

Meet Bärbel Esslinger

Selling her ready-to-wear handknits in her native Germany and beyond, Bärbel loves to create elegant yet wearable garments



BASED IN Cologne, Germany, Bärbel sells her range of hand-knitted dresses, jumpers and skirts through her website, www.esslingers.eu. She specialises in elegant shapes, luxurious fibres and appealing colours, and we have a pattern for one of her trademark dresses on page 31.

When did you learn to knit?

"I started to knit when I was about 12 years old. My mother taught me the first steps, and then my grandmother continued to help me. After a while, I tried to design by myself, not only because I didn't always like the ready-made pullovers I found in the shops, but also because I had my own ideas about colours and quality."

What have been the highlights of working in the knitwear industry?

"I started to knit professionally in 2012 – people were always asking me about the knitted dresses and sweaters I wore, so I decided to start producing them for sale."

"Working in the knitwear industry has been very rewarding, especially knowing that customers appreciate my designs. Last year, there was an exhibition of my work in the design museum here in Cologne, where I met a very old lady who had travelled across the city by bus after reading about me in the local paper. She wanted to give me a gift of a knitted gilet because, she told me, it was made by an artist in the 1970s and she wanted to donate it to me as she felt I was also an artist. That really touched me."

"Some of the technical challenges I've faced doing this job have been designing a wedding dress and also a cassock."

Which yarns do you prefer to work with?

"I particularly love Mohair Luxe from Lang Yarns in Switzerland. It's a silk-mohair yarn that comes in more than 70 wonderful colours, has great yardage, is good to wear almost all year round, and is lovely to work

with. I also love Lang's Cashmere Premium, which is the finest cashmere I've ever knitted with, and its Amira cotton, which has a subtle silky shimmer.

"I also like silky yarns spun with pearls or shimmering viscose thread, linen, and alpaca for the winter – there are so many wonderful yarns available to us."

Do you have a favourite design from your portfolio?

"Actually, it's a simple pullover with a cut-out design, knitted in a wonderful yellow mohair yarn. I'm also proud of a pullover worked in different cable and basketweave patterns, moss stitch and brioche stitch. I'm also astonished by how much interest there is for a jumper design I had published in a German magazine almost 25 years ago. My phone doesn't stop ringing from knitters asking about it!"

Do you have a design philosophy?

"I admire clean shapes and harmonious design – colours are so important, as they say a lot about our personality and affect our moods and emotions. I particularly like Nordic knitting styles and also colourful English patterns." ☺



1 Bärbel uses simple silhouettes to showcase luxurious yarns 2 + 3 She is inspired by traditional colourwork patterns from Scandinavia 4 + 5 Bärbel sells a wide range of delicate, feminine handknitted skirts, dresses, jumpers and jackets