



# Flannespun

**Aoibheann McNamara** reflects on her home county, the tweed industry and the importance of buying Irish

I am from a small town in Donegal called Ardara. It is a town of about 14 pubs and a very strong tweed and aran tradition. Long-standing labels like Bonners, Kennedy's, Eddie Doherty and John Molloy amongst others all have factories producing varying amounts of knitwear and or tweed. In a downward spiralling economy I think it is important that we acknowledge, nurture and develop these quintessentially Irish industries and progress them forward.

One element of the Ardara productions is Molloy and Son. Shaun and Kieran have definitely moved with the times. I first became aware of them through the design conscious magazine called Thread in Dublin. Thread profiles ethical design driven shops and producers and dedicated an article to Molloy and Sons and their collaboration with uber-cool men's shop Indigo and Cloth on South William St. in Dublin. Molloy and Sons produce the tweed and jackets for the shop and have created a niche market of ethical shoppers looking for a product of longevity and durability.

Samuel Beckett reputedly had a John Molloy jacket that was never off his back and discerning shoppers are looking for a product that costs but lasts and most importantly is Irish through and through.

At Christmas I visited their work shop and met both father and son in boiler suits and wool hats. A simple corrugated iron shed beside their home was the setting for busy electric looms producing beautiful tweed for countries like Japan and America. Thread coils and old-fashioned desks and stunning throws and rugs of high design and quality dotted the space. I admire so much this globalised approach to the most beautiful products and traditional skills Ireland has to offer. Inherently from and of the land, the wool industry is at the foundation of our heritage as music, literature and dance is and nowhere better embodies that than in the wilds of Donegal.

John Molloy is Shaun's father and he established a huge business in the 50's hiring up to two thousand knitters. Shaun separated from the family business with a desire to focus solely on produc



ing Donegal tweed and so founded the new company Molloy and Sons Weaving. It is just the two of them, father and son and they carry out all areas of the process from design to dispatch along with engaging local spinners to produce yarn. This policy of local all the way which is now so much part of our evolving food culture should be a bench mark for all production in Ireland and especially in this our most indigenous of industries.

"The Irish weaving industry has shrunk hugely in the last two decades due to cheaper labour in emerging



markets, causing manufacturing to move away from its original home. The authenticity of a lot of products is disappearing, due to these cheaper markets and overseas manufacturing. Weaving is a part of the culture and heritage in this area going back centuries and Ardara has always been at the heart of the Donegal tweed and hand weaving industry. A market used to be held in the town once a month for people to sell their cloth woven at home. Now fewer and fewer people are able to produce this cloth, and we feel a responsibility to keep

the tradition going and not allow such an authentic and important part of our culture to disappear” Molloy and Sons.

It is this statement alone that is the most important thing to remember. With the combined efforts of a father that knows the trade and a son having recently graduated from NCAD college of art you have a collective that can and are moving this wonderful industry coolly into the future. It is their commitment to the preservation of the past coupled with Kieran’s understanding of the emerging global design market that has contemporized their approach and outlook and will hopefully bode well for their longevity and sustainability in the market place going forward.

In Galway, individuals like Anne and Ger O’Maille support and sell these products to the ever increasing local and tourist markets where demand is high and for hand knits it is almost hard to keep up with. Working for years with knitters and producers from all over Ireland they sell only 100 per cent Irish products and try to keep up with a growing number of Internet overseas sales. Anne and Ger endeavour not only to sell the best products available in Ireland but they do so with a genuine commitment

to the tradition of the process.

Today more than ever we need to buy Irish, a difficult activity when authenticity is hard to track. People should make a commitment to buying Irish knits over Topshop Turkey produced sweatshop jumpers. Alongside our commitment to buying local and eating local and seasonal we need to really buy clothes local and Irish. We need to forgo the designer throws in TK Maxx and go to shops like O’ Maille’s and buy a throw made in Donegal which has been hand woven and has authenticity and credibility. As a consumer we have huge power and what better way to use that power then to invest in the future and support local traditional production. Let’s try and make the difference that renders us a more morally and ethically satisfied consumer.

[www.molloyandsons.com](http://www.molloyandsons.com)  
[www.indigoandcloth.com](http://www.indigoandcloth.com)  
[www.threadfashion-magazine.tumblr.com](http://www.threadfashion-magazine.tumblr.com)  
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*Aoibheann McNamara,  
 Owner of Ard Bia and  
 Nimmos Restaurant,  
 Galway*

