

# Terrific

## The New Knitting Circle

Wool and the Gang's Jade Harwood & Aurelie Nicod Popper



Photos by Robert Bredvad

These days, people don't often consider the social benefits of a traditional knitting circle. Perhaps it seems too old-fashioned. Or maybe the dexterity required eludes the majority of us who only ever use our hands for texting and typing. Whatever the reason, the timeless tradition of hand-knitting has found itself nearing obsolescence in contemporary society. That is, until a gang of foresighted designers and founders initiated Wool and the Gang.

"Aurelie and I were both very hands on at Central St. Martins. We would just get some yarn and needles and freestyle, while most of our classmates would learn to knit on machines. We were very strong at hand-knitting" Jade says.

Aurelie adds, "We exhibited a very different process from our designer friends. Generally, they would begin by sketching a garment—before even considering the fabric—then they would make the fabric fit their sketch. We are more interested in seeing how the fabric reacts to different techniques and determining what we can make out of it. We go the opposite way."

While it is Aurelie and Jade who bring Wool and the Gang to life, via their DIY kits and ready-to-wear knits, it was founder Lisa Sabrier who brought the concept to them. "Lisa is from Switzerland, as am I, and when she discovered I would be graduating from St. Martins with a specialization in knitwear, she introduced me to her idea for an updated knitwear brand. And because I was already working so closely with Jade in school and it is such a challenge to build an entire collection, we decided this would be a great opportunity for us to collaborate," says Aurelie.

It was no coincidence that Lisa would look to designers coming from St. Martins to help launch her brand. "At the time, there was a lot of momentum behind a craft movement, and English design schools are known to hold a high standard to the practice of knitting. I think that was a big motivation for Lisa to seek out Aurelie—knowing she had that background and education. And our dynamic has always been so great, working as a team was a very exciting progression for us."

With a nurturing founder and their valuable partnership, the two designers have worked energetically towards taking Wool and the Gang from a fresh perspective on clothing and accessories to a unique and popular brand with avid followers around the world.

"We have a huge following in France and a strong presence in Germany, England, Switzerland, Spain—and of course, in New York." The growing coterie of Wool and the Gang followers is thanks to the company's dedication to not only building a collection of wares but also a community.



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“People buy our kits to knit their own scarves or hats or sweaters and then they want to share it. They want to be listened to. That’s why we created this online platform—where people can post images, and share tips and stories with each other. We always want to maintain a strong presence in the interactive realm. So we maintain our Tumblr, posting fashion reports and “wool school,” which we are just beginning to develop. It will provide a breadth of information on materials and techniques; it is the educational arm of our site.”

Currently, it is just the designers posting to the Tumblr as they receive images and stories from their followers. In the future, however, the plan is to allow users to post independently—expanding the social networking component of the brand. But for now, the team is committed to being democratic and welcoming to input and commentary from their gang of knitters. Aurelie mentions, “We look at our bestselling items, and we constantly read our customers’ emails and Facebook messages in order to get a sense of what knitwear they would like a pattern or kit for. We want our customers to really feel that they have an impact on what we produce. We reply to every question. We want them to know we care, and give them what they ask for!”

“Our brand energy is so friendly,” Jade chimes in. “We love to get feedback of our shop on Thompson Street and hear that it is such a warm and inviting space.”

Adding to the hospitality and enjoyment innate to the practice of knitting and Wool and the Gang are the knitting parties. Anybody with an interest in knitting is welcome to join for a brunch or cocktail hour knitting session. “We live in this world where we are all constantly connected and “social;” these parties and the knitting itself provide people with another outlet or activity. We love nothing more than inspiring people through the lifestyle centered around the tradition.”

It is more than a sense of community and another creative outlet being promoted by Wool and the Gang. Embedded in the line is a mission to promote conscious manufacturing and a respect for the human labor that goes into producing goods.

“We were at Capsule recently, and I was taking notice of how many cool, young brands are out at the moment—people are doing such amazing things. But with Wool and the Gang, it really is the DIY aspect that makes it so unique. It’s about the culture surrounding it. Craft and fashion conscientiousness find a convergence in our company.” Jade says.

When the Gang reintroduced the art of hand-knitting to a youthful, cosmopolitan population with their knitting kits, they demonstrated that it is not only possible but also extremely fulfilling to knit one’s very own hat or scarf. Now, having informed and engaged so many new disciples in the specialty, the designers feel that their customer has a renewed appreciation for their garments. “People realize that all of our products are hand-knitted and finished. And we have worked very hard to make people more sensitive about the process. Now when they buy knitwear, they are more discerning; they really understand the design and work that goes into it and its real value. That sensibility is really something we want to encourage with our retail line,” says Aurelie.



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“It is our responsibility as independent designers to make products on a small scale, well, to provide these well-made products for an affordable price,” adds Jade. “Plus, our collection is really season-less. We make hats that we’ve sold for three seasons in a row. We realize that along with providing the kits, we are encouraging people to invest time and energy into making these items for themselves. We want to remind them that they can wear it forever—regardless of trends or seasons.”

It is a hard line to walk—between making items to be kept forever and broadening the brand’s collection. With that in mind, the design duo adds new items each season based on specific themes. “Next season, we are making knitwear under the theme of ‘skiing in the Alps,’ but the items we make are not crazy trendy. Our main concern is always the silhouette—and that it be something easy to make, especially since we want to be able to offer the ready-to-wear pieces as kits. We will never do anything so trendy that, in a season, nobody would want to wear it.”

As for what is next for Wool and the Gang, Jade and Aurelie are excited to offer free patterns for purchase, without the accompanying kits. “The free patterns will increase the accessibility of our brand. When we design, there are certain elements that increase the cost of a finished piece, or the kits. But with the free patterns, people can be more creative, choose their own yarn and needles, use their own techniques.”

Beyond the free patterns, the company is also eager to branch out further into education, hoping to host a series of workshops at design school in New York City. In an effort to bridge the gap between the concept and reality of launching a line of clothing, the designers aim to work with students as they conceive of a product with the potential to be produced by Wool and the Gang. “We want to offer students the chance to see and understand all the logistics behind actually making a mass-produced item. It’s great to always be designing, but the move into making is quite challenging. It would be so beneficial for them to see how something gets made and what the costs are.”

With tremendously generous spirits and a truly infectious love for the art of knitting, Jade and Aurelie are a perfect team to lead knitting neophytes and enthusiasts alike. “It is just so rewarding to see a customer learn from scratch and then have them come back and keep learning and growing with the Gang. It’s the entire point of what we are doing here!”

*For more information on Wool and the Gang, visit the company’s [website](#). And be sure to check out their brick and mortar location at 98 Thompson Street in Soho.*

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By [Francesca Sonara](#) on March 7th, 2012