



## Metropolis



Left: chunky knit baby camel sweater €245 and striped brushed kid mohair oversized scarf €110  
Above: handknit 'fisherman's net' sweater €265 with oversized snood €130



Left: pale grey baby alpaca sweater €165, handknit tweed scarf €85 and hat €45  
Above: chunky knit 'erosion' sweater in kid mohair €245  
Below: brushed kid mohair red and grey striped sweater €185

# Home spun

Edmund McNulty's take on Irish knitwear for men defies tradition, yet is still very much of Ireland

**K**id mohair, baby alpaca, camel hair and cashmere may not be the traditional yarns of Ireland, but then menswear designer Edmund McNulty isn't a man of tradition. His Aran knitwear reinterprets the woolly icon to reflect a changed Ireland. In time, however, his designs could also take their place in the narrative of this island.

"People worldwide want to discover a product that shows a contemporary Ireland... and they appreciate my take on what it means to be Irish now," McNulty says. "I don't particularly knit traditional Aran."

Which isn't to say the designer is

## Fashion



Lisa Brady

averse to heritage altogether. His love of handknitting, for example, he attributes to growing up on a farm on the rugged north coast.

Here he was surrounded by a cottage industry of handweavers and

knitters – people who would produce Aran knits for tourist shops in Dublin, satisfying the huge demand for authentic Irish produce in the American market.

But despite the evolution of knitwear production to service this market, there remained a perception of the sector as secondary to other areas of fashion, such as tailoring. In addition, people in Ireland fell in love with luxury branded products, to the detriment of home-produced goods. And it wasn't just in Ireland that knitwear was suffering.

"Knitwear has for years been seen as an afterthought by international designers," says McNulty.

When McNulty left college in Galway in the early 1990s, he began to experiment with textures and styles.

"We have a rich heritage of handknitting in this country and, although many of the skills have been lost over the past ten years, there has been a rebirth of interest in the tradition," McNulty says. "It

is an exciting period for handknitters in Ireland."

His collection, he says, features handknit detailing on necklines and scarves.

McNulty established his knitwear label in Drogheda, Co Louth, in 1997, and manufactures his designs at home. He says that being a farmer's son has helped him to train his eye to capture, in his collections, the inherent beauty of natural surroundings.

"Patterns created by climate erosion offer endless design possibilities," he says. "I am fascinated with the subtle colours that change with light, in our moody winter skies. I use lots of perennial greys and greens – I love the acidity of moss green. Also, wild flowers and grasses create movement that inspires textures – like brushed kid mohair garments, and colours knitted in bands or stripes with blurred edges."

A trademark minimalism is at the heart of McNulty's collections. The designer says he continually

paces back elements in his garment to highlight the luxury fabrics used. "You have to be very careful with guys. If there's too much going on they won't want to wear it."

"If you think about how guys shop, they always touch the garment. They want something that is top quality and feels good against the skin and, importantly, that is wearable and unfussy," he says. "People say men are not interested in fashion, I think that is totally untrue. They just know exactly what they want."

McNulty's bestselling pieces include plain round-neck jumpers, and he's observed a shift from second-skin knits towards heritage oversize jumpers, "a war time look".

However, the designer says the economic climate has adversely affected the menswear sector. "Menswear in Ireland is difficult. We have a small population whose spending power and disposable income have been seriously curbed. It is heartbreaking to see so many



small independent retailers close their doors," says McNulty, who no longer supplies to Irish boutiques as a result.

"Irish men are fashionable. During our good times, they invested in clothes and took pride in looking good. Now it is more and more difficult for Irish men to 'feel' good, so looking good has slipped off the agenda.

"I'm guilty of it myself – I fall into a style rut and wear round-

neck black jumpers all the time," he says. "I only hope that, in Ireland, the feel-good factor returns," he says.

Edmund McNulty's winter 2012 collection is available from his studio at Milmount Craft Centre, Drogheda and at [edmundmcnulty.com](http://edmundmcnulty.com)

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