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## HARRIS TWEED...PROFILE AND PROGRESS

### New York. Beijing. A spaceship. An aircraft carrier A new car design...and Harris Tweed

By Katie Macleod

**The latest Land Rover product concept. A Virgin Galactic spaceship. Luxury Harris Tweed accessories designed by Sula Furnishings. The connection?**

Last month, all three were on board the deck of US aircraft carrier USS Intrepid – now serving as the Sea, Air and Space Museum in New York city's Hudson River – to celebrate the launch of Land Rover's newest car, the Discovery Vision Concept, and a partnership between Land Rover and Virgin Galactic.

Harris Tweed was present on April 15th because of the collaboration between Catriona MacGeoch, of Perthshire-based Sula Furnishings, and Land Rover, on the accessories for their latest Concept car.

At Sula, Catriona specialises in designing and producing quality soft furnishings in traditional and contemporary Scottish wool



fabrics, and of course, the classic Harris Tweed.

Land Rover's aim for the vehicle was to create the ultimate leisure space, so as well as featuring detachable travel luggage integrated into the car's interior, the Discovery Vision Concept includes Sula's Harris Tweed picnic blankets, sleeping blankets and cushions - all with the purpose of enhancing family leisure activities.

Sula Furnishings doesn't mass produce – presumably part of the appeal for Land Rover – but works on individual commissions and collaborations, which have previously been with Scottish country estates, local hotels, and luxury lodges.

This high-profile collaboration "came about as a chance conversation at a party last summer," explains Catriona, who runs her one-woman business from a small shop in The Trossachs. Land Rover representatives approached her a few weeks later, asking for samples for their initial idea of Harris Tweed car seating.

Although they eventually decided to go in another direction – the seats are made from Nimbus and Navy premium leather – Catriona was approached again by their design department, who were looking to accessorise with pillows, throws and blankets.

Members of the Land Rover design team ventured north to Scotland to see Sula Furnishings first hand, choosing colours and patterns to suit the Discovery Vision Concept, which was also launched in Beijing last month.

Catriona worked with Harris Tweed Hebrides in Shawbost to have the tweed woven specially for the accessories, and sourced the various additional materials, such as waterproof backing for the blankets, from other areas of Scotland.

"It's been quite exciting," Catriona says of the project. She is, in her own words, a "one-man-band", and adds that working with British-based, global household names has been huge for her as a small business: "It's been great to be a very small part of it."

Sula began with Catriona making cushions for local Christmas markets, working on Scottish textile furnishings "for a few years as a sort-of hobby", before it began to transform into the small business it is today, first with a "wee shed" as a workspace, then the Sula Furnishings shop. Now in her mid-fifties, Catriona says her recent experience is evidence that "it's never too late" to try something new and pursue your passions.

The Land Rover Discovery Concept car has incredibly advanced features, like aerodynamic wing mirrors embedded with cameras to improve the driver's vision, and a transparent hood that allows the driver to see obstacles beneath the vehicle. These are characteristics that contrast strikingly with the timelessness of the tweed, which Catriona describes as "a very natural product that conveys heritage."

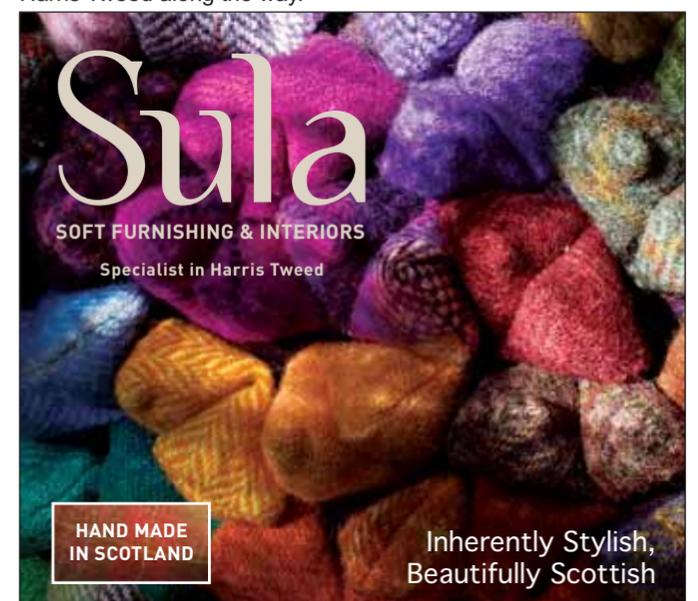
Harris Tweed is very much a part of Catriona's own personal heritage. "I always liked textiles and Harris Tweed. The heritage of it, the tradition, the fact that it's a handwoven product. I've grown

up with it a bit." Perhaps the last bit – Catriona's connection to the textile as a child - is most significant for the birth of Sula Furnishings.

Her mother was from Lewis, and Catriona spent happy childhood summers on her grandmother's croft in Flesherin: "Everyone had a loom then, you could hear the looms going," she remembers. James MacGeoch, Catriona's father, also had strong links to Lewis, being the first photographer ever to accompany the Guga Hunters of Ness on their annual pilgrimage to Sùlasgeir in the 1950s; a book of photographs from his time there was published by Acair in 2010.

It's a connection with heritage and Harris Tweed that has lasted throughout Catriona's life, even as she completed a science degree and went on to do research in cancer genetics. When her children were younger, she would take them on holidays to Lewis, just as her parents had done with her.

Catriona still returns as often as possible to the croft in Point, where she picks up ideas, inspiration, and of course, plenty of Harris Tweed along the way.



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