

BACK STORY

A new breed of swimwear designers is dedicated to reinventing the standard shapes, says *Catriona Ramsay* of *Lilliput and Felix*

Words **PENDLE HARTE**

If you thought that swimwear shapes were predictable, think again. While standard swimsuit shapes and basic bikinis have been worked and reworked countless times, nothing really new seems to happen. But for summer 2015, things are beginning to change and a new generation of swimwear designers has sprung up with some designs that are shaking up the classic shapes.

One of these is Catriona Ramsay, whose new label Lilliput and Felix is a small collection of pieces whose silhouettes don't fall into the usual categories. She's a fan of the self-tie swimsuit, which adjusts to fit, and many of her shapes are designed to be worn in a variety of different ways.

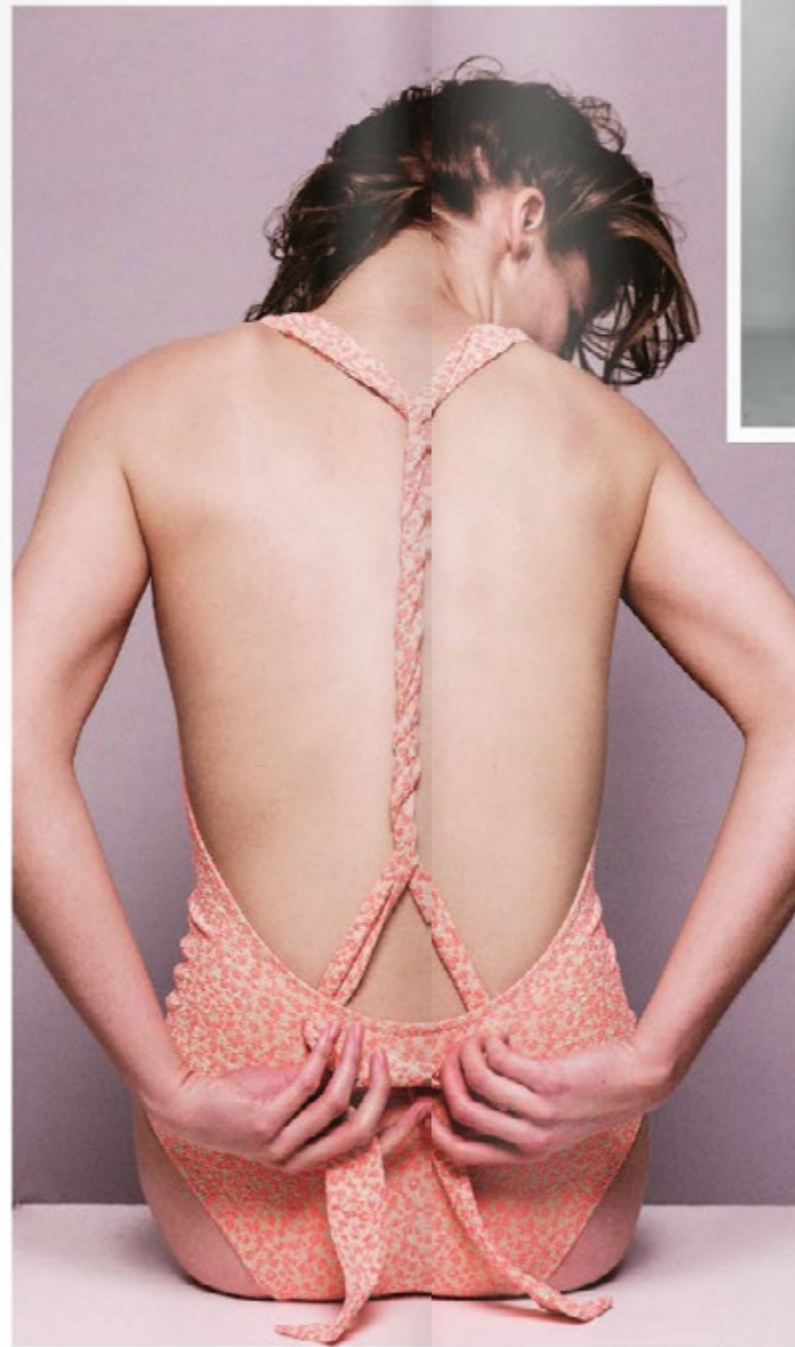
It's all about the fabrics and the silhouettes for me. The idea is to merge the modern, new shapes and new fabric technologies with the classic and the nostalgic,' she says, showing me her signature shape. It's a low-backed, low hiped, cross panel one-piece with straps that cross at the front and tie at the back that combines a futuristic look with a 1950s feel. The floral fabric is a high tech polyamide elastane blend that's woven into a jacquard in a French mill. It really is a



Michelle Emerson in *Jackpot* (Autumn, £27.50)

crossover between the modern and the classic. 'Texture is important to me. I want the pieces to be beautiful things that you want to touch, like a costume or an outfit in themselves.'

But Pomfret-based Ramsay's background isn't really in fashion; hers is a properly millennial hybrid career. After Cambridge, she went to work as an anthropologist for a brand strategy



firm, then changed tack and became a master of wine before taking action on her lifelong interest in swimwear and enrolling on an evening course at London College of Fashion. Then she opened a popup restaurant while launching her brand. And despite having had had swimwear ideas in her mind since childhood and learning the basics about swimwear and contour at college, putting designs into actual practice wasn't easy.

'I had two or three shapes but when I first started, the development took ages. I'd do a design that looked wonderful on paper and even the toile was alright but then when I made an actual costume I'd realize that it wouldn't stay on at all and have to go back to the drawing board. It took me a while to get used to designing in three dimensions for the body, rather than something that looks beautiful in a sketch. I did lots of experimenting on myself. Because ultimately, swimwear has a high functional element. It needs to support – and flatter – a real female body. Plus it needs to stay on, and withstand sun, saltwater and chlorine. I always had this idea for swimsuits with a low back. Nobody has a horrible back, so backs must be shown off.' Another of her designs is a bandeau bikini that wraps round tubes to tie either at the front or at the back. And further plans? 'I'm working on more high-waisted pants and more

●● NOBODY has a horrible back. BACKS must be SHOWN OFF. ●●

FASHION / FOCUS

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favourite pieces by LILLIPUT & FELIX



Jasminum kaftan in *Poppo*, £225



Amoranthus in *Bluebell* (Texture), £245



Rosa bandeau top in *Hot Coral*, £115



Jasminum kaftan in *Steep Garden*, £225



Panacea curve top in *Gun Plus*, £110

covering bikini bottoms, plus a new style of bandeau and a balconette.'

But how can one make waves in an industry that's so big and so crowded? Yes, there is a lot of swimwear around but I think I've carved a niche. The brand is stocked at Bar and Bass in Chelsea as well as online at Avenue 32, where it's a favourite, no mean feat for such a young label. What other swimwear brands does Ramsay rate? 'My favourite for quality and style would have to be Fines – they just do it so well, elegant and minimal. And Mara Hoffman for her prints. Also Marysia, who does these scalloped things, she's really clever for her minimal shapes. Also I think Triangle's campaigns have been really clever.'

Is it time to rethink your swimwear? You know where to go if so. ♦

lilliputandfelix.com