

Dannells®

Meet our Makers



Read the inspiring stories of our Makers that have turned lampshade making into flourishing handcrafted businesses, perfect for working from home or adding new skills to existing trades!

We supply everything you need to manufacture Lampshades

- Frames
- Panels
- Materials
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- Adhesives
- Trimming
- Textiles
- Tools
- Manufacturers & Retail Packs
- Free Help & Advice





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At Dannells Limited we have been manufacturing lampshade materials for Lampshade Makers since 1982.

Over the past decade, we have dedicated our business to mentoring, nurturing and helping build a new generation of British Lampshade Makers and our efforts have successfully inspired thousands of Makers across the country and worldwide.

We are really proud of our customers who have built their businesses, creating careers, employment and beautiful innovative products. Here we share the stories of just a few of our Makers. Discover their journeys, how they started, their techniques, tips & tricks and be inspired!

Mari & Ifan

Gola

Gola is a creative collaboration of talent, skill and creative ideas of mother and son team, Mari and Ifan, whose stunning lampshades celebrate not only the past but have a significant nod to the local heritage that surrounds their 'pink shed' studio, situated on the picturesque Menai Strait, in North Wales.

A lampshade making business born from lockdown, Mari and Ifan cleverly bring their individual senses of style to their range of lampshades, including fun, colourful retro-inspired designs and bespoke custom shades, using intricately detailed old maps. We go behind the scenes to find out the story and passion behind Gola.

How are you today and what's on your workbench?

We're fine, thank you, hoping that you are too!
We're currently responding to last week's orders - a variety of retro shades; map shades and our own Crawia range. We have also started selling a new range of recycled glass lamp bases and are busy promoting these on social media.

Can you start by telling us a little about how you came to work together?

We (mother and son) found ourselves living under the same roof as lockdown began. Ironically the lockdown periods of last year unlocked creativity and enterprise in both of us. Son, Ifan is a graphic designer and Mari (mother) is an author.

Both of us shared ideas during lockdown and began a small business called 'Gola' (Welsh word for light) creating designs for lampshades that we started manufacturing ourselves in our pink shed in the back garden!

So we are mother and son working independently and collaboratively to create unique designs celebrating the past but also deeply rooted in the now. Our collaboration is a combination of traditional and retro; formality and fun, with the emphasis always on quality.



How would you describe your individual styles?

We bring different skills and tastes to the workbench. Our styles vary from traditional to retro. We're both passionate about our local heritage and recently we have drawn on local culture and history to create a new



design inspired by old slate fencing.

How do you start the design process and where do you get your design inspiration?

Most designs start with "What if...?"

Wales' unique landscape, its culture, its language and its

communities inspire us every day.

One of our designs was inspired by our daily walks during lockdown. These paths were familiar to us, but we'd never actually noticed and looked at our surroundings properly. We started to pay attention – especially to the striking slate fences along the paths and back roads of our village.

The slate fences seen in the North West Wales quarrying areas are called 'Crawia'. In the dictionary, the Welsh word 'craw' is defined as 'a piece of waste slate.' Some have described 'crawia' as scars. But scars or imperfection can be beautiful and these 'crawia' inspired us to create a textile design for our lampshades.

Slates shape the landscape; they underline the importance of habitat; they speak to us of the past whilst reminding us today that we're still here to share our story! This is Gola's tribute to the craftsmen who created and installed them.

What do you individually need to consider when creating your designs for lampshades?

We both consider themes, colour variations and how they look when printed on fabric compared to a computer screen. We also consider the layout of the design ensuring that the dimensions will fit different sizes of a drum lampshade, taking care of where the join lies.



What's your favourite part of the lampshade making process?

We love the whole process from creating the design and seeing it through to the final product and customer satisfaction. When customers send us photographs of our shades in their homes we feel a huge sense of pride.

In your online shop, what's your most popular selling shade?

The map lampshades are very popular as bespoke gifts, but we're also delighted that our own design Crawia range is extremely popular.

You've used Dannells printing services for your lampshade designs. How does the printing process start?

We place our order via email and if we have specific requirements, we speak directly with the Print Manager who is always very accommodating and helpful.

Which fabric/s do you use for your lampshades?

Linen and Polytextile

Any tips for new lampshade makers in business?

Don't start unless you're totally passionate about your product. And then - research, practise and don't give up. Our first lampshade was a bit of a disaster! But we persevered!

How do you manage all the different elements of your

business between you?

We don't live in the same house anymore as Ifan has moved to his own home in the village. This has meant



that we have had to become more organised as regards communicating and sharing duties. Ifan concentrates on the design element and is mainly responsible for the packing and posting of our shades. Mari researches ideas and interior design trends and is the manufacturer. When creating social media posts and stories, Mari provides the text and Ifan provides the images.



www.gola.cymru
@gola.cmyru

Discovering a niche gap in the interiors market, that happily coincided with his passion for creativity, Rab Moghal of Light Owl made it his personal mission to create a lampshade making business that would stand out. By applying his far-reaching business knowledge, principles and efficiencies and by having a positive passion for his lampshades, customers and team, Light Owl have recently sold their 4,000th shade - that's after just two and half years of trading!

How are you today and what's on your workbench?

On any given day we're shipping around 10 to 30 lampshades, today we have 18 lampshades going out, which are now all backed and ready to be rolled and tucked. Those shades range in style and colour dramatically from royal blue lined with a stunning peacock fabric to tangy orange lined with a tropical fabric.

My own style is extremely eclectic, which has certainly translated into variety in the business. If I had to pick out a trend that I'm particularly fond of, it would certainly be the BOHO interior look. However, I try to not let myself get in the way of what fabrics we choose to offer as a business. Certainly some of the fabrics we have, I have picked out because I have a deep love for them, but in general, I try to remove my own ego and style from products we offer to not limit my brand's imagination.

We really aim to provide each customer with the exact product they are looking for without limit or constraint. Light Owl is about universal choice and we try to pack as many options, in terms of size, colour, shape and style into everything that we do. We also have a lot of customers who provide us fabrics to use and have seen some dramatic and stylish creations owing to our customer's creativity. Our shop, as opposed to online, is much more a creative playground than anything else as customers will explore the fabrics we have, bring in fabrics they love and each lampshade is more of a collaborative project.

Where do you get your design inspiration?

We track modern trends through a range of analytical tools and trend guides, focusing especially on those that are prominent with online searches and then find colours, patterns and styles that suit well into those specific niches. Sometimes we do limited edition



Rab

Lightowl

fabrics that run for a short while and sometimes we add them into our core collection of lampshades and cushions that we offer throughout our sales platforms.

As an example, trends like maximalism have certainly shaped our colour offerings whilst grandmillennial style has led us into offering modern vintage-inspired pattern fabric options. The very nature of us being entirely made to order and the core flexibility of lampshades as a product allows us to react to changes in trend, lighting fast and we lean into that as a positive aspect to our business as much as possible.

When and why did you start making lampshades?

I certainly can't qualify my love for textiles and soft furnishings the way I would like to, it's more inherent than anything else. Something about it just called to me at the right time. Having identified the market potential for the product in previous employment and with a strong background in sales and management, it was a natural leap for me to start a customer-focused interiors business with a niche offering of personalised lampshades and interiors.



My background in hospitality management has also not gone to waste as our production line works very similar to a restaurant kitchen, with the individual components of each shade working as the ingredients and the flow of our production operating like a well-oiled kitchen in a fully booked restaurant. As a mature student, I did a

degree in creative writing and focused on online content writing throughout my time at University and afterwards, which has helped greatly in tackling the online market. My business has been growing steadily since 2019 and we see year on year increases in all of our major online and shop based statistics.

To be truthful, it's one of those things where a personal lifelong drive to be my own boss in a creative field and all the relevant skills coming together at the right time has led me down this path.

What's your favourite part of the lampshade making process?

Truthfully, it's the logistics & organisation. We produce a large volume of orders from a relatively small workspace so everything needs to be precise and organised. Finding ways to speed up our production line, better organisation our workflow and identify cost and time-saving procedures in every step of the process is what truly titillates me.

We experiment with lots of different tools, organisation systems and procedures to allow us to create a fluent and quick service that does not hamper product quality. As an example, one of the simple procedures we implemented early on was using step counters to measure how much travelling was involved during a production run, and then reorganised the location of crucial tools and parts to reduce that number.

Other than that, I love to engage with our customers, we have hundreds of 5-star reviews and thousands of happy customers and that's because we always go the distance with our customers. I absolutely love to talk with them as much as possible per order and offering free samples that we post out creates ample opportunity to talk creatively with our online customers as well as our local shop based customers.

You're known for your double-sided lampshades. How did this speciality come about?

Oh, they're just absolutely magnificent. There was no other way for me. Endless combinations for style, colour, silhouette effects, contrasting or matched style to produce different statement effects. Initially, we focussed on offering both styles equally but saw very quickly that customers were blown away with our double-sided shades and the unlimited variety that comes with making our shades to order and allowing customers to customise without limit.

How did your lampshade making business develop and when did you open the Light Owl shop?

I started the business around April 2019 aiming to be ready for June of that year. In those months I launched our website, Etsy account, Wayfair account and opened



our shop in Darlington. At the time I was working 12 hours a day, 7 days a week and that continued for the full first year of trading. After the pandemic hit... it just felt that we didn't ever stop working, it was constant.

Our website has been a runaway

success and hours of research into search engine optimisation (SEO) has paid off in dividends. In a very short time, we have gone from launching a brand new website into an extremely competitive environment, to that website generating 1000's of sales and reaching people all over the country and the world. We never stop working on our website and our SEO.

Our shop is now a staple of Darlington where we welcome hundreds of customers old and new who trust our advice, skills and products. Last year we launched onto Amazon which has been very successful and we're excited to continue growing our brand there, and lastly, our Etsy shop has likewise grown from being brand new to nearly 4000 unique sales in just a few years.

It's not been easy and it's been a lot of long days, long nights and hard work, but all that hard work has paid off.



Any tips for new lampshade makers in business?

Never stop analysing all of your costs and processes. It's tough for small businesses and now more than ever being savvy with suppliers, learning cost-saving methods of production and streamlining the costlier aspects of your business could make all the difference. We never take a statement as a fact without

examining everything that led to it being true. Often you'll find just examining a process will show you ways to save money, time or add quality to a procedure, whether that's how you deliver information or options to a customer or how much you spend on fabric a month.



www.lightowl.co.uk
[@lightowluk](https://www.instagram.com/lightowluk)

Ellen

Hillview Soft Furnishings



Switching career to find a more flexible role, Ellen, of Hillview Soft Furnishings is a City & Guilds trained curtain and blind maker and soft furnisher, who has added lampshade making to her broad repertoire of furnishing skills.

With a passion for sewing from being young, Ellen enjoys working closely with her customers to find creative solutions to enhance their homes to fit with their lifestyle, whether it be making them a pair of beautiful wave curtains or an oversized drum shade.

How are you today and what's on your workbench?

I'm feeling refreshed after a lovely family week away - the next couple of weeks though are going to be a huge sort out of my workroom, getting accounts up to date, with the hope of refreshing my website as well, if I have time. I'll also be ordering lots of lovely fabrics, trims and poles ready for lots of upcoming jobs.

Tell us a little bit about your soft furnishing business and how you started out?

I have always been able to sew, as I was taught dress-making when I was a teenager; fast forward several years, after a music degree and a career as a professional cellist, I completed a City & Guilds evening class in Interior Design. After that, I completed more City & Guilds qualifications in Soft Furnishings, because I wanted to change my career to something that would fit around my children, yet that still gives me the flexi-

bility that self-employment allows.

My children were very young at the time and so I then worked a couple of days a week in a curtain workroom - where I learnt a lot about what to do (and not to do!) in running a small business.

Now I am at the stage where I am working full time running my business - I am still essentially a "one-man band" but wouldn't change it for anything because I have all the flexibility I want to fit around family responsibilities. Work can get overwhelming at times, but I am part of a fantastic network of other makers around the country and we all feel the same thing - that it gets stressful because we care.

How do you start the design process for your soft furnishing when working with clients?

I speak to my new customers and try to judge what they're looking for - sometimes they will come to me with a complete idea of what they would like, which can make the process easier for me, but quite often they have no idea what they would like - so I ask them about the style of their home, what furniture

is in the room we are going to work on - the materials of the furniture, lighting, flooring etc. We discuss what sort of style they're looking for and I often show them lots of pictures of previous jobs to give them ideas. I always ask what they don't like because that makes it easier to cut down options to show them. Customers often find that an easier question to answer than saying what they do like.

How would you describe your personal style?

We moved out to the countryside 18 years ago and my

"I love the fact that I am in a job where learning is a daily experience - it keeps things evolving all the time. I moved on to making drum shades after meeting Jamie (aka Mr Needcraft) and his lovely dad, Martin, at a trade show several years ago. I bought some kits and tried them out. The best way to learn is to just have a go!"

style in our home has become less formal over the years, if I had to categorise it I would say its modern country. Lots of soft colours and I love good textures over pattern. Inevitably grey has made an appearance over the last few years in the odd room - but I will always try to add a pop of colour to make it more individual.

When and why did you start making lampshades?

I trained years ago in traditional lampshade making as part of my City & Guilds course, and although I love this traditional skill I found that speed was needed to be a viable business - and I wasn't the quickest at making them! I still make the odd traditional lampshade and have been to single-day courses to refresh my skills.

I love the fact that I am in a job where learning is a daily experience - it keeps things evolving all the time. I moved on to making drum shades after meeting Jamie (aka Mr Needcraft) and his lovely dad, Martin, at a trade show several years ago. I bought some kits and tried them out. The best way to learn is to just have a go!

How has lampshade making helped expand your business?

Shade making is a great add-on to a soft furnishings business. Quite often you will have enough leftovers to get a shade out of the waste - and offering this to my customers often goes down really well - they love that bespoke look of a shade to match. Sometimes when I mention shades to customers they will order more for other rooms - and add in a few cushions which together can refresh the look of a room on a relatively low budget.

What's the most popular shape of lampshade that your clients request?

I make drum shades the most and I have done a few ovals. I don't offer loads of options because for me it is an additional service and so keeps stock levels to a minimum.

What type of support or resources have you used from Dannells?

Dannells are great at their videos which can be really helpful - and the Lampshade Makers Facebook group is good for tips and tricks, which the instructions in the box don't always include - as Jamie says if they included every little tip the instruction sheet would be VERY long!

What's your favourite part of the lampshade making process?

If I'm honest the best bit is seeing my customer's reaction when they see their new products all in place in their homes. It always makes me smile that it is so astonishing to most customers, that making a drum shade is a possibility!

Any tips for new lampshade makers in the soft furnishing industry?

I would say that if you're starting out, then be prepared to take more time over making and don't rush things. Try to make contact with local makers of curtains and blinds and see if you can offer your services in collaboration with them. Don't expect to suddenly have a ready-made business once you set up an Instagram page - it takes years to build up a good customer base - and if you always prioritise the best customer service you can provide those customers will be very loyal to you and come back and refer you on to others.



How do you fit in your shade making around your other commitments?

I'm very lucky to be able to have a lovely workroom in our garden. It keeps things separate from the house but allows me to work when I'm able to, without a commute. I can coordinate my work around the demands of being "mum's taxi service" as well which can be a full-time occupation itself at times!



www.hillviewsoftfurnishings.co.uk
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Candice

Candid Owl

Candid Owl's mission is to provide customers with unique, standout lampshades and lamps and they definitely don't disappoint! With her love of lampshade making, bold bright colours and striking patterns, Candid Owl's founder Candice, has proudly taken her business from the kitchen table to new commercial premises.

Making beautiful statement shades, for her website, bespoke commissions and exhibitions, we find out how Candid Owl came about and how Candice created such a successful venture.

How are you today and what's on your workbench?

Hello, I'm really well thank you - a little busy but that's just how I like it!

We've just finished up an exhibition order for 45 lampshades, so I'm concentrating now on our retail sales from the website and Etsy. Myself and my full-time lampshade maker Poppy, have 22 shades to prep and make up so it should be a nice and steady day. One is a 70cm diameter lampshade in Burnt Orange Velvet which I'm looking forward to making. We also have two very large Hessian lampshades, both with Champagne lining, that are a challenge to make but look fantastic once finished.

How do you start the design process and where do you get your design inspiration for your lampshade designs?



My design process always starts with the fabric. I have accounts with fabric manufacturers who always notify their customers when there is a new collection being launched. This enables me to look through their fabric books/catalogues and select any that I like straight away. Once I have the fabric design in mind, the rest just follows naturally in regards to shape, height, lining etc. For example, a solid velvet fabric looks lovely with a brushed metallic lining, particularly a bold colour such as navy blue or cerise pink. However, a light coloured linen fabric always works best with a white lining, preferably in a tall cylindrical shape so you have the full effect of the light shining through.

How would you describe your style?

I love bold and bright colours with a striking pattern, the larger the pattern the better. This seems to have worked well with our new 50cm and 70cm tall conical lampshades as you can really appreciate the full pattern. Sometimes a Drum or French Drum just doesn't do the full design justice. I also absolutely love Dannels Brushed Metallic linings; they add a touch of luxury to what could be quite a plain lampshade, whilst also creating a lovely warm glow when lit.

My aim is to, where possible, make the lampshade a focal point of the customer's décor. This isn't always possible as many customers like their lampshades to blend in with their current neutral décor. And that's



absolutely not a problem, I'm always happy to do this! But if I'm completely honest, I love to select the boldest fabrics and if they also have a metallic lining then that's the perfect combination.

It's clear you have an eye for detail. Do you follow trends or do you just go with your instinct on what will work for a lampshade?

I'm not a huge follower of current trends and would have to say I'm guilty of incorporating my own taste and style into many of our collections. This is something my husband and I have had many lively discussions about over the years as he has always been a firm believer in creating a large selection of plain and neutral lampshades. In the early days, I would only create a shade completely to my own taste. However, I've learnt (with a little help) that in order to be a successful business and to appeal to the maximum number of customers, you have to cater to all of their tastes and styles.

When and why did you start making lampshades?

In 2015, which seems like a very long time ago now! I originally started by making a shade for myself, for a hand-painted floor lamp, and for my daughters' nursery. These were made from kits that I purchased from Dannels and although the finished shades weren't saleable, they were definitely nice enough for my home. I was then bitten by the lampshade making bug (which I know happens to all of us lampshade makers) and started selling my lampshades first via eBay, then Amazon Handmade and Etsy and finally via our own website which we launched in 2017.

My daughter was born in 2016 and making lampshades from home was the perfect job for me; it enabled me to work part-time whilst also being at home full-time to care for Thea. Since then, we have moved Candid Owl out of the house and now rent a business unit at Blackminster in Worcestershire. It was undoubtedly the best move we ever made. It has enabled us to employ a team, to have the space needed to make larger shades and commercial orders and it's been fantastic to have a small retail space that we open on an appointment basis for our customers to experience our products first-hand.

What's your favourite part of the lampshade making process?

That's quite a tough question to answer. I still thoroughly enjoy making lampshades, even though it's now been 7 years since I made my first one; there's always that buzz

of excitement when a new fabric delivery arrives and I decide which shape, size, lining etc to try. So I would say the design element of the process is now my favourite part. However, I do enjoy challenging myself and currently, square lampshades are my favourite style. The corners can be a little tricky to navigate and the seam needs extra attention to detail but that's all part of the learning curve and all it takes is a little practice.

We noticed you've recently undertaken a commercial brief for 18 matching square lampshades. Do you often take on commercial commission and how did the project come about?

I think that was one of our largest commissions to date – it was for an exhibition in London and gave me some great practice at making squares. Since then, we have just finished making a further 45 square lampshades for the same company, for a larger exhibition they are showcasing in Germany. My husband Mark, who now also works for Candid Owl full-time, was asked to quote for the project by a family member. They own an electrical business which has specialised in fitting out large exhibition stands for many years.

It was a fantastic opportunity and one which I don't think we would have been able to accommodate if we hadn't moved into the business premises. The project came along at just the right time and we have also been able to complete some smaller projects for bars and restaurants.

Any tips for new lampshade makers in business?

I think my biggest tip would be to work on getting your creations seen. There are some really talented lampshade makers now, both here in the UK and abroad, making beautiful high-quality lampshades. Whilst the look and quality of the shade are extremely important, what is possibly even more important is getting visibility for your creation. This can be via marketplaces such as Etsy and Amazon, social media such as Facebook and Instagram, or a stand-alone website. It can all be a bit daunting at first but the hard work of making, photographing, listing and posting via social media all pays off in the end and creates a successful business. I still haven't really figured out TikTok yet so if anyone has any tips they would be gratefully received!



www.candidowl.com
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Be inspired



Our Blog is your best source of inspiration.
Discover dozens of Tutorials, Makers' Stories, Insider Tips and Business Advice!
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