



Photo: Valérie Wilcox Photography

# Of flowers and fleeces

Jane Audas discovers how Canadian design guru Sarah Richardson responded to the challenge of celebrating wool

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When the Toronto-based interior designer Sarah Richardson was asked to take on a project for the Canadian branch of The Campaign for Wool, her thoughts turned Britain, and to a visit she had paid two years previously to the Prince of Wales's gardens at Highgrove. After all, Prince Charles is the founder and patron of the Campaign to 'raise awareness amongst consumers about the unique, natural, renewable and biodegradable benefits offered by the fibre', as its website proclaims.

'Having experienced His Royal Highness's passion for gardens at Highgrove I was capturing things in my mind,' she says, while bemoaning the fact that she had not been allowed to take pictures. However, 'I found a photograph that came from the Hampton Court Palace Garden Show that reminded me of Highgrove, and we reinterpreted it digitally.' The resulting flatwoven rug, *Hampton*, suggests the colours and feel of the flowers, rather than representing them literally: 'It's a more graphic interpretation of a garden. But to me it speaks to the Prince's love of gardening.'

The rug is one of three that Sarah has designed for The Campaign for Wool, working alongside the rug company Creative Matters, which also has its home in Toronto. As you might expect, the micro-collection is woven out of 100 per cent Canadian wool. In tune with the Creative Matters ethos, the rugs are sustainable, renewable and handcrafted; and, as is typical of Sarah's work, they are also clever in concept, easy on the eye and easy to live with. The designer holds sway over a mini empire that encompasses books, television, a rather addictive YouTube channel and several product lines. A trademark is the large, practical hat that she wears on all of her projects.

When Matthew Rowe, CEO of The Campaign for Wool in Canada, first contacted Sarah he deliberately left the brief fairly open. As it has turned out, the second rug, *Highland* (actually a cut-pile runner), adopts as its theme the heathery colours of the Scottish countryside: 'I was thinking about pastures where the sheep roam free,' says Sarah. 'From a landscape photograph I took, we reinterpreted it with all these misty, soothing, smoky greens and blues. It goes from the colours of the sky, through to those of the undulating hills and the fields, down to the road. It just feels like you want to journey down that rug as soon as you see it.'

The third rug, *Origin*, is more abstract, more about texture than anything else, and designed to be a 'contemporary riff on macramé'. For Sarah the concern was to foster appreciation of both the natural qualities and potential textures of undyed wool. It was also about what could be achieved with craft production in India, where all the rugs were woven by artisans, under the experienced and watchful eye of Creative Matters. Sarah received samples and was kept in the production loop all along. Creative Matters kept pushing production details: ensuring the blurred quality and vivid colours of garden flowers were still visible in the finished piece; making the landscape runner colour transitions even more subtle; and seeing that the contrasting textures were sufficiently contrasted on the 'macramé' rug.

Sarah spent a lot of time thinking about how to design something that would make people think: 'I'd like to bring that home.' 'When you step on these rugs in bare feet they feel fantastic underfoot. And especially in today's world, with everything that's going on, we need all the softness and comfort we can get. People are thinking about their effects on the environment and how we interface with our world.'

So this project, all about giving individual style to a natural, renewable and luxurious material, was perfect for her: 'I'm always drawn to the more soulful elements in a home,' she says. 'Anything crafted by artisans that is made with passion and purpose is something that I admire, enjoy and get excited about.'

[www.campaignforwool.ca](http://www.campaignforwool.ca)