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Sh*t That I Knit

CHERYL FENTON **writer**

a hand-crafted Peruvian textile is recognizable from yards away.

The vibrant hues and styles are attention-grabbing, from traditional ponchos and blankets to fun Andean *chullo* hats. Every colorful skilled stitch recaps 10,000 years of tradition.

When it comes to respecting this age-old love of manipulating yarn, Sh*t That I Knit (STIK) is keeping knit real.

Weaving together modern designs with ancient Peruvian knitting traditions, Weston native Christina Fagan created her Boston-based knit-wear label to take over the wool world—one hat at a time.

“Peru has one of the longest traditions with knitting, and the people there are insanely talented. Many women learn as children from their mothers and grandmothers. It’s a tradition that’s passed down from generation to generation,” says Fagan of her choice to work with the people of this South American country for her local line.

Now employing 170 knitters in Peru’s capital city of Lima, STIK (as it’s known in knitting circles) was founded in Boston out of a serious love of knitting and a minor love for joking around. Their hats are kettle-dyed and made from 100 percent Peruvian merino wool, while their Pardy Wraps and Ponchos are made from 100 percent Peruvian baby alpaca wool. Their



Christina Fagan modeling the Ladd Beanie in lavender

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business “making something out of nothing”



Christina Fagan at work in front of the timeline that tells the STIK story

CHRIS ANDERSON (CDAMEDIA.US)

styles can be found online and around the country, in local boutiques such as Salt & Grove in Newburyport and Boston's Mulberry Road and Whitney + Winston, and at pop-ups around the Seaport District.

That First Stitch

Fagan's story began back in 1999 when there weren't many kids playing along the breathtaking trails and rugged coastline of Nova Scotia's Cape Breton. Ten-year-old Fagan took a less rambunctious approach to her family's summer vacation.

"We spent summers up there, and it was very quiet," she remembers. "Mom took my sisters and me to a knitting store as a hobby for a rainy

day." And so she began cozying up to knitting after befriending the owner of Baadeck Yarn.

The young girl started with a sweater—a lofty goal—and her nimble fingers picked up the craft quickly. She soon had the itch to create more.

"Knitting was always something I turned to. I always loved doing things with my hands. It's very meditative and therapeutic for me and creative, making something out of nothing," says Fagan.

Career Path

Eventually Fagan packed up her knitting needles and headed to college, earning a degree in art history with a business minor in 2012 from

*The Motley Mittens and
Beanie in sky blue*



Skidmore College. During a young adult's life of parties, exams, and studies, she knit. A lot.

"I was knitting a lot in college, and my sisters were making fun of me. One of them said that I should start a blog called Sh*t That I Knit, so I did," she explains. Her online presence became a virtual album packed with photos of "sh*t that I had knit."

"No one read the blog, but it was a fun fact for me and always my line in the icebreaker game."

But, after graduation, one sweater does not a career make.

"After going on a few informational interviews at museums and auction houses, I realized very quickly that, although I was an art history major, I did not want to go into that field," she remembers. "My dad always said I'd be 'great in sales,' so without understanding what that meant, I took a sales job at LevelUp right out of school." With her father's intuition proven spot on, Fagan spent two years at the growing start-up and eventually left for the internet advertising company Criteo to sell digital retargeting.

Meanwhile, Fagan started testing her products just for fun in October 2014 at SoWa Open Market with her mom, Katie Fagan, by

her side. Her stash that took all summer to knit sold out quickly, despite the hefty price tag (beanies run around \$125). This was her first inkling that this could go from a side hustle to a main gig.

By spring 2015, she had built up enough orders and created enough of a following that Fagan said goodbye to Criteo. Then came the Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign in September 2015, which gathered \$15,000 in just 24 hours. She put together a team in Boston of women in their 20s



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business “knitting provides numerous therapeutic benefits”

and 30s via an Instagram ISO for knitters, designed three styles of hats, and hit the ground knitting.

“They would grab the yarn from my apartment and parents’ house, knit from home, and bring back finished product.” To keep up with demand, she had to move beyond the small local group and dig even deeper. Enter Peru. “We were sourcing all of our Merino wool from Peru, so that’s where I started looking.”



*Christina Fagan
wearing the Pardy
Wrap in creme*

Quality Knits

STIK is irreverent, with a tongue-in-check sense of humor. Fagan explains that laughing every day is a big part of the brand. They like to keep it light, as evidenced by their fun fom fom (faux fur pom pom) hats and their customer service username “wazzup.”

“When my mom and I sold at SoWa, we noticed that every single person who read our sign smiled,” she says. “It made sense to keep it.”

But all the fun is balanced with the seriousness of the quality. All of their products are made in Peru, with designs coming from Fagan and brought to life in sustainably sourced yarn by a group of talented women in Lima. The Pardy Wraps and Ponchos are machine-made in Peru by small, family-owned businesses.

“Many of these women are amazing mothers who can work from home while taking care of their children and earning an income to support their families,” says Fagan.

Give-A-Sh*t

Research has shown that knitting provides numerous therapeutic benefits. The repetitive motions and concentrated counting are almost meditative, helping to reduce cortisol levels and blood pressure, lower stress and anxiety, and even provide a distraction from chronic pain.

The Give-A-Sh*t program donates Knit Kits to young adults undergoing cancer treatment to teach them how to knit and hopefully make a difference in their quality of life.

“It’s an underserved area and we wanted to be able to share [knitting’s] therapeutic qualities, so people can have the benefits of putting their minds on something else other than treatment.” To date, STIK has donated 400-plus kits at no charge. Individuals wishing to request a kit can do so through the company’s website.

“We’ve most notably partnered with Dana Farber’s Young Adult Program here in Boston,” says Fagan. They are also partnered with Lurie Cancer Center, Memorial Sloan Kettering, Lucile Packard Children’s Hospital-Stanford, University of Calgary Department of Oncology, and AYA at USC Norris.

Future Sh*t

Today's STIK blog has morphed into an online "safe space for talking sh*t," from the latest knitwear trends to binge-worthy Netflix shows. The product line itself has grown into kids' Lil Sh*t's in 2016, wraps in 2018, and ponchos and hand-crocheted raffia jewelry in 2019. All the products have a link back to Fagan's family: last names for knit items, first names for earrings.

"We have dug deep into the family tree now to find good ones," she laughs of her growing collections.

On the horizon is another trip to Peru to visit the women who help make these products possible.

"I've been twice to visit with people," she explains. "We usually pick a day and spend the entire day driving to different areas, bringing them gifts, hearing their stories, hugging. This work means a lot to them and it's incredible—not only the income but also the support from the women they knit with. They're like sisters to each other. They offer advice, help each other through hard times, and it gives them a sense of purpose," she says.

While Fagan is able to thank them in person during her trip, a quick visit to the STIK website provides an opportunity to write thank you notes that are hand-delivered to these amazingly talented women.

Consider this a great way to let them know that you give a sh*t. www.shittthatiknit.com

You can find STIK online at www.shittthatiknit.com.







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