

SECRET LIFE OF CLAY / WHAT'S NEXT FOR DHARMA TAYLOR? / PUPPETS AT PLAY / MAKERS OF JAMAICA / WOOL: THE FLUFF OF DREAMS

LINDSEY MENDICK TELLS ALL / COMMUNING WITH GILES NARTEY / HEROES OF HOBBIES / BEAUTY GETS A MAKEOVER / SUPERSONIC STIAN KORNTVED RUUD

CRAFTS





Despite its historic importance, the future of wool was looking grim in the face of sustainability challenges and the arrival of cheap synthetic fabrics. But, as *Francesca Perry* reports, a flock of innovators are giving wool a new life through regenerative farming practices and global initiatives to create change

SHEAR DELIGHT



LEFT: Mai Kasagi, director of Kasagi Wool Textiles, and ABOVE: shearing their sheep



ABOVE: one of the brand's hand-tufted wool rugs

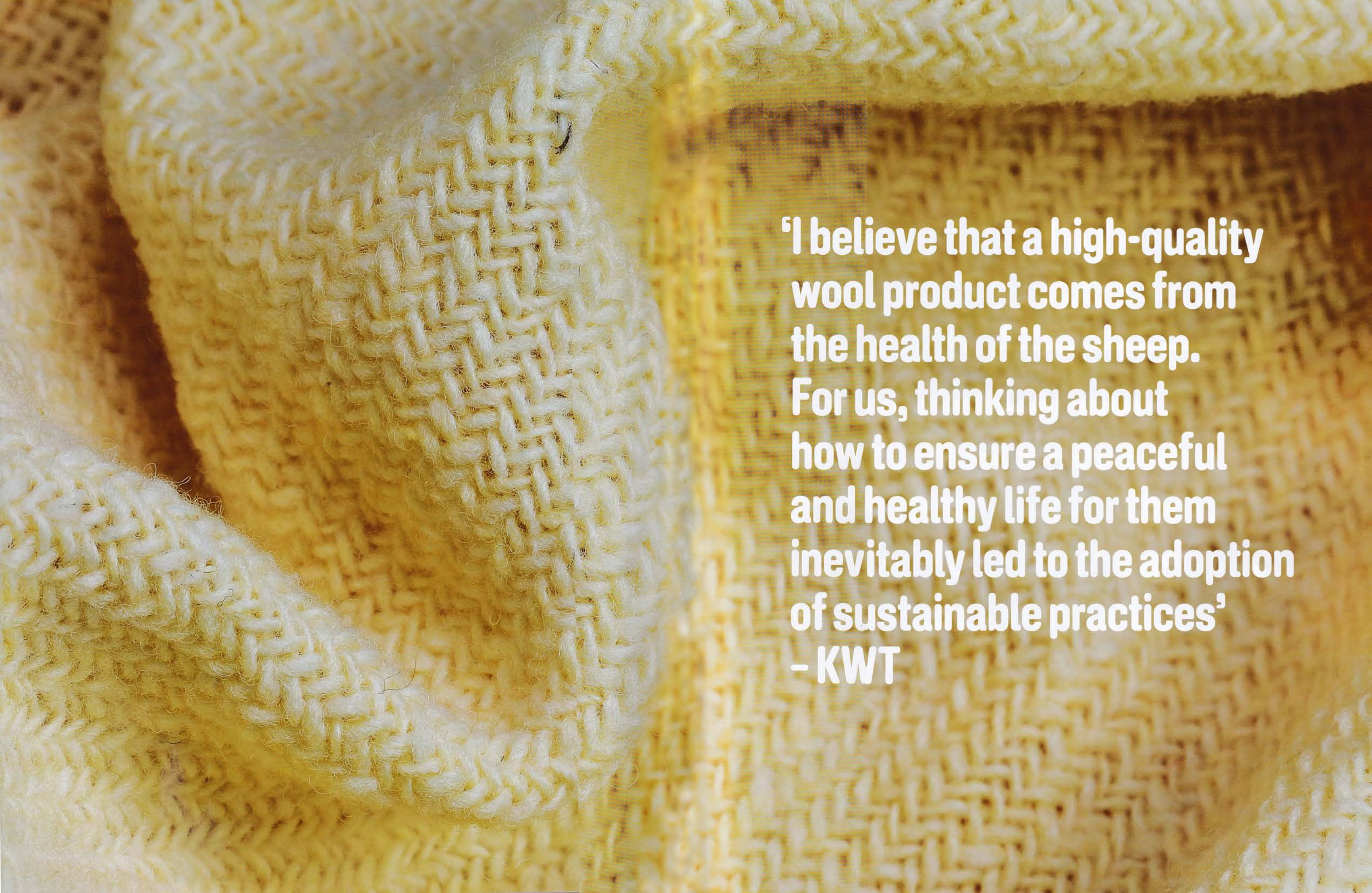
In the mountainous Shimane prefecture of southern Japan, Kasagi Wool Textiles (KWT) is a small farm and company run by Mai and Masato Kasagi, creating fabrics, rugs and socks. They started five years ago with four ewes – and now have 33 sheep.

'I developed a strong interest in wool,' says Masato Kasagi. 'I wanted to raise sheep myself and produce the raw material together with them.' He shears the sheep once a year and works with local craftsmen to spin and weave the yarn, including wool that isn't considered suitable for mass production because of its characteristics and perceived 'impurities'.

Masato and Mai prioritise the welfare and wellbeing of their sheep: each one is named and kept in family groups. The couple's genuine relationship with the animals shows in the products they make. Rugs, delightfully, are designed in the shape of the outlines their sheep leave after sleeping in the snow.

'I believe that a high-quality wool product comes from the health of the sheep,' says Masato. 'For us, thinking about how to ensure a peaceful and healthy life for them inevitably led to the adoption of sustainable practices.' KWT hand-washes the wool in small quantities with less water, heat and detergent compared to mass production.

Socks and clothing are produced in one entire piece, directly on the knitting machine in three dimensions, reducing waste. Natural plant dyes are used when colouring the wools: KWT grows its own indigo plants, collects wild lichens and uses *kakishibu* (tannins from persimmon fruits). Masato and Mai are aware that this approach to sustainability is only possible because of KWT's small scale. Its methods take time and effort; slowness is celebrated. They are keen to understand how to scale up sustainably, but in the meantime acknowledge that the farm is 'part of the local community – and keeping it going means keeping the community together', says Masato.

A close-up photograph of a knitted wool garment, likely a hat or scarf, featuring a yellow and white color scheme. The texture of the wool is clearly visible, showing a mix of fine and slightly frayed fibers. The lighting is warm, highlighting the natural tones of the wool.

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