COMPANY PROFILE

Sandnes Garn

BY MARYAM SIDDIQI

he typical Sandnes Garn knitter knits a lot. We like to think that once a knitter tries our yarn, he or she will find it hard to stop after just one project," says Rebecca Hansen, business developer of exports for Sandnes Garn, a 131-year-old yarn manufacturer based in Sandnes, Norway.

Specializing in natural fibers, the company spins 96 percent of its yarns in its factory in the small south Norwegian town. Approximately 20 percent of the wool the company uses comes from Norwegian farmers, with the rest sourced in Uruguay and Australia. Alpaca comes from Peru and Bolivia, cotton from India, silk and mohair from Romania and South Africa. "Fibers from all over the world meet to be spun, colored and made into 50-gram skeins," says Hansen.

"We think it's important that all knitters are able to see themselves in Sandnes Garn," she adds. "We always work toward being versatile in our designs and focus on being fashion-forward. At the same time, we also want to preserve Norwegian heritage in our knitting patterns. We want to inspire the next generation of knitters by making patterns that are fun and easy to knit."

The company is looking to have a bigger presence in the homes of American knitters thanks to its exclusive distribution partner-ship with New Jersey-based Mother Knitter, which formally launched the brand in the United States in February 2019.



"The love of all things Scandinavian has been going on for quite some time in the U.S.," says Laurie Brekke, creative director and manager of Mother Knitter. "Even the Scandinavian term hygge has made its way into American pop culture as a sort of 'new Zen.' This has created a natural place for Nordic yarns in the U.S. market, which has already embraced Nordic-inspired patterns and designs from contemporary American designers including Andrea Mowry and Caitlin Hunter."

Brekke, whose Norwegian husband Vidar acts as Mother Knitter's strategist and technical director, has long been a fan of the brand. "I fell in love with Sandnes Garn more than 20 years ago, and working with the brand has been a goal of ours for quite some time," she says. "We were waiting for just the right moment to bring them back to the U.S. market—and we feel that time is now."

Both Brekke and Hansen are confident that the brand, which boasts more than 30 different yarn qualities, will resonate with American knitters. "Our products range from thick and cozy Norwegian wool, like Peer Gynt, to thin and soft cotton, like Mandarin Petit. If you want to knit an item with the modern mohair touch, our Tynn Silk Mohair can be paired with any one of our other yarns," Hansen explains. She describes their Smart and Sisu yarns as "workhorses"

"One of our newest favorites is the Kos, meaning 'cozy' in Norwegian, a supersoft, easy-knitting yarn. The colors for each yarn will make stores look like candy shops for knitters," Hansen adds.

Brekke believes this diversity in offerings will help the brand quickly resonate with an American audience. "People who knit and crochet want to see themselves in brands that reflect their values, with sustainable production practices but also, practically speaking, with a variety of patterns, colors and qualities that put















no limits on their self-expression and diverse ideas," she says. "Sandnes Garn also produces about 25 pattern books per year supporting the yarn lines—a strategy that has been very successful in driving yarn sales."

The company launches new designs virtually every other week throughout the year, with releases from mid-August to mid-December and then in January to mid-May. Patterns are developed by the in-house design team; collaborations happen as well. "For the past decade, we have worked with several Norwegian and Danish celebrities in creating new patterns and yarns. We have worked with It Girl Hanneli Mustaparta to create the high-end fashion collection you can knit at home and with former supermodel Vendela Kirsebom to create new classics that will never go out of style," Hansen says.

Product launches happen seasonally, with the release of new collections and colorways. "Our design department is always up to date on trending colors in the fashion industry, and given the fact that we have our production inhouse we are able to quickly adapt to emerging trends," she adds.

With the constant stream of new products and designs, Brekke has placed a priority on building a social media presence for the brand in the

States. "We are aggressively working with Sandnes Garn to make their patterns more readily available on social platforms, Ravelry in particular," she says. "This has been the number one request, in large part due to the enormous popularity of their yarn on this site. Currently, their yarn is being used in more than 7,000 projects on Ravelry."

Mother Knitter was at TNNA last June to reintroduce the brand to the U.S. market and get feedback from retailers, Brekke says, but 2020 will be the big launch for the brand, when it's a main sponsor at Knitting LIVE! by Voque Knitting.

"It was very exciting for us and, being a new name for most retailers, we weren't sure what kind of a reception Sandnes Garn would get. But we were thrilled with the initial—and continued—response and interest from retailers and we are adding to [our stockist] list daily," she adds. Plans for Knitting LIVE! include a booth, runway show and cocktail reception.

"Everyone at Sandnes Garn has been amazing," Brekke says. "Not only are their products outstanding, but their design, branding and marketing teams have been extremely responsive to our needs and are eager to further evolve the brand and extend their European market leadership into the U.S. market."

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www.sandnes-garn.com; www.motherknitter.com

Number of employees: 96

Fact: Environmental responsibility is a priority for Sandnes Garn. "We want to contribute in the fight toward a cleaner environment, so we want the production of our yarns to be as eco-friendly as possible without compromising on the quality. In Norway, we have strict laws to ensure that our production meets environmental standards set by the government, and we are proud to always be working toward more sustainable production," says Hansen.