

PROFILES



Meet the PEI Woman Who Makes Upcycled Sweaters for Dogs

by Sheri Radford / Jun 4, 2021

This adorable attire for dogs is also eco-friendly

Kayel Lewis studied to be a clinical herbalist, and by day she works on an organic farm. But in recent months it's her side gig, Hand-Me-Down Hound, that has attracted attention to this Prince Edward Island resident.

Lewis upcycles vintage sweaters (for humans) into custom sweaters for dogs. The results are just as cute and quirky as you'd expect, as evidenced by her Facebook and Instagram feeds. "It's play as much as it is work," says Lewis.

The journey to designing dapper duds for dogs started last year when Lewis adopted a Galgo, or Spanish Greyhound, from Spain. These beautiful hunting dogs are frequently abused or abandoned, so the rescue agency Extraordinary Galgos and Podencos works to find loving homes for them in Canada.

The PEI winter proved extremely cold for Lewis's slim and sleek Galgo, named Exi. After Lewis tried but failed to find anything suitably warm for Exi to wear, she decided to make something herself. "I've been playing with and altering secondhand clothing since I was a teenager," she says. "I looked at other dog sweaters and figured out how to do it based off that." She adds, "Having an excuse to go shopping for old sweaters, and then also finding a practical use for them, was just a perfect match."

Soon Lewis was creating sweaters for other people's dogs, too, and she hopes to branch out even more one day. "I reached out to someone with a pet pig, and they said that their pig doesn't like wearing clothes. I think a number of cats don't like wearing clothes, either. But I'm not closed to the possibility of other animals wearing sweaters."

Each garment Lewis makes is one of a kind, based on the animal's measurements and the vintage sweater used as material. She says, "The beauty of this is that it's totally custom."

Lewis scours PEI thrift stores for eye-catching secondhand pieces. "When I'm looking for sweaters, I'm looking for something that's unique, that is still in good quality." Warm wool sweaters are ideal for winter, while lighter materials work well for spring and autumn.

Once pandemic travel restrictions ease, Lewis plans to head to nearby New Brunswick and Nova Scotia to continue her treasure hunting in textile plants. "They sell the bulk clothing that thrift stores don't want, that is going to be shipped overseas." This zero-waste ethos is important to Lewis in all aspects of her life and her business. "The sleeves that I don't use from the sweaters, I turn into little snoods. They're like scarves for dogs. So that's kind of fun."

Lewis enjoys the small, homegrown nature of Hand-Me-Down Hound, crafting one garment at a time for a specific animal, and she doesn't see her business ever changing. "So long as it's well-received, and I keep on seeing all these fun pictures of animals in sweaters, then I don't see myself stopping."

When asked for tips on how someone can be creative and try upcycling on their own, Lewis ponders for a moment before responding. "The first thing that comes to my head is lowering your expectations," she says. "We're hard on ourselves when it comes to art, or creativity, or just existing. Do it and see what happens. Be kind to yourself."



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