

It's been such a magical time, says Rosie

Katie Macleod interviews Rosie Wiscombe as 'By Rosie' closes

Rosie Wiscombe landed in Lewis in the middle of a Hebridean winter and quickly made it home – for herself and her design business, By Rosie.

Now, eight years and many memories later, she's saying goodbye. "It's time for a new chapter," says Rosie. "I've feel like I've had such a good run of it here, and it's really nice to go out on a high, but it's definitely time for something new."

On Friday 31st August, Rosie closed the doors on her shop and studio on Cromwell Street for the last time. It came a week after a final farewell event for customers, where Rosie invited her customers in to get creative and design their own purses and bags or buy the last of the one-of-a-kind stock before it was gone for good. There was also a silent auction of Rosie's decorative Harris Tweed ice cream cones, which raised £120 for the Linda Norgrove Foundation. "It was a lovely day, lots of customers and well-wishers. Some folk brought their By Rosie bags from years ago and it was like seeing old friends!" says Rosie.

Having recently married, Rosie and her husband Sean will soon be starting a new chapter in South America, on an extended, year-long honeymoon that will see them hike through Chile and Patagonia. In fact, it was travelling that brought Rosie to Lewis in the first place; the couple met while travelling in New Zealand, after which Rosie packed up her belongings from her childhood home in Dorset and headed north.

"I thought it sounded very romantic, moving up to the island," she remembers. "I didn't know what to expect beyond what Sean had told me about it, really, but he had a lovely group of pals, and so I had a little community to move into straight away. I started doing all my sewing in his old bedroom, and that's how it all began."

Although she had been working on her own design business since she finished school, it was when she moved to Lewis in 2010 that By Rosie really began to take off. Rosie started selling her designs at Tallulah & Eve, a boutique dress agency on Cromwell Street, before moving into a small space of her own next door, and eventually combining her shop with a larger studio when Tallulah & Eve closed down.

"Luckily I think timing was perfect, because



Harris Tweed was on the rise again, tourism on the islands was on the rise, and me having the shop at the time I did, it was just a very happy series of events," muses Rosie. "I'd walked past the premises – at that time it was completely empty – but I remember looking in the window and thinking 'Oh that would be such a lovely shop to have one day,' and I moved into it. I always felt like it was very blessed, like it was meant to be."

And the move to Lewis impacted By Rosie not just in a business sense, but a creative one, too. Despite having never been "a particularly

outdoorsy person," Rosie soon found herself enjoying the outdoor activities that Sean was already passionate about – activities like hill walking, sea kayaking and sailing – and realised the island environment was seeping into her art. "I think everyone that visits here and lives here just falls in love with the landscape, and I started to quickly take the inspiration from the things I'd seen out and about, and take those colour influences and put them into my designs."

That of course, meant an introduction to Harris Tweed. A friend brought her a bag of tweed

off-cuts not long after she arrived, and she soon started making patchwork bags with the remnants. Now, the By Rosie Harris Tweed bags are iconic; customers know a By Rosie bag when they see one. Clean, contemporary, and often with a pop of contrasting colour, the bags are inspired by the croft and the sea, and have memorable names like 'Tattie Sack' and 'Lochan.' "I found Harris Tweed really beautiful to work with; I don't think I'd ever worked with a fabric that had so much character. I think what I was doing was something really fun and quirky, and everything was a one-off as well, so people knew they were getting something different," says Rosie.

Over the years the By Rosie product line has grown to include everything from small accessories to full-size bags and even Harris Tweed hoodies. "The way it's developed over the years is really looking at what people were buying, and what customers were saying to me. I was in a privileged position to meet all my customers directly and be able to work on what they were asking for. It was all about being inspired by my island surroundings, and still bringing people a quality product that is made here."

As for highlights from her years in the business, Rosie has plenty. She mentions getting creative with window displays during the week of the Hebridean Celtic Festival, adding Harris Tweed hoodies to her collection, and designing her own 'By Rosie' tweeds with the Harris Tweed Hebrides Mill. "There have been so many lovely things that have happened. To see my products on people, and people wearing my stuff, that's amazing."

How does she feel now that she's said "goodbye" to By Rosie? "It's been a privilege to be a small part of this wonderful and unique industry. I have kept a pile of my favourite Tweeds for the future, because even if I don't work in the industry again, Harris Tweed will always hold a very special place in my heart."

"It's been such a magical time. I'm really excited for the future, but obviously there are so many memories and so many lovely times I've had here," says Rosie. "I definitely want to say thank you to all my lovely customers. It's such a welcoming community, and I just want to say thank you to everyone for supporting me. It's been magic."