

BAGS of *fun*

Clearing out her loft, Sam Cross came across a mountain of vintage fabric which had been gathering dust for years. As she unravelled the rolls, Sam began to envision each one as a quirky handbag, a bagel-handled shopper or a kitsch day case. In that instant, as her creativity rocketed into overdrive, her handbag designing business, Cloth Magpie, was born.

It was a return to a career she had put on hold to bring up her three beautiful girls – Tabatha and twins Lauren and Matilda – but this time, the designs were very different.

Her bags come in a variety of fabrics, colours and patterns. Sam's spring/summer collection features four different shapes of bag – the Canteeni, a playful take on the Army canteen; the retro Day Case, inspired by vintage vanity cases; the popular Bobble Kiss, a delicate feminine bag with a stylish metal clasp; and the Bagel Shopper, with its unique bagel handle, hand-crafted from reclaimed oak by a Suffolk carpenter.

The quirky creations are very different from the fashion-led, girly and delicate creations of her earlier career when, as a fresh-faced graduate from Cambridge Regional College, Sam designed her first few bags and tentatively put them in a Cambridge shop to see if they would sell.

Her background had been fine art, but gradually her love of painting turned to sculpture, then she decided to extend this to make 'sculptural, decorative bags'.

"Even my early paintings had bits of material stuck on them, so maybe there's always been a fabric influence – perhaps it was my mum being a dressmaker when I was growing up. I had a lot of clothes made out of curtains and soft furnishings," she laughs.

Her first bags were very sculptural and had flowers in between two layers of smoked pvc. They sold out on the first day on sale at Jayne Shapley's Hats, on Rose Crescent in Cambridge.

"It was really thrilling and for it to happen so quickly was great," says Sam.

When a London shop owner then bought some of Sam's bags, it gave her the confidence to start looking elsewhere.

As her reputation grew, Sam's bags ended up being sold in New York, Hong Kong, Selfridges and various high-end London boutiques, as well as appearing in Marie Claire, Vogue and Elle. She even found herself with a few celebrity fans – the likes of Hollywood actress Nicole Kidman and the late television personality Paula Yates.

Now firmly back in the bag designing fold, Sam is revelling in the excitement and buzz she gets from fabrics and textiles. "I'm very happy and it definitely feels a lot more satisfying and fulfilling the second time round," she smiles.



♦ Above: Sam Cross

Find out more about Cloth Magpie on Sam's website – www.samcross.co.uk – or visit Cuckoo at Burwash Manor, Barton.

Win

Journal readers have the chance to win one of Sam's bags – the stylish Bobble Kiss in Meadow Cream, worth £88.

To be in with the chance of winning, just answer the following question:

Q From which college did Sam graduate?

Send your answer on a postcard, along with your name, address and telephone number, to Sam Cross Handbag Competition, Cambridgeshire Journal, Winship Road, Milton, Cambridge, CB24 6PP. Entries should arrive no later than Friday, June 25th. Usual terms and conditions apply.

