

Six of the Best

The **Scottish Field** team uncovers six of the country's visionary artisans who are on a mission to keep traditional crafts alive

Alasdair Thomson – Sculptor

Wander the streets of Siena, and your gaze will naturally trace skyward, writes Rosie Morton. Such was the case for stone sculptor Alasdair Thomson who, when studying for a diploma at Italy's Scuola Edile, found his creativity set alight by the city's timeless architecture.

'It was a total feast for the senses,' Alasdair tells me, hastening to add that his alma mater and hometown, Edinburgh, is equally inspiring for artistic minds. 'It started with having studied Art History, particularly figurative sculptures of the Renaissance, and I was really fascinated with the way fabric on these figures fell. So, I started making a series of contemporary drapery sculptures, like dresses on hangers.'

Alasdair's works, made from Carrara marble, are acutely detailed and require hours of minute attention to detail. Perhaps the most ingenious part of his craft, though, is that he can make such an unforgiving, heavy material look as soft and supple as leather. It is something in which Alasdair rightly prides himself, and he finds great satisfaction in unveiling the marble's hidden beauty – the veins that lie within.

'I feel it is my responsibility to continue the story of art,' says Alasdair, who has completed commissions of sneakers sculptures for Nike, Puma and Arkk Copenhagen, as well as for MBA player Damian Lillard. 'I work in marble because it's predictable, and because it's the material in which I can most easily realise my ideas. But it also carries the weight of Art History in it, with great masters of sculpture that came before me.'

alsadaircthomson.com

A mile in his shoes: One of Alasdair's famed Nike sneakers.

PHIL WILKINSON

‘Her work calls to question
our perception of space in
the natural world’

Naomi McIntosh – Artist

Speaking with interdisciplinary artist Naomi McIntosh was refreshing, writes Rosie Morton. As well as fostering a deep appreciation for the wilderness that surrounds her studio at Crathie in the Cairngorms, her work calls to question our perception of space in the natural world.

Transforming 2D objects into 3D immersive installations and architectural jewellery, Naomi explores the relationship between the body, objects and space. By manipulating local wood from Logie Timber through laser cutting, steam bending and wood-turning, she crafts pieces that change as you move round them, thus plays with the shifting light and shade of the landscape.

‘I became obsessed by architectural drawing conventions to describe something that is behind you, or that you can’t see,’ says Naomi, who went from Bartlett School of Architecture at UCL to Central Saint Martins where she gained a Masters in Design. ‘It’s that discovery,’ she says, describing the source of her motivation to continually explore her craft. ‘You can think about a piece through drawing, then as it comes into three dimensions, that’s when it gets really exciting.’

Naomi works with Ruup & Form gallery, with whom she completed a project for the London Design Biennale. ‘I made a series of 21 suspended sculptures called *Quiet Garden* that were all named after a Scots word for the weather. It was about capturing qualities from the garden.’

naomimcintosh.com / ruupandform.com

BEN ADDY



‘If a Victorian bookbinder walked into my studio, he would immediately recognise my presses and tools’

Tom McEwan – Bookbinder

Each year, when the Booker Prize shortlist is published, the committee commissions a design bookbinding of each shortlisted book, writes Richard Bath. Only the finest bookbinders are employed, which includes Tom McEwan, one of the best binders in the world and the only Design Bookbinder used by Booker in Scotland.

Design Bookbinders are the elite, artists who make elaborate, one-off bindings from the finest leather, often with detailed inlay and intricate gilding. From his studio in West Kilbride, the Glasgow Art School graduate makes books for everyone from wealthy collectors and bibliophiles to organisations such as the National Library. His latest work, a binding of poet Hugh MacDiarmid’s *A Drunk Man Looks at The Thistle*, won an award at a prestigious international competition and is in the Bodleian Library in Oxford before heading to Edinburgh University in November.

It costs between £2,500 and £4,000 to commission a Design Binding, which then takes four to six weeks to complete, using skills and tools that have barely changed for centuries. ‘If a Victorian bookbinder walked into my studio, they would immediately recognise my presses and tools,’ he laughs.

The Ayrshireman started collecting books as a teenager and soon enrolled in evening classes so he could repair his own library. ‘I fell in love, and things just led from there to where I am today,’ he says. ‘Design Bookbinding is the apex; a fusion of artisan practicality and artistic sensibility. There’s nothing more beautiful or satisfying than an unforgettable binding.’

mcewan.co.uk/tm

The oldest trick in the book: Tom’s work in bookbinding has been recognised nationwide.



ROBERT PERRY

‘Max’s style is inspired
by nature but underpinned
by engineering’

Max McCance – Furniture Maker

The most beautiful things are very often found at the meeting point of genres and that is certainly true of Max McCance’s work, writes Morag Bootland. A ven diagram would undoubtedly show elements of art, craft and nature in the pieces of furniture that he creates in his workshop in rural Fife.

But it was engineering that first led Max on the path to working with wood. He served an apprenticeship in Glasgow before travelling to Italy and the US, where he found that he could always make a living from woodwork, which had really been a hobby until then.

‘People always needed doors adjusted and windows fixed,’ he tells me. And it was in Italy that the idea for the heads that have become a regular feature of Max’s work was born.

‘A family wanted a wooden sculpture of their father’s head. I really had no idea how to do it, so I came up with the idea of creating the head from slices of wood. Luckily they loved it.’

Working mainly in oak, Max’s technorganic style is inspired by nature but underpinned by engineering. He is fascinated by the Fibonacci sequence and the perfect spirals found in nature, like the Monkey Puzzle tree in his garden, which has been the inspiration for many of his tables.

Exhibiting pieces in galleries encouraged Max to build The Kinloch Gallery next to his workshop. So, now visitors can pop in to see his work.

maxmccance.com

Inspired by nature: Max showing off one of his beautiful visage cabinets.

‘Kilts are incredibly functional, practical garments and I think we’ve forgotten that’

Andrea Chappell – Kiltmaker

I wear a kilt unless I’m cleaning, swimming or running,’ Andrea Chappell of Acme Atelier tells me. And although she’s relatively new to kiltmaking, she’s certainly no stranger to wearing one, writes Morag Bootland.

Attending school in Bedfordshire this was somewhat unusual, but when she was able to whip off the velcro-fastened Anderson Ancient kilt that her mum had made for her in a Bucks Fizz style it went down a storm in the playground. Fast-forward a few years and after studying Design at St Martins and RCA in London, Andrea started to commission Howie Nicholsby of 21st Century Kilts to make kilts for her.

A move to Moray was always going to be life-changing and what started as a hobby became her livelihood when Andrea launched her business in 2021. Most of her clients are women; many have a kilt made to commemorate a special occasion and then wear it more than they ever expected.

‘Making kilts is a dying art,’ she tells me. ‘They are incredibly functional, practical garments and I think we’ve forgotten that.’

Sustainability is incredibly important to Andrea and all of her one-off kilts are made from fabric that she has created or sourced from Scottish mills. She always uses vintage, or deadstock fabric meaning that each one is unique. Her beautiful hand-painted designs, prints and details make her kilts truly bespoke. She’s also working on a ‘field-to-fork’ style kilt project to make a Moray Tweed that is entirely produced in Scotland, starting with local fleece.

acmeatelier.co.uk

She wears it well: Andrea Chappell looking stylish with some of her beautiful, colourful and unique kilts.



GARETH EDWARDS

‘To try and make your own examples of the masters is where I want to be’

Colin & Findlay Tulloch – Violin Makers

For Colin Tulloch, it all started when he was a 24-year-old precision engineer and his grandmother left him an old box that once contained clothing starch, writes *Jeremy Grant*. In it, he found a copy of the type of violins that were made by the German violin-maker – or luthier – Klotz, but unfortunately in pieces.

‘I was intrigued,’ he says from his studio in Kirkwall, Orkney, where he and son Findlay craft traditional Cremonese-style violins for the global market. ‘I took it to a luthier in Edinburgh, and he immediately saw I was interested in violins.’

Colin bought a book on violin-making and spent some years being self-taught, checking in with the Edinburgh luthier every Friday after work to show him what progress he’d made. But it took a training session in Tennessee in 2005 with American luthier Kelvin Scott for the breakthrough to happen. ‘When I came back my brain was completely fried with the knowledge I had taken in and I’ve never looked back,’ he says.

That training and subsequent years spent in Cremona – the cradle of Italian violin-making made famous by 16th-century luthier Nicolò Amati and his student, Antonio Stradivari – allowed him to develop his own style.

Tulloch violins follow the Cremona style, the instrument’s physical lines, contours and even the distinct varnish and colour. ‘A lot of the shapes that these old violin makers perfected you’re not going to improve on, but to follow the masters and try and make your own example is where I want to be.’
tullochviolins.com

The music maestros: The father and son duo hard at work.



REBECCA MARR