

LOOK  
Feature

'We Started A Knitting Group...

Now Cara D  
Wears Our  
Designs'

Six years ago, best friends Jade and Aurelie sold knitting kits online. Now they head up a celeb-loved fashion brand that's going global

**H**airspray, perfume and frenzied shouts fill the air backstage at the Giles AW14 show. It's a hive of activity, but in the middle of it all, standing calmly by a clothes rack, Cara Delevingne is knitting an orange sweater. Jade Harwood, 29, and Aurelie Popper, 30, are on hand to instruct her before she's called to the catwalk, wearing one of the pair's beanies. 'She wouldn't take it off,' Jade laughs. 'She was so much fun – exactly as you'd imagine.'

With that, Instagram and Twitter were flooded with pictures, and the girls' company, Wool And The Gang, was on the map. '[Collaborating with Giles] was magical,' Aurelie recalls one year on. 'Having the approval of the fashion world wasn't just about elevating the brand, but the whole community of knitters.' 'I started knitting with my grandma,' Jade says. 'It's a craft that could've disappeared, but it's coming back.'

Having graduated with degrees in textile design from Central

Saint Martins in 2008, the pair started selling knitting kits online, with step-by-step guides to designing everything from beanies and bags to dresses and tops. They also uploaded YouTube tutorials. 'We were sick of just consuming,' Jade says. 'Fashion doesn't have to be disposable.' Aurelie agrees: 'Everyone's always on their phones, so taking time out to create something is special. It's an achievement.'

Knitters started sending pictures of their creations to the girls, who were surprised by the standard. 'Other people were asking if they could buy the products without having to knit them, and the idea was born,' says Jade. They researched crowdsourcing businesses, where a company sells products made by freelancers (who take a share of the profits), and realised they didn't really exist in fashion. So they asked their regular knit-kit buyers if they'd want to sell their products. Lots of them did. They set up an application process where people would prove their knitting skills via Skype.

Fast forward seven years and they now have 150 'gang makers' based around the UK, 2,500 on



Cara Delevingne



Jade Harwood

Aurelie Popper

Hey, girls, can we borrow those scarves?



Cara and Kendall get their knitting needles out

the waiting list and a collection of designs that can sell out in days. 'If we need 50 hats, the gang makers let us know if they can do it, buy the wool from us, make the design and send it to us,' Jade explains. 'They can work at home or at our offices. Then they get 78 per cent of the profit.'

When they got the email from Giles Deacon asking if Wool And The Gang would create the knitwear

for his show, their gang makers dropped everything. 'We had to make 250 hats in three weeks,' Jade recalls. 'Lots of our knitters are based outside London, but we still ended up with about 40 in our offices. It was so exciting.' The idea was to give hats to everyone in the audience, so the FROW would be pictured wearing the brand. It worked, making the show one of Fashion Week's most talked about. 'Even the photographers wore them!' Jade says.

The brand's celebrity following is growing. Last Christmas, Vivienne Westwood, Anya Hindmarch, House of Holland and Matthew Williamson designed jumpers that were knitted

**“Taking time out to create something is an achievement”**

by the Wool And The Gang collective and sold for Save The Children.

So, what's next? Well, teaming up with Christopher Raeburn at LFW AW15 for one thing. And a push to expand their knitting parties. 'Friends get together,

sign up to a special online tutorial and even get a Spotify playlist.' Later this year, they're expanding into America. 'We want to be a global fashion brand that's locally produced.'

Aurelie says. 'If you want a hat in New York, we'll have someone in New York to make it.' Looks like they've got the future all sewn up (sorry).

■ Visit [WoolandtheGang.com](http://WoolandtheGang.com) for more information and to shop the collection

How To  
Become A  
Wool And The  
Gang Member

## 1 Fill in the questionnaire on the website

Questions include: how many hours per week could you knit for WATG?

## 2 Tell a good knitting joke

No, seriously, they ask for one. You never know, a brilliant gag might improve your chances of crawling up the waiting list.

## 3 Be ready to show off your needle skills via

photographs or a Skype call Demand is so high, from both sellers and buyers, that they need to be sure you know what you're doing.



Jade, Aurelie and their trusty gang makers

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