



LIGHTING DESIGNER
NAOMI PAUL

Bridging the gap between innovation and traditional craft, Naomi Paul handmakes contemporary crocheted pendants with distinctive colour, texture and form

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OPPOSITE PAGE Naomi's recent designs include (from left) Simple Shade in Shetland and Aran wool; Cave in Greengold, from £340; and V2 Glück in Alpine, from £805. **THIS PAGE** In her east London studio, Naomi shapes a crocheted pendant around a wire frame.



ABOVE, FROM LEFT A selection of the colourful yarns that Naomi uses to make her pendant lights; labels ready to be sewn inside the finished pieces; crocheted samples, used as fabric and tension guides.

LEFT The tools of the trade include a crochet hook and thread scissors or snips, plus a winding machine for unravelling and splitting yarn.

Marrying artisan skills with a thoroughly modern aesthetic, Naomi Paul produces crocheted lighting that is defined by its simplicity and functionality. After studying constructed textile design, she set up her studio in 2012, when she was named *Homes & Gardens* Young Designer of the Year. Her distinctive pieces have caught the eye of many high-profile clients, including Firmedale Hotels, Benjamin West and The Conran Shop.

Tell us a little about your background. I grew up in Sussex. When I was very young my parents bought a smallholding and various outbuildings were rented to independent businesses, from ceramics dealers to carpenters and ice-cream vans. So I spent much of my childhood outdoors, tinkering with wood offcuts and found objects.

How did you become interested in constructed textiles? While studying graphic design at Central Saint Martins, we were asked to “make something badly”, so I decided to give knitting a go. My mother taught me the basics using chopsticks for needles. I ended up knitting a swimming costume, which was not so badly made. Soon afterwards, I realised that graphics was not the direction I wanted to go in; this, coupled with a trip to Japan, where I discovered traditional weavers in Nagao, sparked my interest in textile construction. So I transferred to the Chelsea College of Art and Design to study weaving.

Tell us about some of your early designs. I was working part-time for a jeweller who commissioned me to make a sculpture, and I began to think about how it could be simplified and also given an element of functionality with lighting. My brother, who is a brilliant designer, inspired me to evolve the sculpture into a series of lighting forms. I spent weeks sitting on the floor of my King’s Cross flat, crocheting yarn and experimenting with spiralling techniques to create voluminous shapes of varying sizes.

Where do you find inspiration for your work? I am inspired by so many things, including textures, fashion, furniture design, colour, architecture, people, dance – the list never ends. I share a studio space with my photographer husband Nick Rochowski, and we are constantly bouncing ideas off one another. The studio is located on the edge of Hackney Marshes – a little oasis of calm surrounded by flora and fauna, which is incredibly inspirational too.

Can you describe a typical day? I cycle to the studio, come rain or shine, allowing ideas to take seed on the way. I start the day by looking at emails, checking orders and ensuring that all the makers are on target. I have two part-time assistants who help with pattern development and the general day-to-day running of the studio, plus a rolling team of makers who are mostly textile graduates and



ABOVE, FROM LEFT A yarn colour card; Cave wall light in Lava, £714; a birch crochet hook is used to attach a shade to a copper frame. **LEFT** The process involves meticulous hand-stitching; the beginnings of a pendant in the making.



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materials enthusiasts. While I no longer make many of the standard pieces myself, I'm a stickler for ensuring that all the pendants are crafted in exactly the same way. It takes a long time to train a maker to use the same techniques, whether casting on the yarn, tying in ends or steaming the finished piece.

Describe the process of making a piece. All the pendants are made completely by hand, to order. Usually only one person will work on a piece, to ensure an overall consistency of tension and finish. Once we have the colour, size and shape specification from the client, we begin construction. A pendant may take between eight and 40 hours to complete, while bespoke pieces can take from three to six months. Once made, the pendant is hung, dusted and steamed to finish the fabric. During steaming, the shade is carefully pushed and smoothed into shape with the back of the hand while being gently spun, until it looks even all the way around. The piece will then hang in the studio for up to four days to drop to its final stretched height.

Where do you source materials? When I first launched my lighting collection in London I used industry surplus yarns, mainly from couture fashion houses. But as I began to take more orders, it became apparent that I would have to source virgin yarns in order to keep up with demand and maintain a consistent colour palette

and range. I now source the cotton from a family mill in Italy. It is then knitted into a fine cord in Lancashire, ready to be crocheted.

What makes your work unique? I think what draws people to my work is the combination of tactility and simplicity. Classic handcraft, such as crochet, is often associated with hobbyists, but to me it is a sophisticated means of construction, which produces intricate and complex forms. There are a number of mathematicians, scientists and computer programmers who have used the principles behind crochet to demonstrate and calculate molecular growth.

Tell us about your recent commissions. I'm currently working on new lighting pieces, which are evolutionary in terms of shape, material and function, building on the existing collection and responding to client feedback. I am also focusing on designs in British wool, inspired by my collection of lighting for last year's London Wool Week.

What's next? I'd like to explore outdoor lighting materials and hopefully develop a range of pendants and floor lamps for outdoor use. I'd also love to collaborate with a furniture design house to look into upholstery furnishings and spatial dividers; I'm interested in how textiles can be incorporated into building design at an early stage. □
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