

Tweed weaves a way from Scottish islands to catwalk



Traditional thatched roof cottages are pictured at Garrannan Blackhouse Village on the Isle Of Lewis. —AFP photos



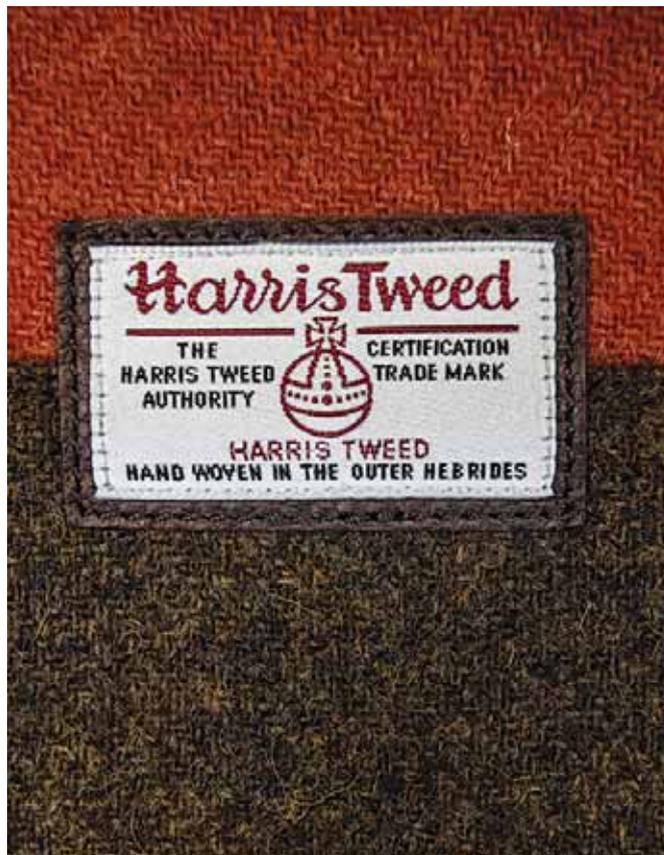
Harris tweed weaver Ian Mackay tends to sheep in Shawbost on the Isle Of Lewis.



Harris tweed weaver Ian Mackay works in his weaving shed in Shawbost on the Isle Of Lewis.



Harris tweed weaver Ian Mackay works on his pedal powered loom in his weaving shed.



A certification trade mark for Harris Tweed is pictured at The Carloway Mill.

In the cluttered workshop of his home off the coast of northwest Scotland, Ian Mackay patiently weaves a bright green wool, surrounded by bags of fabric, spools and tools. He makes a steady clatter as he pedals his machine in the shed of his croft on the village of South Shawbost on the Isle of Lewis, watching closely for any defects. “It’s handwoven... or rather foot-woven,” the 51-year-old weaver jokes in his sing-song accent typical of the Outer Hebrides. Mackay spins wool for 10 hours a day, resting only on Sundays, when most shops and services are shut on the religiously conservative islands.

Once complete, his handiwork-authentic Harris Tweed—could be shipped to the other side of the world, as the rough woollen fabric becomes more popular than ever. Long associated with the windswept Scottish islands, the textile’s ecological and sustainable properties have inspired designers to be more environmentally friendly. “It doesn’t really matter how bad the weather is outside if you are weaving,” Mackay told AFP as an icy November wind whipped across the ochre-coloured moor where sheep were grazing. “There’s no point in being really fast, doing mistakes. You are better doing slow, quality work.”

Such is its status, Harris Tweed, traditionally made from 100 percent pure virgin-unrecycled-sheep’s wool, is the only fabric protected by an act of parliament. The Harris Tweed Act 1993 stipulates that it “has been handwoven by the islanders at their homes in the Outer Hebrides, finished in the Outer Hebrides, and made from