

THE G.O.A.T.

Frances van Hasselt's Love of Mohair - The Diamond Fibre from South Africa

Frances V.H Mohair Rugs are ultimately desirable. Based in the Karoo, a semi-arid area of South Africa, the eponymous company name refers to the founder Frances van Hasselt. Van Hasselt has a close affinity to mohair having grown up on her family's Angora goat farm in the town of Prince Albert at the foot of the majestic Swartberg mountain range.

Mohair, a premium, speciality fibre, is obtained from the fleece of long-haired Angora goats. It is one of the most ancient natural fibres - also called the 'diamond fibre', due to its sheen and strength. Mohair speaks of luxury. South Africa is proudly home to the majority of the world's production and processing of mohair.

Defining features of this natural fibre are its lustrousness, smoothness, and softness. The inherent characteristic of mohair is its breathability; hollow fibres reduce weight and trap insulating air. Naturally curled fibres impart elasticity, adding to its comfort factor. Mohair holds dye and colour beautifully, providing a deep saturated and rich colouring to finished products. In addition to this, its lustre enhances and retains colour helping to reduce fading. Mohair fibres do not pill or matt together, giving end-products a sleek and sophisticated finish. It is celebrated for being crease, crush and odour-resistant as well as being non-flammable (mohair will not burn unless exposed to a direct flame). Mohair is practical and easy to maintain; it resists soiling and a simple shake or brush will remove most dust and dirt. As a natural fibre it is incredibly strong, resilient and

durable, and if cared for mohair textiles last to become heirlooms. At the very end of its life, mohair is biodegradable.

Frances van Hasselt's mohair rugs are hand-made from start to finish, in single colours or patterned and are all reversible. Each piece is custom-made, with clients given a choice of range, colour, and size. The bespoke online service responds to a made-to-order system ensuring overheads, storage, and wastage are minimised. Customers tend to be designers, architects, and private clients who all appreciate natural, local, hand-crafted, and sustainable products.

As an entrepreneur, van Hasselt sees South Africa operating on a global platform as a world-leading producer of mohair in all forms. Her focus is on developing African textiles that preserve, honour, and celebrate traditional craftsmanship, ensuring skills and know-how is passed onto future generations. Employment extends to rural communities, benefiting the area's socio-economics. van Hasselt is passionate about good farming practices, its material processing and sustainability. Humane treatment and welfare of the Angora goats is endorsed and the resulting mohair is all spun, dyed, woven, and finished by hand by skilled artisans.

Design inspiration comes from the Karoo, a geographic region in South Africa that has a particular concentration of mohair production. Karoo is a bushman word meaning 'dry place'. Here, a topography of semi-arid desert with wide

skies and horizons has a far-reaching landscape of desolate plains, shrubland, and flat-topped hills backdropped by impressive mountains. A striking place with gravel mountain passes, streams flowing down from its mountains, river banks, craggy pinnacles, and interesting rock formations. Colours range from light and subtle pales - whites and greys to saturated and bold ochres, reds and yellows.

Spring happens in September, when an abundance of succulents, low scrub bushes, and varied flora bring vivid accents of greens, purples, and pinks against the general dustiness. Angora goats thrive in such a dry climate and produce some of the world's best quality mohair (from the Arabic mukhayyar - 'goat hair fabric'). Mohair, an animal-based protein fibre, is a sustainable resource - shorn twice a year, the raw mohair fibre is gathered with no harm caused to the animals in the process. Finer yarns from kid mohair are used for fashion whereas coarser mohair from adult goats are mainly used in interiors for rugs, carpets, and curtains.

Van Hasselt presents different ranges - 'Raw Landscapes' and 'Karoo Plains' are understated and plain-coloured, while 'Patterned Places' can be multi-coloured, inspired by the colours and forms of South Africa. The abstract designs are derived from landscape aerial views, vegetation, work by local artists, and Karoo architecture. These are rugs to delight and awaken our visual and tactile senses - enhancing well-being within our habitats, our dwellings, our homes. *** **Sarah E. Braddock Clarke** www.francesvh.com

