

in the Studio

Sarah Marks is one half of crafty duo Button Bag, a brand that now sells over 50,000 craft kits a year in some of the country's biggest stores

What is your background and how did you come to be a designer?

My dad was a tailor and taught me how to sew when I was a child. I've been sewing ever since and I always have a project on the go.

growing commercial success meant it soon threatened to take over and we then had to make the big decision to find premises and give up our previous jobs.

The first idea for the business came after people had admired the

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Buttonbag started as a part-time, kitchen table venture with my business partner Sara and I ferrying our craft kits between our two houses and fitting it in around our children, home and careers. But

dressing up costumes we had made for our children, and confessed that while they would love to make some for theirs, they didn't know how.

Putting together Sara's expertise as a pattern cutter and costume



QUICK FIRE QUESTIONS

What did you want to be when you were younger?

A pirate

What is your favourite project you've created?

The Owl House

How would you describe yourself in three words?

Resourceful, inventive, and fun

If you were stranded on a desert island with only one crafty item, what would it be?

Large sharp scissors



maker and my commercial sense, Buttonbag set out for Greenwich market with a collection of costume kits; pirates, princesses, knights and fairies. Each kit had a pattern – graded for size, fabric, instructions, needle and thread. They looked beautiful and everyone said so, but they didn't sell. However, what flew off the shelves were the peg doll kits for children we had made with all the leftover fabric. So from this response we made some more – and then some more and they kept selling; and that's how it all started.

Five years later and Buttonbag is now selling over 50,000 craft kits a year. Our customers include some of the country's biggest stores, such as John Lewis, Liberty's, Heals and Paperchase, but we also supply hundreds of independent toy shops, galleries and boutiques.

What are the biggest inspirations for your designs?

I am inspired by memories of my own childhood and the things I used to make. I made all sorts of toys and clothes when I was a kid including a Viking village out of peg dolls. Now we design, manufacture and sell our craft kits from a studio in the east end of London. These are mostly sewing kits but notable exceptions include our peg doll kits, children's puppet theatre and button-based jewellery range.

Have you noticed a change in your customers shopping habits over the past few years?

We haven't really noticed a change in shopping habits, more a change in the type of customer. Craft seems to be becoming more popular and edging into the mainstream. Some of our customers are the most unexpected types of people to be into crafts. Also, it has definitely become more desirable to make personal gifts for friends and family.

How do you think the craft market is performing at the moment?

I think the craft market is growing as more people are encouraged to do

it. Craft is a great antidote to the high-tech lifestyle. To make something with your hands after a day sat in front of a computer screen is very rewarding. Social networks have definitely helped because people love to share their ideas and what they have made. The internet is a great tool for this and helps create virtual sewing circles. You can see this with all the craft blogs that are springing up.

What trends are you focusing on for summer?

Our summer is all about re-crafting. We've just launched a thrifty craft kit collection with Oxfam which includes kits to help people make something new from old clothes and second-hand finds, for example making bunting from old men's shirts. In September we're also launching our first book called ReCraft which will be full of projects like this, including making toys from old jumpers, pin cushions from jam jar lids, recovering old deck chairs,

turning an old shirt into an apron and much more.

What are your future plans?

We're planning to expand internationally but this will take some time as we have to work on all the translations for the craft kit instructions. We'd also like to make another book aimed at children. So far this year we've been doing really well and hope to continue in this way. Our UK manufacture, quirky designs and great packaging have all helped create a strong Buttonbag identity. We are now the third biggest craft brand in John Lewis, which is a fantastic achievement for us.



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Jem's Designs L.t.d
as seen on *Create & Craft*

As a small company we are growing rapidly due to our wide range of fantasy, gothic and steam punk paper packs and CD ROMs. As designers and suppliers we are able to cater for all crafter's needs including the niche markets. We are also renowned for our popular collaborations with Keepsake Crafts.

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