

STAMFORD

MY NEIGHBOURHOOD

THE LINCOLNSHIRE TOWN HAS PROVED AN INSPIRING AND SUPPORTIVE PLACE FOR TEXTILE DESIGNER NICOLA CLIFFE. SHE

Photography: **CRISTIAN BARNETT** Words: **CLARE GOGERTY**

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"PORE VENIS VOLUPTAT IUS
UTAM SOLUPTATUR SPARTALIT
HILLAC EAQSHUIGUI CONECUS"

A handsome Arts and Crafts house on the outskirts of an agreeable market town, feels like exactly the right place to find sustainable textile designer Nicola Cliffe. The mullioned windows are dressed with curtains and blinds made from her own fabric, and her cushions and lampshades are scattered artfully about on solid wooden furniture. At the end of a garden lined with pleached hornbeams, is a purpose-built studio where she hand-screenprints fabric for her company Madder Cutch & Co. It all feels very William Morris.

"William Morris is a great influence on me," she confirms. "Especially his use of natural dyes and the way his designs drew their inspiration from nature." The natural world is all around her in

Stamford; a short walk takes her and Ernie, her lively Parson Russell terrier, to The Meadows, a lush patch of greenery beside the River Welland, which flows through the centre of town. The names of her fabric designs – 'Achillea' 'Clover Seed' 'Creeping Ivy' and 'Blossom' – directly reflect what she sees on their morning dog walks and daily in her own garden.

Nicola knows Stamford well: she grew up nearby and, after a sojourn in Derbyshire, moved back with her husband Jonathan and her three sons, George, Ted and Bertie. When her job as a chemistry teacher in a local school ended in 2012, she finally had a chance to realise a long-cherished dream: to pursue a creative career. "When I was teaching, I kept my dream alive by painting and drawing," she says. "My knowledge of chemistry »



"We are spoilt for choice for places to take very active Ernie, our Parson Russell terrier, for a walk in Stamford, but this is a favourite. In the summer, he goes for a swim in the River Welland and meets up with his doggy pals. It's also given me a chance to get to know Stamford's dog-walking community."



“There is always someone to help you here, and the ladies make a fuss of Ernie. It’s an amazing shop, crammed with all kinds of useful things. I come here all the time to buy rope and hooks for trade stands or jam pots, lightbulbs and cleaning stuff for the home.” harrisonanddunn.co.uk



“Stamford has a lot of independent shops, and this is my favourite. Partly because they support me and stock my fabric and cushions, but also because the owners have such good taste. Everything in the shop is styled beautifully and they sell great painted furniture.”



“I walk past the door to the bakehouse in King’s Mill Lane every day. Asker’s bakes bread and cakes such as Swiss rolls and jam tarts in the original coal-fuelled oven, which can bake 200 loaves at a time. The results are sold in their shop on Red Lion Street and they also supply pubs and cafes in town.”
5a Red Lion Street



“I drop in here for coffee after walking Ernie – it’s a good place to warm up if it’s cold. The owner’s mother makes the most delicious cakes – my favourites are the Smartie cookies. I’ve also just made them a curtain from my Achillea fabric as the old one was looking a bit shabby.”
37 St Mary’s Street





Stamford in a snapshot

With its cobbled streets, working brewery, coaching inns, bakehouse and generally prosperous air, Stamford feels like a model town. The streets are lined with medieval buildings and Georgian townhouses built of local honey-coloured Clipsham stone – the result of the town’s wool-trade past. With more than its fair share of independent shops, restaurants, and a weekly market, it attracts visitors by the coachload in summer, all keen to enjoy its quiet, civilised charm.



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also helped me understand the dyeing process.”

A year studying Sustainable Textile Design at Chelsea College of Art and Design set her on her new path, which was obviously the right one to follow as her business immediately blossomed. “Because I have left it so late, I feel there is little time to waste,” she says. “I’m keen to get on with it!”

Appalled by the environmental and health dangers of synthetic dyes, she chose to use only dyes made from plant extracts. The name of her company reflects this: ‘madder’ and ‘cutch’ are two of the colours she uses (madder is red; cutch is reddish brown). She only prints on linen because it is the most sustainable fabric. Keen to spread the word, she also holds screenprinting and indigo

dyeing workshops in her studio. Fittingly, a woad plant flourishes in a galvanised container outside.

Stamford has proved to be a supportive place to start a creative business. “It’s a really friendly community,” she says, “and because there are so many small businesses, we all help each other when we can.” One example is her favourite café, The Fine Food Store, where she stops for coffee post-dog walk, and which is now furnished with curtains made from her Achillea leaf fabric. Nicola has also designed a Stamford cushion – an artistic interpretation of the town’s buildings and leafiness – which is sold in local store, Chez Soi. You get the feeling William Morris would approve. 📍

For more information and for details of Nicola’s workshops, madderandcutchco.com.



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