

Fashion finds some flair in lobster-influenced designs

There's color and beauty but it's a rugged business. My dad goes year-round and he freezes his butt off," said Hayley Griffin, daughter of a Cape Elizabeth lobsterman and budding textile designer. Hayley, 24, has produced two collections of clothing inspired by the sea and her father's lobstering world.

Lobstering certainly is in Hayley's blood. After all, her father, Greg Griffin, formerly a Maine Lobstermen's Association board member, named his boat after her. As a child, she sat in the barn her father built near their house and drew pictures while he built traps. She went with him on the *Hayley G.* throughout her childhood and worked as his sternman during the summer months. But Hayley had another career in mind. "I would make jewelry out of his hog rings in the shed," Hayley recalled. "He always knew I was a little different."

So it wasn't much of a surprise that after graduating from high school, Hayley applied to and was accepted at the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore. She received a scholarship from the MLA to attend for her freshman year. "I thought I was indulging myself by going to art school so I decided to take the most practical classes there," she said. She chose a highly marketable graphic design major but by her sophomore year knew that other interests were calling her. "I always loved making clothes for my dolls," Hayley said with a laugh. "So I started studying clothing design."

During the summer after her sophomore year at college, Hayley had the opportunity to go to Twillingate, Newfoundland, with an artist for whom she had been babysitting. "I was her videographer," Hayley explained. Much of the artist's work took place at the shore, where Hayley spent long hours hunkered down in the seaweed, filming. "It was very contemplative," she said. Returning to school, she decided to enter something into the yearly fashion show. But what? Her answer: Seaweed clothes. "I really liked the texture of the seaweed," she explained.

So Hayley stitched together deflated water balloons to make a series of pants, vests, skirts and head coverings that resembled brightly colored seaweed. Some outfits even included the airbladders of the seaweed strands. "I didn't know how to make clothes at the time," Hayley admitted. "I would turn a pair of pants inside out to figure out how they were made."

Delighted with her first collection, Hayley thought of becoming a fashion design major but decided to stay with graphic design, taking elective classes in the fiber arts department to pursue her clothing interest. She took pattern-making and printmaking classes in her senior year and got ready to put together a collection for the annual juried fashion show.

Once again her link to the sea provided inspiration. "I didn't really know what to do. I started looking through photos from the previous summer I had taken on my father's boat. And I thought to myself when I looked at some of them, "That would make a good image." Hayley spoke to the head of the graphic design department about submitting her clothing collection as her senior project and got his approval. And so "Lobsterman Goes Runway" was born.

To create the clothes, Hayley first expanded her photographs to get the precise figurative elements she wanted. Then she used a computer program to print those images on different types of cloth. The cloth then had to be cut and pieced together extremely carefully to allow the images to stand out. "I made the dresses to fit 14 of my friends," Hayley explained, thus no two pieces are exactly alike. The dresses feature designs such as "Stack" – colored bait trays stacked against a building; "Vent" – the view through the trap toward the escape vent; "Day-Glo" – her father's distinctive orange buoys; "Fathom" – coiled rope; and "Fragrant Stripes" – five herring strung on a bait iron.

"It's funny. I had to go away to Baltimore to find that my work is really inspired by Maine

and my dad's work," Hayley said. The fashion show, Web site and book that she produced documenting her process met her graduation requirements and Hayley left MICA in 2010 with a degree in graphic design.

Now what? She spent last summer with a friend in Bar Harbor working at a restaurant and exploring the beauty of Mt. Desert Island. That exploration translated into another piece of clothing. "I made a dress from vintage silk based on topographic maps," she said. The pale pink dress features fabric cut, finished and then affixed on the dress to recall the topo maps used by hikers. "It took forever to make," Hayley admitted. She also sent out dozens of resumes to design firms in New York City, San Francisco and other large cities to find an entry-level position. When no positions materialized, she returned home to Cape Elizabeth. After a few jobs in the Freeport area, she was hired on a freelance basis by L.L. Bean's graphic design department as a design assistant for the international office. "I work mostly for the Japan market," she said.

Young, talented and deeply tied to the world of lobstering, Hayley is just starting out as a designer. She realizes that she needs to expand her clothing line to make pieces which can be readily purchased by anyone, but she is not in any rush. "I would love to have my own design studio some day, to do clothing or design things like stationery," she said. "I think it will all be themed around the water and Maine."

BY MELISSA WATERMAN



Photo by Melissa Waterman



Photos courtesy of Hayley Griffin



Lobstering isn't just about the clothes. No, it's about accessories as well! In *L*OWls Head, a woman has taken the simple bait bag found in every Maine lobster trap and turned it into a fashion statement. The Maine Bait Bag Company, founded by Bonnie Kern and Patrick Stewart in 2009, uses fishing mesh for a line of elegant handbags, totes and purses based on the ubiquitous bait bag.

"I started a clothing company years ago using Guatemalan fabric for my designs," Kern said. "A few winters ago I started thinking about what I could do based on materials used in lobstering." Thus was born the Maine Bait Bag.

Maine Bait Bags are made out of recycled fishing net which is hand-sewn to create the bag. Because the net has been in the ocean and dried on land it has a distinctive patina, Kern explained. After the net has been sewn into a bait bag, Kern inserts linen, wool or silk as lining. All Maine Bait Bags are adorned with metal, seaglass or a starfish.

The distinctive bags have caught on. Kern now has orders from California to Nantucket and has unveiled the company's Web site (www.mainebaitbags.com). "They are elegant, simple and certainly durable," she said. "Plus Maine and lobstering have a mystique. They are very popular."



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photo courtesy of Baren Yurick, Stonington

THANK YOU MLA

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FOR THE LOBSTER INDUSTRY. KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK!