

# Introducing EK-Reversible

New York-born Emily Keller is the head designer and founder of new knitwear label EK-Reversible. A graduate of the prestigious Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT), Keller honed her craft at the likes of brand Diane Von Furstenberg before launching her eponymous womenswear brand in Shanghai late last year. Inspired by the slow fashion movement, every piece in her debut collection – from bodycon dresses to structured jackets – is completely reversible. She tells **Selena Schleh** about designing smarter, not faster, and why the best prints come from nature

I spent eight hours a day looking at stitches in my previous job as a stitch designer. That was where I first came up with the idea for the brand. In knitwear, there are a lot of stitch styles that are very 'clean' on both sides and you only need to add a few extra construction details to make [a garment] reversible. Plus, it's a very important step towards making clothes that are both smarter and more sustainable.

Knitting has a lot to do with maths as it works on a grid system. I always loved maths in school so the technical side of knitwear has

always appealed to me. I use a CAD [computer assisted design] program for pattern-making, but all the stitches are designed manually on a small hand-machine at home. I make lots of little swatches, finding out what works and what doesn't.

Our knits use a blend of local merino wool and cotton yarns, with a little bit of nylon and lycra thrown in for stretch, comfort and texture. At the moment we're using yarns that are certified above industry standards for environmental consciousness: low carbon footprint, minimal environmental waste and a focus on natural fibres. Next season we hope to use organic yarn.

Problems are what push me to design. I'm very technically-minded, I'm always

thinking: 'What do I want to see that's not out there yet?' Clothing can do so much more than what we expect. I try to focus on what I think fashion needs, in terms

of functionality, and on doing atypical things and pushing the traditional boundaries of knitwear.

Nature has the broadest range of patterns and colours, so it's there that I look for inspiration for our prints. One of my favourites is the reptile-skin pattern, which we've replicated in various colours on a dress and a jacket – it's bold, fun and sexy. I also really like the textured dots stitch: polka dots can be very traditional, very 'cute', so presenting the pattern in terms of a 3D texture is a way of reinventing it.

I've always been a huge fan of Alexander Wang's knitwear. He's very good at making inexpensive 'normal' stitches look unusual. I also like the minimalist look of [US label] Duffy's cashmere sweater line. To the other extreme, I love [Swedish designer] Sandra Backlund's stuff – she does really crazy, chunky hand-knits.

EK-Reversible's debut collection is priced from 550-800RMB and is available from AK Studio. See Listings for address details.



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