the first colourway you ever created?

"I bought extracts and mordants online to see how hard natural dyeing would be! The first colours I created were purple, rose pink, yellow and red using logwood, lac, goldenrod and madder. But me being me, I played around with some modifiers and mordants to change the colours - and I was hooked! I still have my first samples and the records for this first attempt."

Where do you source your yarns from?

"The source of our yarn is important. I like to work with suppliers who have the same values as FelinFach and source their fibre from farms with the best farming practices. All our yarn is sourced from the

UK and some from smallholdings in West Wales. The Welsh yarns are spun locally; fleece to yarn in a Welsh weaving mill. The UK yarns are sourced from a spinning mill in England. I also source the more exotic fibres, like yak, from a UK supplier. I could source yarns at a lower cost from overseas suppliers, but I do not want to compromise on our values."

What dyeing processes do you use?

"It depends on the yarn that I want to produce and the technique I would like to use. It could be a solid colour, variegated colour or hand-painted. I would be extracting the dye liquid from the raw material such as roots, bark or insect. I also use ethically sourced extracts. Some of the processes are dyeing in one pot on a heat source, or it could be an indigo vat or even both, or hand-painted. These are the main processes, but I do like to experiment with new or different techniques."

Do you have a favourite colourway from your current range?

"Our Hydref (meaning 'autumn' in Welsh) Yak Sock 4ply is my favourite out of the current range. Autumn is my favourite season, and the colours can be spectacular, so this colourway is berries, turning leaves, heather and autumn sky. These were the colours I was thinking of, and I am happy with the way they turned out."

As well as your own hand-dyed yarns, what other products does FelinFach sell?

"I hand dye scarves in silk, cotton and wool, and I stock a range of books and accessories including hand-thrown yarn bowls. My original interest was and still is weaving. I enjoy designing Welsh blankets and throws, and having the iconic Welsh tapestry design woven in new contemporary colourways. These are woven on Dobcross looms in the few remaining Welsh mills."

What would you say are the particular highlights and challenges involved in running an artisan yarn business?

"It's entralling to look at the colours from that day's dye pots and think 'wow, I produced that', and knowing that all the colours come from nature. It's also amazing and humbling to read customers' reviews (especially when they are good ones!). "As it's only me hand-dyeing yarn, there are never enough hours in the day to do as much as I would like. The upgrading of my FelinFach Dye Studio will allow me to have more pots on at the same time, and I'll have more space for the whole process."

Where do you find colour inspiration?

"The Pembrokeshire coastline is the only coastal National Park in the UK and is truly spectacular and inspirational. The colours of the sea and landscape are so varied.

Barafundle is my favourite beach, and a walk there one autumn inspired my Barafundle hand-dyed scarf. The Strumble (Pen Caer) area and lighthouse, another favourite thinking place of mine, inspired the Hydref yarn collection."

What has been your proudest achievement?

"I had dreamed of turning my hobby of hand-dyeing into a viable business for a long, long time, and making that a reality is something I am proud of. Also, the first time I took my yarn to a major UK show in London, I was staggered by the generous praise from the customers, many of whom said that surely the yarn couldn't have been dyed using natural dyes."

What's the best piece of advice you've been given by another dyer or weaver?

"Two things: first, always keep a journal of what you have done to record and monitor your progress. And second, don't be afraid to experiment - if isn't what you expected, don't see it as a failure, but 'just a learning experience!'"

Are you a knitter or crocheter yourself?

"I am a knitter but not a fast knitter and so I have lots of work in progress! Weaving is faster, so if I want something knitted in my yarn, I ask my sister." ☺

- www.felinfach.com

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