

FEBRUARY
2022

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IRIS LIFESTYLE

Uniting her love of art and design with a desire to live a more planet-positive life, Nikki Wilkinson launched Iris Lifestyle last year. The Shelford-based brand is fast becoming known for products which do good, as well as look good, as she tells Velvet



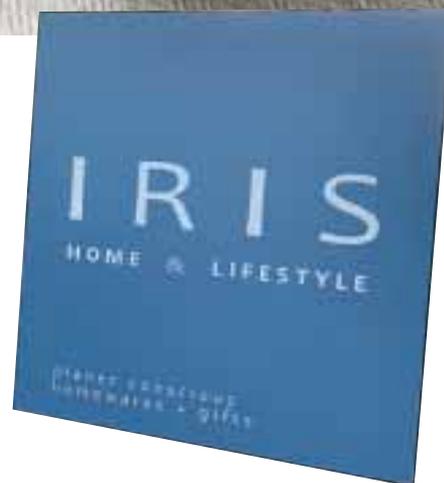
How and when did Iris Lifestyle come to be?

Iris Lifestyle is really a fusion of loving art and design and wanting to be more planet-positive. The stylish planet-conscious homeware store that I had been dreaming about began on a speculative trip to Maison et Objet Design Fair in Paris, where I fell in love with thoughtful homewares,

artisan makers and sustainable natural interiors. I knew I wanted to bring it home, but life was already very busy... The opportunity arrived unexpectedly when acclaimed specialist grocery store Shelford Deli had to close their café-bistro in the pandemic. They have such a great team and the unused space was natural, available and, although unconventional, the perfect venue – I couldn't resist! Both brands are passionate about high quality products, sourced directly from small-scale producers where artisan processes, ancient techniques and material knowledge are key. In 2021 Maggie joined and we started fitting out the space permanently; our new online webstore is an exciting start to 2022.

We know it's founded on strong ethical and eco-conscious values. Why was that so important to you, in creating the brand?

I have always been very aware of retail's growing impact on people and the planet, and the time is now to make changes to prevent the climate crisis. We all have a social responsibility – thinking of my kid's future is a catalyst for me. At Iris Lifestyle we curate home and lifestyle products that are durable – both in their life



cycle and in their style – making it possible to use them for many years, if not decades, to come.

This is the way we endeavour to continue sustainable business with products beautifully made to be used, loved and have longevity. We carefully choose the makers we work with and the materials; sourcing only ecological, certified fabrics and natural fibres that are strong but biodegradable.

We are committed to this journey and are looking to generate new initiatives across the business as we develop.





You stock many artisan-made pieces with stories to tell. Can you tell us any of those stories?

If something's made locally here in the UK then it reduces the ecological impact – such as Cleiog Ceramic's gorgeous Provencal-style hand-thrown stoneware, actually made here in Great Shelford, Cambridge – but we do also stock other products from around the globe which allow fair trade work opportunities.

A great example of this is the beautiful and practical Mmaa.Social baskets from Bolga: not only do they reflect generations of traditional handicraft, with each piece taking two to three days to make, but they also provide income, education and financial independence for rural women where employment is scarce, plus each basket sold gives a reusable sanitary kit to help keep a girl in school. Such a great initiative!

Finally, we're great lovers of the Scandi movement and style, so love working with Norwegian brand Lapuan Kankurit which weaves 100% eco-responsible house linens, created by designers who

have a shared vision of nature and the timelessness textiles can have in our homes.

As well as being ethically sound and planet-friendly, every piece you stock is an object of beauty. . . How would you describe the Iris style?

Durable, timeless, natural, elegant, minimalist, well-made, contemporary and personal. At Iris Lifestyle we offer a curated collection of planet-conscious goods to inspire slow-living, things of beautiful quality which are thoughtfully made.

What's trending for 2022 in terms of homes/interiors?

2022's trending Pantone colour is a periwinkle blue. . . but we prefer interiors that grow with experience and personality; enhancing a space rather than constantly changing it, which is not so good for waste or the planet. We prefer to buy fewer, well-appreciated handmade pieces that you love, from ethical brands or local makers, rather than going with trends. It's also great to upcycle pieces

you already have to give them a new lease of life.

What's the reward of running the brand for you?

As an artist myself, I love to paint, collage and composition, so curating shop displays, choosing products, colour matching and the design aspects all naturally appeal to me.

I also feel happy inside when I think of the artisan makers of these beautiful things; they are so talented and we can really showcase this skill and craftsmanship, plus so many rely on the income, living in areas of extreme poverty.

As a team we love unpacking new orders, examining and enjoying each piece, thinking of how it was made and imagining where we'd put it at home or in store – it's very rewarding. Sustainability is also very important to us, so I feel genuinely lucky to be in a business that works hard in this way too.

See and shop the Iris Lifestyle collection at Shelford Deli, Great Shelford, and irislifestyle.store.