

My new chapter

‘I found a sense of purpose when I really needed it’

Natasha de Terán, 55, began making coats once she regained the use of her hands following chemotherapy. But when her creations started to win admirers at her local Waitrose, she turned her back on a career in finance to launch British-made coat brand EdNerat.

I grew up in Milan, Paris and Madrid and, perhaps through being nourished with their glamour and visual stimulation, am quite a creative person. Even so, and despite a maths report that read, “Natasha is not good at maths”, I was encouraged to pursue an academic path and ended up in finance.

I have worked in finance for more than 30 years, firstly in the derivative markets, then in journalism and later in public policy. Now I combine finance and fashion.

When my daughter was a toddler, I found working from home as a freelance journalist near impossible and returned to the City to work in public policy. I soon joined Swift, a global company based in Brussels that carries payment messages globally. There I worked on some fascinating political challenges and travelled at least once a week to Brussels, other European capitals or Washington.


After 10 years the travel began to take its toll. But it was in 2019, when I started to experience incredibly heavy bleeding and had three or four fainting episodes, that things had to change. I had lots of tests and saw many specialists and was told my symptoms were menopausal. It was



a tough period, so I took a prolonged break from work. As we had recently bought a house in Wales that needed a lot doing, I set to work on that.

By the time lockdown happened, we’d finished most of what needed

doing but my health was still a bit mixed. Then one day I woke up with the most excruciating pain in my abdomen that left me curled up, screaming on the bathroom floor. Although it soon subsided, the

A woman with dark hair, wearing a bright red, textured, knee-length coat and mustard-colored sneakers, is adjusting a black and white patterned dress on a mannequin. The mannequin is on a black stand. The background is dark. The woman is looking down at the dress with a focused expression.

'Women tend to undermine the value of the experience they've had, and the world often seems to tell us we are worth less as we get older, but you're never too old and your experience is hugely valuable'



Natasha is passionate that all her coats are modelled on women over 50.



same horrific pain returned the next morning and when it didn't stop, my husband rushed me to hospital. He wasn't allowed in and had to leave me at the door. I was told I had a blockage or disturbance in my intestine that required an operation to remove some of my bowel and that I would wake up with a stoma.

After recovering for a few weeks alone in hospital, I was allowed to go home, but as my mother was dying from pancreatic cancer, I didn't want to worry my parents by telling them what had happened. I told my sister instead who, having looked things up on Google, pressed me to ask for the pathology from the operation. Eventually, I called my GP and left a message to ask if there was a pathology report. Unfortunately, it had been lost at the time and my poor doctor had received mixed messages. When he did eventually call, he simply said: 'Well, what a relief, it's not definitely stage four.' He didn't realise I hadn't been told I had cancer in the first place. We both ended up in floods of tears. The staging scans took months, but eventually stage three bowel cancer was confirmed with a possible spread to the tonsils. I would

You can try a mock-up of any coat at home and add adjustments before ordering.



need chemotherapy first and once recovered, a tonsillectomy.

On chemo I felt awful. I was apathetic and felt completely useless. My brain was addled, my energy levels were on the floor, and I had lost the use of my hands. When the effects of the chemo finally started to wear

off, and my sense of touch returned, what I wanted to do more than anything was use my hands. I found that making things with them also served to bring some purpose into my life as I drifted between operations and recovery. That's when I started to make coats.



Some of the collection Natasha has designed. All can be ordered at ednerat.com.

HANDMADE THERAPY

I've always had a very strong affinity to coats. They cover and cloak, disguise and protect, and I suppose I was looking for that extra layer of armour they give you, because during that period of recovery I made 20 of them! In making them, I felt I had a utility which I sorely needed. At that point, I really wasn't going out because we were still in semi-lockdown, and I had to be vigilant about my immune system. The highlight of my life was going to my local Waitrose in Abergavenny where I soon gained a little fan base. They would get very excited when I came in wearing a new creation and give me marks out of 10. It was interesting to have people spontaneously coming up to me at the checkout or in the car park to say they loved my coat.

All this gave me a real sense of purpose at a time when I really needed it. Whether because of the cancer, my age, or perhaps a sudden unveiling of a longstanding ineptitude, it was becoming increasingly clear I no longer had a relevance in the workplace. It was difficult. Previously I'd been the main breadwinner, but now I seemed to be unemployable.

Sufficiently recovered, I started going to London and there too my coats received compliments from complete strangers. So, when a friend asked me to make her a coat for her son's wedding I did so, and I decided I might as well try my hand at it properly. I launched EdNerat in 2023. Without any formal experience in the fashion or textile industry, finding proper pattern cutters and tailors to make my coats was challenging, but I eventually found a very old-school company called Musa Apparel in London who cut everything out by hand and are a dream to work with.

My coats are individually cut and made to order, and everything from the boxes and suit carriers to the care labels is made in the UK. This isn't about British pride or nimbyism, it's about being able to do things on a small and sustainable scale, keeping people in work here and keeping skills alive for tomorrow.

It's lovely to have younger customers of course, but I'm most thrilled to be serving an unmet need for older women. My oldest customer is 86 and she told me she didn't think she'd ever find anything made for her again. It's really important to me that

all my models are 50 or older because we shouldn't be invisible – we should be seen and served. I also don't want my daughter growing up thinking women are invisible or unattractive after a certain age.

One of the biggest challenges I faced in making my coats was getting the sizing and scaling right. I don't have much of a bust, but lots of women do, especially as they get older – most of the time they are forced to jump up a size to accommodate it. To solve that, we've created two cuts in all our styles: one for the bustier shape, another for the smaller busted. We've also made up calico toiles – or mock-ups – of all the styles in different sizes which you can order, try on at home, and tell us if and where you need more room.

The growth so far has been gradual, mostly from word of mouth, but every order causes great excitement, and I wouldn't want to do it a different way. To any readers thinking of starting a new venture, I'd say that so long as you are prepared to learn new skills, to turn your hand to whatever is needed and put the work in, you really haven't left it too late!

Women tend to undermine the value of the experience they've had, and the world often seems to tell us we are worth less as we get older, but you're never too old and your experience is hugely valuable. Just start now, fail small and go right back at it until you get it right.



● Natasha and her team craft coats made from British-sourced fabrics and textiles. For more information and to view the collection, visit ednerat.com.