

Rowan anniversary



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1 Rowan brand manager David MacLeod with founder Stephen Sheard and *Vogue Knitting's* Trisha Malcolm 2 Sasha enjoyed catching up with Kaffe Fassett 3 Martin Storey and Lisa Richardson 4 A display of iconic Rowan designs



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A party to remember!

Sasha Kagan reports back from a very special celebration in London marking 40 years of Rowan Yarns



I FIRST met Stephen Sheard, the founder of Rowan Yarns, in 1984 at a trade fair in Brighton. I was starting work on my second book, *Big and Little Sweaters*, and was on the lookout for a soft

yarn in a good palette of colours. Rowan Weavers, as the company was then called, had just launched its first collection of hand-knitting yarns, and Stephen asked me to design a sweater for Issue One of its pattern magazine. I never thought, all those years ago, that I would find myself at Rowan's 40th anniversary party!

The event took place at Peter Jones in London's Sloane Square, and was cause for great celebration as this pioneering yarn company has had its share of ups and downs over the past four decades. As with any venture that strives to break new ground, it has worked hard to get its message across, stick to its values, and maintain a large selection of colours and choice of yarns. (In the beginning, Lightweight DK came in 100 colours!)

Rowan VIPs were out in force, and included Lisa Richardson, the head

designer and art and styling director, along with many of its most popular designers, such as Martin Storey and Marie Wallin. Company CEO Sharon Brandt was there to welcome guests, along with Dr. Philipp Diekmann, the CEO of Mez Crafts, which is now in charge of Rowan.

Brand manager David MacLeod opened the proceedings with a warm welcome and a guide to the party highlights: a mystery yarn game (put your hand in the box and guess the Rowan yarn); an exhibition of iconic sweaters from the early magazines; a gallery of stills from memorable photoshoots; the special Ruby pattern collection; a display of nearly every yarn that Rowan has produced; an enormous birthday cake; and a well stocked drinks area. What more could you wish for?

Happy memories

There was a lovely atmosphere as guests chatted away, reminiscing about sweaters they had knitted, magazines they loved, and their favourite yarns. My good friend Trisha Malcolm, editor of *Vogue Knitting*, was over from New York; Stephen Sheard and Simon Cockin, the founding fathers of Rowan Yarns, were down from Yorkshire,

Sandy Black, professor at the London College of Fashion, came up from Brighton, and designers Kaffe Fassett and Brandon Mably popped over from Kilburn. It felt like a family gathering, with lots of jokes, hugs and kisses. Knitters are such friendly folk.

Stephen Sheard gave a very moving speech, charting the history of the company. Some of us got quite emotional at this point (I witnessed a tear or two); however, a fresh glass of champagne and a slice of ruby-tinted birthday cake helped lift the spirits, and the party continued with a fashion show of iconic knits.

The following day, 50 lucky Rowan subscribers were treated to a Q&A session with Rowan stars. This was an excellent chance for knitters to make their opinions known, and I noticed the Rowan team taking notes - it's great to see that Rowan is willing to consider their fan's ideas. More celebration cake was distributed, copies of the *Rowan 40 Years* anniversary book were signed by designers, and each guest was delighted to receive a goody bag to take home as a memento of a great day out. Back in the splendid isolation of my Mid Wales studio, it all seems like a dream... long may the Rowan brand continue! ☺