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Featured member

Sam Petter: Ethical, cool and creative

Rural living and a passion for creativity and ethical awareness led Sam Petter to tread the unique and delightfully innovative Tatty Bumpkin path

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Sam Petter of ethical kids' clothing and developmental yoga brand Tatty Bumpkin. Photograph: Zak Waters

"It has always been my destiny" enthuses Sam Petter on the subject of why she chose to swap an achingly cool career in interactive graphic design in W1 for a world of mud splattered, combine savvy living amongst the cobnut fields of rural Kent.

Having grown up on a family farm in the area, she and her husband decided to decamp to the country twelve years ago and suddenly found themselves thrown into a world that was "more cutting hedge, than cutting edge."

The result of that switch is Tatty Bumpkin, a brand that straddles two areas: sustainable and ethical online kids clothing and yoga inspired developmental classes for toddlers and babies.

When she fell pregnant all her "priorities began to shift" and Petter trained as a yoga teacher. Still travelling to London to continue with graphic design, it was a throwaway remark that prompted the initial idea for the birth of the brand.

"I was always scruffy, going up to town covered in mud, or manure," she laughs, "and a friend joked with me, saying "you're such a Tatty Bumpkin." Petter thought the name had an indelible ring to it and kept it in

mind, thinking it shared the perfect synergy with the quirky stick figures she liked to doodle.

When she had her son Oscar, she noticed a gap in the market for "anything imaginative to do with children", and also "couldn't find any fun and funky organic or ethically sourced clothes." At which point she embarked on her Tatty Bumpkin journey.

Steaming ahead with her idea she completed all the initial illustrations, made a prototype doll and came up with all the ideas in a week. "I went into auto-pilot overdrive!" she quips.

That was five years ago and today this child-centric natural lifestyle brand is a prosperous hub of creative activity, boasting 800 teachers trained in the award-winning developmental classes, a thriving franchise model and innovative best-sellers like their "interactive t-shirts" and "bamboo sun-shirts", with SPF 50.

Developmental classes are yoga-inspired and led by the Tatty Bumpkin character herself; a rag, stick-doll (remember the doodles) who lives on 'Wobble Farm' and whose mantra is "bendy, giggly, clever and strong." During the sessions children learn movements, sing songs and experience developmental imaginative adventures, all through her lead.

Petter developed the classes in conjunction with a pediatric physiotherapist, and they've proved so effective that last year they won the Organix 'Best National Physical Activity for Children' award.

Petter still, "highly values the importance of teaching a class" herself, which she does weekly at her local nursery. "I'm still touched when I see the kids doing the classes and their creativity," she reveals.

Although her inaugural vision was essentially led by the classes, she thought the clothing line "represented a great physical manifestation of brand ethos," The company uses organic cotton and bamboo which she sources from Turkey to make, as their tagline stipulates, "clothes to feel good in and good about."

She's keen to extol the benefits of using organic and sustainably sourced materials. Both she says, "feel super soft on the skin, look good and wear well." She adds, "if you buy one of our organic t-shirts you'll save a cupful of pesticides every time." So it follows suit that Petter also sources her Fairtrade toys from a Sri-Lankan women's co-operative.

As for what the future holds for Tatty Bumpkin? She is talking to investors to enable further growth, or as she describes it with her characteristically infectious ebullience, "global domination, but I don't say that in a weird way." And you certainly know that talking to her. It's clear she's creatively brilliant but down-to-earth and has the confidence to think big.

She also wants to maximise on opportunities that arise from the three-year licensing deal she secured this year with First Choice, Thomson and Canvas Holidays. An inflight project with First Choice is already in planning stages. She's also in the process of working up a TV pitch to make the Tatty Bumpkin an animated character.

Delighted to become a part of the Courvoisier The Future 500 Network, as she has long admired the members and "voraciously read the supporting articles", she was nominated by a friend. "The external recognition of someone telling you you're doing something valuable means a lot," she notes.

She's enjoying the buzz of meeting cutting edge movers and shakers, too. At a recent Courvoisier event she met Ben Ramsden from Pants to Poverty and Cyndi Rhoades from Worn Again who she would love to collaborate with as they "share the same ethical vision as Tatty Bumpkin."

"I'm having a think about how I could use the Courvoisier gallery space [The Future Gallery] at the moment," she confides. With this creative lady at the helm it's clear the possibilities are endless and never dull. The future's definitely Tatty.

tattybumpkin.com

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