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Show Me the Money!



on our cover

READY, SET...

How simple yet elegant it is to use yarn as shoelaces! Debbie Bliss Paloma (60% alpaca, 40% wool) has a perfect texture that recalls those strings we learned to double-knot as kids. (Distributed by Knitting Fever in the U.S. and Designer Yarns in the U.K.) www.debbieblissonline.com/yarns.asp
Photograph by Marcus Tullis

ATOP OUR SMART COLUMNS

Indian Lake Artisans handcrafts its hexagonal needles and shawl pins; these exquisite examples are topped with rustic copper-plated shapes including feathers, fish and canoes. www.indianlakeartisans.com

W

hether you're a yarn shop owner, a yarn or notions manufacturer or a designer, you work tirelessly to make the best products you can, to be the best resource you can be and, hopefully, to make enough money to support your small business. But it's hard, I know. The economy has yet to bounce back, and there's still enough competition to make every business decision a fraught one. The yarn world is filled with bright, smart, engaged entrepreneurs, yet I see firsthand how tough surviving in this industry can be.

What we wanted to know is how much yarn shop owners are being compensated for all that hard work. When we posed the question on Facebook and Ravelry to find those willing to share their stories, we weren't surprised by the quippy responses we received (it's a very personal question, after all), but we meant for it to be taken seriously. We really are interested in knowing how much—and, indeed, whether—you pay yourself.

The information Cheryl Krementz discovered is fascinating—I encourage you to read her article on page 36 right now. It opened our eyes to the realities so many of you face and left us wanting more data. I invite you to hop onto your computer (or open a new tab in your browser if you're reading a digital version of *YMN*) and go to www.surveymonkey.com/s/YMNsalaries to take our quick survey. It's completely anonymous; we'll post the results in an upcoming issue.

Of course, this issue is packed with ideas to help you grow your business. In her Smart Marketing column (page 24), Daryl Brower writes about nominating yourself for a small-business award. It's so much more than a chance to win some money; it's an opportunity to revisit your goals and take stock of your business. Perhaps there are "green" choices you can make that will help both the environment and your own bottom line—find out more on page 22. We also give you an overview of Pinterest.com (page 28), introduce you to the team in charge of the llamas at Long Island Livestock Co. (page 34) and tell you about equipment-rental programs that can add cash to your coffers (page 26).

What you do is hard work, but that doesn't mean it can't be fun. With that in mind, Leslie Petrovski explores the ubiquitous knit-along and crochet-along, surefire ways to build community and make sales. Get the lowdown on how to make your next event effortless on page 40.

"Effortless" hard work— isn't that the goal?

A stylized signature of Erin Slonaker.

Erin Slonaker,
Editor in Chief



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Hey, Girl, We Meet Again

Oh, **Ryan Gosling**, we knitters just can't quit you. Not when you go on record with stuff like this, quoted from an interview in *GQ Australia*: "I did this scene in *Lars and the Real Girl* where I was in a room full of old ladies who were knitting, and it was an all-day scene, so they showed me how. It was one of the most relaxing days of my life.... If I had to design my perfect day, that would be it. And you get something out of it at the end. You get a nice present. For someone who wants an oddly shaped, off-putting scarf." Oddly shaped, off-putting observation aside, the real present is the rest of the quote, sure to feed "Hey, Girl" memes for the foreseeable future.

Great Balls of China

Like Sean Connery, **Trendsetter Yarns' Barry Klein** has learned to never say never. "I always said I'd personally never deal with China," he recounts. "I didn't want low-priced copies of yarns made better elsewhere." Then Klein found out about the **Lotus** line of luxury fibers.

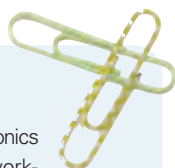
Lotus is a 12-year-old business based south of Beijing, in Hebei Province, with a presence in Japanese and European markets. At last summer's TNNA show, several Trendsetter reps spotted the company's booth tucked into the back of the market and raved to Klein about the skeins' quality and hand. Interest piqued, Klein looked into the brand and liked what he saw. Duly concerned by ubiquitous news reports about substandard working conditions at Chinese factories, however, Klein asked a friend who lives in China to drop by the Lotus facilities and scope things out: She found, he says, a clean and well-run factory with well-treated employees. Worries alleviated, he was convinced that he'd hit upon a high-end classic complement to Trendsetter's collection of fashion and novelty yarns and made the decision to distribute Lotus in the United States.

The Lotus line consists of nearly a dozen deluxe yarns and blends in a full range of weights—100 percent cashmere, silk, bamboo, yak, merino and, most unusually, mink, sheared from the company's specially raised and tended domesticated herd. Eager to be a good partner, Lotus asked how it could Americanize its palette. Klein's answer: with true, clear colors, as opposed to the heathered shades the brand had been turning out. For his part, Klein has given Lotus something it didn't have before—dedicated pattern support, in the form of accessories galore plus a few larger pieces. (The *pièce de résistance*, Klein says, is a rectangular coat in 100 percent mink Mimi yarn that's "one of those magical pieces everybody wants.") Since the collaboration was introduced, he reports, 90 percent of LYSeS carrying Trendsetter have also adopted Lotus yarns. "It's now a partnership that fits beautifully," Klein says. "It fits in with who we are, adding something new to the cachet" of Trendsetter. See the Lotus line at trendsetteryarns.com.



Knitting: A Factory Fix

Speaking of working conditions in China: Foxconn, the electronics manufacturer in Longhua, Shenzhen, whose subhuman working conditions and high worker suicide rate made international news, drawing widespread condemnation, recently incorporated knitting into its attempt at a reputation makeover. According to *The New York Times*, Foxconn has been offering on-site knitting classes for several months now, a step that's reportedly increased workplace morale.



Don't Call Her Ishmael



Ahab had his whale. Clara has her bale. The woman who has devoted the past dozen years to studying fiber down to its finest particulate for *Knitter's Review* and the best-selling *Knitter's Book* series has put her money where her micron is:

Clara Parkes is making yarn, attempting to turn a 676-pound bale of superfine Saxon merino wool into the ideal skein she has long been "seeking but not finding." As she stretches her skill set, a devoted cadre of readers will follow along every step of the way, paying for the privilege.

Parkes got her shot to become a bona fide yarn maker when the owner of the largest Saxon merino flock in the U.S. asked her if she'd be interested in taking over the bale. "I've had the chance periodically to talk about making yarn, but because I'm a control freak who has to make sure things are technically and ethically perfect, it never worked commercially," says Parkes, gently ribbing her purist tendencies. Over a six-month span, Parkes will travel the country overseeing the yarn-making process, having the bale separated into four lots that will each be sent to a different mill and treated in a different way. The fact that the wool, at 18.5 microns, is of cashmere-fine quality will inform the outcome. "There are only so many ways this fiber innately wants to be spun," Parkes says. So part of the fun will be in seeing how this particular wool plies, dyes and blends with complementary fibers, yielding a quartet of unique skeins whose outcomes are as yet unknown. According to the original plan, one lot is meant to be kept in its natural state, undyed, while the other three will be custom-colored by prominent hand-dyers. Parkes's goal is to be "utterly honest" about the process as it unfolds, reporting on every misstep, surprise and triumph in a "narrative yarn adventure" she's been able to monetize.

Parkes is writing about the great white bale not in *Knitter's Review* but in a separate, member's-only online journal to which two levels of subscribers have access. The premier tier of Explorer sold out in a mere three days, with 250 fiber enthusiasts jumping at the chance to pay \$320—not only for Parkes's postings but also for 1.7 pounds of the finished product. Still open is the Armchair Traveler level, which gives interested yarnies access to the journal for \$39; at press time, the bale had attracted 450 armchair travelers. This pay-per-read model allows Parkes to keep the journal unsullied by online ads and "flashing banners," and the brisk pace of subscription sales heartens the woman who has been providing free Internet content for so many years. ("This proves that people are willing to pay for content online," she says.) Parkes is also pleased that the concept has appealed to so many "cool yarn-heads—fellow knitters, authors and book publishers, people who have flocks of their own, designers, people who own yarn companies. If I do a good job, I hope this all helps to seed the domestic yarn market and keep these people thriving." Armchair-travel over to the bale at www.clarayarn.com.

A Nobel Pedigree

Never underestimate the power of a pullover as political statement. A sweater knit more than 20 years ago by Nobel Laureate **Aung San Suu Kyi**, the Burmese parliamentarian whose opposition to military rule in Myanmar resulted in a 21-year house arrest, was recently auctioned for \$49,000. Bidding started at \$6,000 and quickly escalated; Suu Kyi, known as "Amay Suu" ("Mother Suu"), is a beloved figure in her native land. The winner of the auction, the chairwoman of a local radio station, says the pullover is "priceless because [it] was made by 'Amay' herself. I... value the warmth and security it will give." The auction proceeds will fund education initiatives for poor children, a charitable effort of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy.

Good Grief

Community knitting has long been an outlet to show compassion in the wake of tragedy, be it a natural disaster or one caused by man. Recently, though, group stitching efforts have morphed into a more personal way of mourning individual knitters. When Jennifer Longworth, a second-grade teacher who knit Christmas presents for her students every year, was killed with her husband in an Indianapolis house explosion last December, her school community took up needles in her name. Fellow teachers—including some who had never knit before—honored her memory by merging two of Longworth's passions, knitting and football, making scarves and hats in the blue of her beloved Colts for her class, with overflow donated to a local children's hospital.

In this instance, the grieving participants knew the person whose life they were celebrating. That wasn't the case when **Karrie Steinmetz**, known to the knitting community as **KnitPurlGurl**, died suddenly on November 26 at the age of 38. Hundreds of fans of the well-read blog and popular video podcast that bore her sobriquet responded on Ravelry, Facebook and Twitter with such heartfelt condolences, you'd never know that most of those moved to share their feelings had never met nor spoken with Steinmetz.

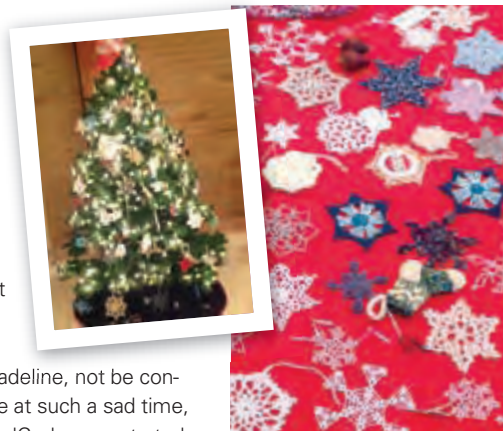
Celeste Reed, Steinmetz's real-life best friend, announced the death in Ravelry's KnitPurlGurl group at the request of Robert Steinmetz, Karrie's husband, and was overwhelmed by the response. "It became helpful to me, to realize that this support group of people who didn't know Karrie other than from the podcast were in tears," Reed says. "They wanted to do something." Steinmetz



had been blogging about her attempt to crochet snowflakes for her family's Christmas tree, to replace ornaments that had been lost in a recent move. Determined that Robert and their two children, 16-year-old Brian and 7-year-old Madeline, not be confronted with a bare tree at such a sad time, members of the KnitPurlGurl group started looping snowflakes in earnest. Steinmetz had passed away on a Monday; just five days later, 114 snowflakes sent in by fans graced the memorial service—which itself coincided with a virtual knit-in for Steinmetz on Ravelry; more than 50 admirers participated. During the rest of the holiday season, 75 more snowflake packages arrived, many from overseas—New Zealand, Canada, Turkey—enough to fill five Christmas trees all told.

Reed says the widespread outpouring that followed Steinmetz's death has brought new knitters to the KnitPurlGurl group, where her friend's podcasts—during which "she laughs a lot; it's comforting to hear her giggle"—are still accessible, and where Steinmetz's tradition of committing "Random Acts of Patterns" continues each Tuesday. Reed hopes to foster the KnitPurlGurl brand to benefit her friend's family, possibly by selling Steinmetz's voluminous stash in "mystery packages" and by completing and publishing an unfinished pattern design.

"If Karrie had had any idea that she touched that many people.... It wasn't until after she was gone that we realized how far-reaching her following was."



Stitchy Love for Sandy Hook

Snowflakes were also at the center of much of the knitting and crocheting done to send love to the shattered community of Newtown, Connecticut, in the wake of the tragic mass shooting at **Sandy Hook Elementary School**. So many snowflake decorations—made from paper, fiber and other craft materials—were sent to decorate the surviving students' new school that organizers from the Connecticut PTA had to close the donation process almost as soon as it opened.

Other knit- and crochet-based efforts to support the Newtown community and the victims' families include one to make a wall hanging representing a "warm hug" for those affected, as well as one based on the heart-tugging children's book *The Kissing Hand* to place stitched hearts on the palms of yarny mittens meant for every Sandy Hook student. Industry-wise, **Sharon McMahon** of the indie yarn dyer **Three Irish Girls** was so affected by the dreadful event, she spearheaded **Knitters for Newtown**, a two-pronged approach to help heal the grieving town. For six weeks after the shooting, McMahon donated 20 percent of the sales of two Newtown-related colorways—the "gentle rainbow" of Love Wins and

The Giving Tree, incorporating the Sandy Hook colors of green and white—to the Sandy Hook School Support Fund and other charities. McMahon also urged knitters to work up 8-by-8 squares that would be assembled into at least 26 blankets, one for "each mother's child" lost that day. At press time, Knitters for Newtown was nearly 90 percent of the way to its \$10,000 goal. Follow along until the March 31 blanket-square deadline at threeirishgirls.com.

Designer **Rebecca Danger** has also become involved in an inspired project to spread cheer to Newtown. Fittingly, the industry's foremost monster maker teamed up with **600 Monsters Strong**, an initiative to send friendly, huggable monsters to every Sandy Hook student as a morale-booster in the face of fear. Danger discounted two of her patterns—the sweetly eye-patched Penelope (above) and the kangaroo-pouched mother/daughter pair of Daphne and Delilah (left)—from \$6 to \$2, to entice knitters to get cracking on a creature or two. At press time, the group was well on its way to reaching its goal and, due to the strong response, announced plans to continue to send stuffed love to kids recovering from trauma well after every Newtown student is so gifted. Find out more at ravelry.com/groups/600-monsters-strong.





Home Shopping Knitwork

Leave it to a broadcast pro like **Deborah Norville** to use the airwaves to her yarny advantage. The three-time Emmy Award winner and knitter premiered the Deborah Norville Craft Kits in January on the Home Shopping Network. The half-dozen newbie-friendly projects, packaged with needles and skeins from the newswoman's eponymous yarn line, a collaboration with **Premier Yarns**, include a knit hat/mittens set and a crocheted beret/mittens combo in Everyday Soft Worsted, a crocheted cowl/Nordic mittens pairing and knit and crocheted afghans in Serenity Chunky, and a knit tote bag in Cuddle Fleece. The final pattern, the Swirling Shawl in Serenity Sock, was modeled by Norville herself on the red carpet at the Golden Globe Awards. See the kits at hsn.com and Norville's yarn line at premieryarns.com.

In Memoriam: Since *YMN* last went to press, the yarn world lost several notable members.

Luisa Gelenter

Gelenter died in mid-December, less than a year after shuttering her iconic, eclectic yarn shop La Lana Wools in Taos, New Mexico. Opened in 1974, La Lana carried no commercially made yarn, just Gelenter's custom hand- and mill-spun and naturally dyed fibers. "I'm happy people are going to miss me," Gelenter told *YMN* while clearing the last fixtures out of the shop she'd nurtured for nearly 40 years, reflecting on the outpouring of well wishes she received. The vibrant store had long been a destination for yarnies, due in no small part to the lively profile of its owner in Melanie Falick's *Knitting in America* (since reissued as *America Knits*), but in recent years sales had slipped due to the stagnation of Taos's tourist economy. Gelenter planned to devote her post-retail time to her spinning and dyeing and said she hoped to document on video the traditions of indigo dyers in Laos and Bali. She understood that the loss of La Lana heralded the "end of an era. But hopefully," Gelenter said, "it will create new space for something else."

Evie Rosen

The founder of the Warm Up America Foundation and author of *Teach Yourself to Knit*, who passed away in late November, was also an influential LYSO. As co-owner, then sole owner, of the Knitting Nook in Wausau, Wisconsin, for 30 years, she was involved in many industry advances: Rosen cofounded the Midwest Retailers Association, was instrumental in urging the National NeedleArts Association to create an associate membership for yarn retailers and helped develop the Craft Yarn Council's teacher certification program. Rosen conceived Warm Up America in the early 1990s, as the nation's homelessness crisis reached a peak. Unable to knit the afghans she donated to a local shelter "fast enough to fill the need," she started the organization in order to get others involved in the worthy effort. Over the past twenty-odd years, Warm Up America has distributed to countless homeless shelters more than 300,000 afghans constructed from 15 million individually knit or crocheted blocks. Post remembrances of Rosen on the Warm Up America Facebook page.

Jim and Suzan Stapleford

The Staplefords, husband-and-wife spinners known for their pendulum spinning demos in period costume at the New York Sheep & Wool Festival in Rhinebeck, died as a result of separate Superstorm Sandy-related incidents in their Shokan, New York, home—Jim succumbed to carbon monoxide poisoning while attempting to restore power to their home; Suzan, from a fall in the dark house. The couple owned a company called Spinster and Smythe.

Barb Strate

A model for *Vogue Knitting* back in 1939—she once posed in a navy knit top and pleated skirt, holding a Pekinese—Strate lived a fascinating life. This WWII war bride and survivor of the London Blitz emigrated to Montana and spent the last 20 years of her life penning an award-winning column for the *Bigfork Eagle*.

In Clover



Clover Needlecraft U.S.A. turned 30 at the start of 2013, and the venerable notions company kicked off a year-long celebration with an industry party in Anaheim, California. The good times continued on the floors of the CHA and TNNA markets, where Clover showed off new product, including double-point-needle protectors, circular stitch holders, a ten-piece Amour crochet hook gift set and darning needles with a latch-hook eye. Photos and updates from both shows are featured on the Clover blog (cloverusa.wordpress.com), where you'll find the latest about the company's pearl anniversary festivities.



Where There's Wilton

...there's a way to increase market share in the needlecrafts category. In January Wilton Brands acquired **Simplicity Creative Group**, a global leader in craft, sewing, knitting, hobby and home decorating products. Because of the deal, Simplicity, Wright, Boye and Martha Stewart Crafts are now part of Wilton's "diverse" DIY portfolio. For more on the acquisition as it evolves, go to wilton.com or simplicity.com.

Kudos Corner

Congratulations to:

Knitting and Hiking Between Fire and Ice, an Icelandic knitting tour voted one of the world's best tours at Europe's premier travel fair, CMT 2013. The six-day, footwear-themed tour, a collaboration between knitter Héléne Magnússon and Icelandic Mountain Guides, incorporates visits to the Þingborg Wool Centre and the Skógar Folk Museum with hikes amid "spectacular nature and exciting geological features," even allowing travelers to knit at a volcano that recently erupted. Get the itinerary at mountainguides.is/OvernightTours/KnittingTours/KnittingandHikingbetweenFireandIce.

Darn Good Yarn, for winning the FedEx Small Business Grant contest—and its \$25,000 prize. *YMN* reported on the reclaimed-yarn company last year after owner Nicole Mikkelsen-Snow rescued 10,000 pounds of silk waste from clogging landfills in India and Nepal. Ever resourceful, Mikkelsen-Snow used her social-media savvy to earn nearly 6,000 Facebook votes to put her in the running for the FedEx award. Mikkelsen-Snow plans to use the grant to empower a greater number of women in India and Nepal to earn a livable wage by spinning the reclaimed silk into yarn. Find out more at darngoodyarn.com.

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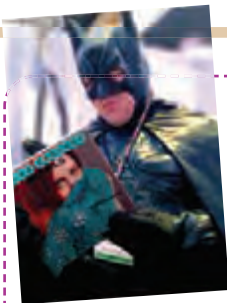
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Holy Knitters, Batman!

At last sighting, the Caped Crusader had left Gotham City in order to swoop down on the Big Apple just in time for Vogue Knitting LIVE in January. Batman made an appearance on the Marketplace floor—wearing a badge that ID'd him as, naturally, Batman—after **Shannon Okey** and **Sarah Eyre** sent out a knit bat signal. Taking up a collection from game exhibitors and attendees, they hired the Batman impersonator, who poses for pictures in Times Square, to pay a visit to the Cooperative Press/Cephalapod Yarns booth on the last day of the show. The appearance quickly assumed superhero proportions, with pictures of the Dark Knight perusing patterns and fondling yarn appearing on the Twitter, Instagram and Facebook feeds of star-struck knitters in attendance.

Yarnies to the Rescue

It's a story that shocked a community: Just as Bernida Simmons, a disabled homeless woman, was about to transport her every possession from a shelter to her very own apartment, her moving U-Haul was stolen as it sat in front of the Seattle women's center she'd been living in. Though she lost much when the thief drove away with her worldly goods, what she most missed was the \$1,000 worth of yarn and crochet supplies with which the lifelong crocheter was going to start a cottage industry, making pillows, gloves, hats and scarves.

A local TV news station, KOMO, reported on the theft—and the response to the Problem Solvers piece has put Simmons back on track to loop her way to success. **Mary Harris**, owner of Seattle's **Fiber Gallery**, invited Simmons to the shop to replace about \$200 worth of the lost fiber. Local knitters and crocheters are collecting more yarn to send the budding entrepreneur. And so many generous viewers were touched by the story, KOMO received enough donations to present Simmons with a \$1,500 check to buy new necessities just days after the original clip aired. "For every creep who would do this, there are hundreds of kind-hearted people," Simmons told KOMO.

The Art of Craftsy

We called it eighteen months ago, and *Forbes* magazine now agrees: **Craftsy** is a verifiable hit. On course to become the Internet's most-trafficked online-learning portal—larger even than the University of Phoenix—the DIY-crafts teaching site has enjoyed nearly 750,000 class enrollments since its debut in the summer of 2011. Staff growth has been equally fast and furious, with several of the URL's teachers now earning upward of \$100,000. How does the nearly-still-a-startup do it? *YMN* editor in chief Erin Slonaker recently witnessed firsthand the care Craftsy puts into creating content that has such far-reaching appeal.

Erin traveled to Craftsy's Denver headquar-

ters as part of the team behind *Vogue Knitting's* new technique-based series of classes, starring VK executive editor **Carla Scott** and Knit U founder/Meg Swansen right hand **Amy Detjen**. After developing the curriculum with designer Stefanie Japel, now Craftsy's acquisition editor, the filming began. Like A-list actors, Scott and Detjen had early morning hair and makeup calls; then they stepped in front of not one but two cameras—the first holding tight to the instructor, the second swirling about to catch every angle of the knitterly action. Producer Linda Permann ensured continuity and kept the day-long shoot on track. The finished product, Erin says, is a testament to the attention to



detail and adherence to excellence to which Craftsy is dedicated—no doubt both major reasons for the site's booming success. Scott's cable class and Detjen's on the circular yoke sweater are now available at craftsy.com/vogueclasses.

Front and Center

In our January issue, we told you that longtime *LYSO* Karen Kendrick-Hands had begun the due diligence necessary to determine whether it would be possible to found a U.S. museum dedicated to knitting and crochet, be it physical or virtual ("The Knitting Heritage Museum: A Possible Dream?"). Since then, much has happened to propel her grand plan from concept to reality.

At a recent symposium in Madison, Wisconsin, that attracted more than 50 luminaries from the museum and fiber-arts worlds alike—June Hemmons Hiatt, Gwen Blakely Kinsler, Susan Strawn, Jack Blumenthal and Trisha Malcolm among them—it was decided that the project would go forward as a digital collection with a new official name, the **Center for Knit and Crochet**. As attractive a prospect as a bricks-and-mortar museum might be, it was clear from the frank curatorial testimony given that the expense and resources (both logistical and human) a physical repository requires would

render that option one to strive for rather than start with. And while a real-world museum remains a possibility down the road, says Kendrick-Hands, the virtual model, having "no boundaries," is a far more achievable and accessible approach.

Now that an online blueprint has been sketched and the center has been incorporated as a Wisconsin non-stock corporation, Kendrick-Hands is working with a nine-member temporary board to develop a "financial and governance infrastructure" as well as to file for nonprofit 501(c)(3) status. The nascent center has been operating off its initial \$5,000 grant from the TNNA Yarn Group and has an endowment created by Jim Bryson in memory of designer Beverly Galeskas, but nonprofit status will allow for the solicitation of further grants and tax-free donations from supporters, both a necessity for growth. Creatively, "our initial goal is to develop a comprehensive knitting and crochet taxonomy that will form the basis [of] a

digital collection," Kendrick-Hands outlines. The center will consist of knit and crocheted objects "shared from a global consortium of museums and similar institutions, educational institutions and private collectors. We also plan to develop practical conservation and documentation guidelines that any institution or individual can implement to preserve these objects and their stories."

It's big-picture stuff. And Kendrick-Hands is hoping many yarn professionals understand the intrinsic value in the center's evolution and get involved in shaping its form. "The takeaway is that the industry can make more money off of art and craft if knitting and crochet are considered something people revere rather than something people mock," she explains. "I think the [center] can create reverence for what we do and help people see what's intriguing and important and elegant about it." Follow the center's evolution at a new URL, knitcrochetcenter.org.

YMN CALENDAR

Events to keep you in stitches this spring.
(For more, visit www.yarnmarketnews.com.)

March 10-12

YMN Smart Business Conference

Four Seasons Baltimore
Baltimore, Maryland
yarnmarketnews.com

March 15-17

9th Annual Pittsburgh Knit & Crochet Festival

Four Points Sheraton
North Mars, Pennsylvania
pghknitandcrochet.com

March 22-23

Festival of Alabama Fiber Arts

Old Alabama Town
Montgomery, Alabama
alabamafiberarts.com

March 22-23

Fibreswest

Show Barn on the Cloverdale Exhibition Grounds
Cloverdale, British Columbia
fibreswest.com

March 23

Heartland Fiberpalooza

Madison County Fairgrounds
Winterset, Iowa
heartlandfiberpalooza.wordpress.com

April 5-7

Alpacapalooza

Clark County Events Center

Ridgefield, Washington
alpaca.org

April 5-7

Vogue Knitting LIVE

Meydenbauer Convention Center/
Hyatt Regency Bellevue
Seattle, Washington
vogueknittinglive.com

April 5-7

Dallas Fort Worth (DFW) Fiber Fest

Grapevine Convention Center
Grapevine, Texas
dfwfiberfest.org

April 11-14

Stitches South

Renaissance Waverly Hotel/Cobb Galleria Centre
Atlanta, Georgia
knittinguniverse.com/STITCHES

April 11-14

Yarn Crawl L.A. County

Los Angeles, California
yarncrawl.com

April 19-20

Smoky Mountain Fiber Arts Festival

Great Smoky Mountain Heritage Center
Townsend, Tennessee
smokymountains.org

April 19-21

Taos Fiber Festival

Taos Convention Center
Taos, New Mexico
taosfibermarketplace.com

April 19-22

Shepherd's Extravaganza

Western Washington Fairgrounds
Puyallup, Washington
shepherds-extravaganza.com

April 26-27

Creativ Festival

International Centre
Mississauga, Ontario, Canada
csnf.com/s12_index.html

April 27-28

Downtown Knit Collective Knitters' Frolic

Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
downtownknitcollective.ca/dkc_frolic.html

May 4-5

Maryland Sheep & Wool Festival

Howard County Fairgrounds
West Friendship, MD
sheepandwool.org

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Birch Knitting Needles
and Crochet Hooks

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Dolce Handknits

Dovetail Designs

Fiber Dreams

Fiber Trends

Gloria Tracy Designs

Hooked for Life

Keep it Simple Designs

Knitting Pure and Simple

Maddy Laine

Mari Sweaters

Oat Couture

PhoenixBess

Silver Creek Classics

Vermont Fiber Designs

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Book Reviews

BY CHERYL KREMENTZ

Easter Knits

By Arne & Carlos

Trafalgar Square Books; \$17.95

ISBN: 1570765642



Put away the Paas dye and hop on down the bunny trail with Arne and Carlos: The décor duo's popular knitted Christmas

ornaments prove just as joyous when reimagined for spring. To adapt their yuletide scheme for Easter, the guys eschewed red, green and white for a pastel palette and elongated their spheres to ovoids, creating stuffed eggs to hang, scatter on a buffet table or tuck into baskets. The motifs range from hatching chicks, a garden's worth of florals and even a primaver skier (Arne and Carlos do live in Norway, after all) to dyed-egg and Fabergé-inspired gems and geometrics. Duplicate stitch supplements the circular Scandinavian stranding, lending a stained-glass-like effect in places. Along with the eggs and balls, you'll also find a pompom-tailed stuffed rabbit (wearing a hand-knit sweater, of course), a toy hen with crocheted feathers, and mini pullover egg cozies. Each item takes a minimum of yardage and intermediate expertise with a set of dpns. As long as you don't give up knitting for Lent, you'll have a cache of huntable eggs that'll last way longer than your average hard-boiled.

Boyfriend Sweaters

By Bruce Weinstein

Potter Craft; \$21.99

ISBN: 0307587126

Reverse the curse! If you knit a "boyfriend sweater" for you as much



as for him, the breakup scenario becomes moot, right? The scarves and sweaters in this book are indeed universally

appealing, toned down enough for a guy with a subtle fashion sensibility

yet charismatic enough for a gal looking for style. Sized from a woman's (and teen boy's) Small up through a man's XXL, the garments—insightfully photographed by Jared Flood—fall into four chapters. "Line and Drape" gives us a mock turtle-neck with an off-center neckline zipper, a colorblocked saddle-shoulder jersey and a cushy turtleneck even the knit-averse will covet. "Texture" serves up Shaker rib, 3-D argyles, honeycombs and linen stitch.

"Reversibility" emphasizes wearable (and knittable) versatility, and "Color" keeps the hound's-tooth, plaids and varsity lettering as muted as possible. Throughout you'll find tips for emphasizing or deemphasizing masculine design aspects and answers to pressing questions, including on which side buttonholes should be placed.

Finish-Free Knits

By Kristen TenDyke

Interweave Press; \$24.95

ISBN: 1596684887

Few knitters choose a project because it involves tons of seaming; on the contrary, plenty of newbies—intimidated by thoughts of finishing—shy away from multipiece garments. TenDyke removes that trepidation



with this collection of enticingly wearable no-sew knits. Her multiple methods rely mostly on circular, side-to-

side and multidirectional construction; shaping with short rows; working up from a pocket, down from a flounce neckline or outward from a central motif; and joining where necessary with a three-needle bind-off. To prove her thesis, TenDyke starts things off with a no-purling-necessary garment, the Ease tank, knit in the round in stockinette, then separated for the garter-stitched front and back, the shoulders connecting via buttons. The knitterly acumen picks up from there, with chunky and finer-gauge projects showing off bobbles, cables, lace, picots, feather and fan, and pearl brioche. Seems that the appeal of seamless continues apace.

The Knitter's Book of Finishing Techniques

By Nancie M. Wiseman

Martingale & Co.; \$24.95

ISBN: 156477452X

If you're in the camp that firmly believes in the stability and structure a pieced knit gives, Wiseman is here to shore up your knowledge and confidence. This compact paperback edition of Wiseman's tried-and-true primer includes advice on 50-plus methods that ensure flawless garment completion. For a book about the end game, it may appear



counterintuitive to begin with cast-ons, but Wiseman explains the benefits and drawbacks each technique has on the ultimate result—for example,

the picot cast-on works well with ribbing or garter stitch, but the points can cause the edge to ruffle. Increases, decreases and selvages are treated similarly. Then come the meat and potatoes: bind-offs, plus a seaming section including everything from grafting live stitches to a straight edge and joining a new piece of yarn to the best choices for woven shoulders and pockets, among others. Picking up stitches, borders, bands, buttonholes and decorative finishes are also covered, each with written instructions, color photos and illustrations. And for the big finish, Wiseman discusses odds and ends such as blocking, weaving in ends and inserting shoulder pads, devoting the final pages to work-sheets that let you customize your own happy endings.

Classic Elite Shawls, Wraps & Scarves

Sixth&Spring Books; \$19.95

ISBN: 1936096528

Three is indeed company in this new collection, which delivers a trio of variations on twenty themes. Those themes—based on a stitch, a spectrum, a specific skein or fiber—are interpreted as a shawl, a wrap and a scarf while giving the Classic Elite Yarns canon a full workout.



Block Party employs a textural checkerboard pattern in an asymmetrical green shrug with

one sleeve, a teal scarf and a cowl-necked cape with a fold-up collar, all in Soft Linen. Daisy Chain has a floral motif linking the three pieces—a keyhole scarf, a jabot and a patchwork wrap—in complementary colorways of Alpaca Sox kettle-dyes. Just Peachy serves a fruit-hued palette, with peach, melon and coral Wool Bam Boo knit up in triplicate in a beehive lace stitch with crocheted edges. Fun & Funky offers bright jolts of playful sculptural details in bobbles, loops and I-cord. And Lacy Leaves shows how the same scheme—a leaf lace and faggot rib—is altered by the type of yarn chosen, in this case Silky Alpaca Lace and mohair Gisele. Add in the cachet of name designers—Jean Moss and Brooke Nico included—and it all makes for a handy in-store book/skein/sample merchandising tool.

Step It Up Knits

By Vickie Howell

Chronicle Books; \$22.95

ISBN: 1452106630

It's the duty of those in the yarn biz to grow scarf stitchers' abilities so they'll graduate from one-skein



purchases to stocking up on sweater- and blanket-quantity yardage. And that's the goal of Howell's

new book, teaching intermediate-and-up techniques via cute, quick projects challenging enough to stretch a skill set yet small enough to whip through in a relative flash. Thus, lace-cuffed anklets act as instruction for short-row heel turning and grafting; a hooded shrug exemplifies knitting from the top down and picking up stitches; a berry-stitch purse flexes your double-stranded yarn muscles. Mosaic stitch is

utilized in a pair of duotone wrist warmers; intarsia colors in kiddie zebra leg warmers; brioche stitch shows up for a double-sided unisex fringed scarf; and mitered squares make up a sunny toddler beanie. Integrated throughout are such methods as triangular lace, drop stitching, knitting in the round, her-ringbone, I-cord, cabling, felting, reading a chart, mattress stitch—if a knitter needs to know it to move forward, she'll find it here. And the fast, funky nature of the projects means that the book works equally well as a last-minute-gift-idea collection as it does a kick-it-up tutorial.

Knitting With Icelandic Wool

By Védís Jónsdóttir

St. Martin's Griffin; \$29.99

ISBN: 1250024803

As hefty and hardy as a skein of Lopí, Jónsdóttir's ode to her native fiber and culture is required reading for knitterly anthropologists. It's a subject the author knows well, having grown up on an Icelandic farm and working for years as head designer and palette picker for Istex, one of the country's main Lopí producers. To start, there's an in-depth introduction to the storied history of knitting in Iceland, describing some of the island's better-known knitting customs (shaped knitting, stranded colorwork). After this immersion comes the patterns, 65 in all, reaching back to vintage schemes from the 1950s and traveling up through today. Intricate charted yokes crown pullovers, tunics and cardigans for men, women and children. Seven progressive shades of blue are stacked in an ombré scheme to recall the feeling of the Icelandic mountain range in the two-stranded piece called



Land. Faðmur is a scalloped-edge lace sweater shawl that started life as a bed jacket. And Fiðrildaslóð is a deceptively warm girls' tank dress with lace at the border and butterflies flitting across a bodice band.

Clever Crocheted Accessories

Edited by Brett Bara

Interweave Press; \$22.95

ISBN: 1596688270

We've posited plenty of times that getting crocheters hooked on LYS yarn can be as simple as showing them an irresistible quick-stitch accessory that doesn't eat up yardage. *Clever* delivers 20 such projects, in a brand array that includes Noro, Rowan, Bijou Basin, Alchemy, Kolláge, Malabrigo, Habu and Madelinetosh. Nearly instant gratification is the link among these modern accents, all attractive, project-bag-scaled and designed by the crème de la crochet: Drew Emborsky, Doris Chan, Linda Permann, Marly Bird, Robyn Chachula, Kim Kotary, et al. The cover piece, Saturday



Beret, is done in red Bruges lace, which suspends vertical columns between two eyelets. The Diamond Lace Socks, worked toe up with an afterthought heel, proves that crocheters can have just as much fun with feet as knitters. There's a flapper-style headband with ear-warming strips that interlock through each other, an embroidered Tunisian crochet belt with a faux-leather buckle, a hip porkpie hat for him and a retro shell-stitch afghan reimagined as a tablet cozy. Bling-wise, look for an oversized beaded-glass ring and a necklace made of interlocking key rings wrapped in metallic single crochet. Bara brings the big guns—and clearly has a blast doing so.

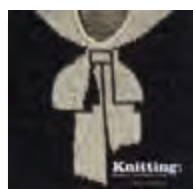
Knitting: Fashion, Industry, Craft

By Sandy Black

V&A Publishing; \$60

ISBN: 1851775595

One of the surprises of the over-all holiday sales season was the popularity enjoyed by lush, big-ticket coffee-table hobby books. *Knitting* is such a treat. Scholarly but never stodgy, it's written by a woman long at the forefront



of the United Kingdom's impressive institutional tradition of teaching knitwear as a viable career choice. As professor of fashion and textile design and technology at the London College of Fashion, University of Arts London, Black has disseminated information about knitwear's transformation from home handcraft to cutting-edge industry and style force, and she details the journey in this handsome collection from the publishing wing of the Victoria & Albert Museum. She tracks the history of knitting from the earliest examples of stockings and jackets to its importance as a cottage industry for women worldwide to commercial and couture designs of the runway eras. The evolution of the knitting pattern, modern stockings and tights, domestic machine knitting and radical knitwear are just a few of the sub-topics. The accompanying photos are a fascinating look at knits through the ages. It's history lesson and fashion magazine in one.

Amigurumi on the Go

By Ana Paula Rimoli

Martingale & Co.; \$21.99

ISBN: 1604682132

Kitschy appeal notwithstanding,

amigurumi has never exactly been practical—until now. Mini master Rimoli has upsized a friendly menagerie of amigurumi and placed them on items of use to kids who need to tote things. Her backpacks are an elongated version of the classic little figure, with a stuffed head (choose from monkey, bear, piglet or penguin) crowning a double-zippered pouch body from which tubular arms and legs dangle. A strappy messenger bag sports a teddy's round face on the front flap; similarly, zippered pencil cases boast smiley visages (a bunny joins the usual suspects here) and pop-up ears.



Beaming from the front of circular "roundie" bags are a koala and kitty cat. Turtle, octopus and owl are true hoots, as a shell-topped lunch box, a domed tote with tentacles and a wide-eyed rectangular book bag, respectively. Moving from animal to vegetable, there's a tiny purse in the shape of a toadstool, a cupcake drawstring snack pack with cherries dangling off I-cord ties, grinning carrot and tomato coin purses, and a quintet of apple cozies that nestle a crisp sphere so it doesn't get bruised before snacktime.



Bestseller Box

During the holiday week of December 31, 2012, classic-style primers (including perennial bestsellers from the *SNB* series) were among the hottest sellers on the knit charts.

Amazon Knitting and Crocheting

8. *Cast On, Bind Off*, by Lesley Ann Bestor (Storey)

10. *Teach Yourself Visually Crochet*, by Cecily Keim (Visual)

16. *Stitch & Bitch Crochet: The Happy Hooker*, by Debbie Stoller (Workman)

Barnes&Noble.com Knitting List

1. *Knitting in Circles*, by Nicky Epstein (Potter Craft)

5. *Knitting the Perfect Fit*, by Melissa Leapman (Potter Craft)

8. *Knit Red*, by Laura Zander (Sixth&Spring Books)



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At once novel and long established—June Hemmons Hiatt, in *The Principles of Knitting*, notes that they were being used as far back as the 1940s—ribbon and tape yarns are the paradox of the yarn world. The best part about them? Yarn companies always find ways to reinvent them, with beguiling results.

By Christina Behnke

Car-ribbon QUEEN

Hiatt describes ribbon yarns of the 1940s thusly: “The ribbon was wrapped carefully for every stitch so it would lie as flat and smooth as possible in the fabric,” which was then “carefully steam-pressed flat in finishing, giving the stitches an overlapping, scaly appearance.” A spool put-up and fine weight make **Sirene (#4)** (7 colors; 100% polyamide; 208yds/50g) from **Bergère de France** the perfect yarn for knitters looking to re-create the “absolutely luscious” vintage garments that Hiatt describes. Knit as regular yarn, however, it makes a drapery and surprisingly elastic fabric with multifaceted sparkle.

At the other end of the spectrum is **Mango Moon's Ragg Silk (#5)** (colors vary; 100% silk; 50yds), made of 100% recycled sari silk strips that are hand-sewn together by a group of Nepalese artisans. Colors vary based on what's available; our hank was full of beautifully coordinated pink and green jewel tones. Knitting with Ragg Silk is, quite literally, like knitting swaths of fabric. Thankfully, the silk content gives it a cool, smooth hand that flows easily. While knitting our swatch, we couldn't help but imagine how well a weighty, colorful throw would brighten up the living room.

While **Trendsetter Yarns'** name has become synonymous with innovation, its long-running ribbon **Dolcino (#6)** (30 colors; 75% acrylic, 25% nylon; 100yds/50g) is a true classic. Its runner threads are placed much closer together than

in typical railroad-constructed ribbons, making for a more substantial (yet still gauzy) strand that adapts easily to a variety of needle sizes. Large needles produce a light, chiffony fabric, while medium-sized needles yield a more sturdy fabric with lots of spring. While it knits like a breeze on blunter large needles, take care with sharper mid-sizes, which are wont to stab through the wide strand.

Part of ribbon yarns' charm is that they knit up irregularly, creating a texture that can only be achieved in hand knitting. **Tahki Yarns/ Tahki-Stacy Charles** further employs this feature with **Marina (#9)** (7 colors; 100% cotton; 55yds/50g), a ribbon made of raw-edged cotton jersey strips. Knit in stockinette, it creates a variably weathered patina that evokes the rugged romance of a Levi's commercial. We expect that like a good pair of jeans, any item knit in this yarn will improve with wear, the fabric getting ever softer and the frayed edges buffing to a velvety finish.

We've come to expect the avant-garde from **Habu Textiles**, and its **Wide Cotton Kasuri Gima (#1)** (7 hand-dyed colors; 100% cotton; 50yds/1oz) does not disappoint. Ten cotton threads, placed side by side, have been bonded together to create a wafer-thin yet extremely durable ribbon—so durable, in fact, that Habu recommends it as a warp yarn for weaving. This is a yarn for process, rather than product, knitters: Let (continued on page 42)



The National NeedleArts Association

BY PATTY PARRISH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

It's Survey Time Again

You can now take the 2013 State of Specialty NeedleArts survey at www.tnna.org. It is constructed to give us insight into how consumers and companies interact with their crafting, asking questions that range from whether customers use smart phones when shopping to what shop owners consider their most effective marketing efforts. This is the fourth time since 2005 we've run the survey; it has been reassuring to hear that TNNA members find the survey important to their businesses, using the results for forecasting, planning, trends and more.

We've made a few changes to serve you better. This year, for the first time, the survey—conducted, as in years past, by Hart Business Research—is customized for each enthusiast segment, which we hope will result in more relevant results. The needle-artist survey is segmented for six different primary crafters (knitters, crocheters, spinners, weavers, cross-stitchers and embroiderers/needlepointers); the retailer survey addresses three different types of shops (yarn, needlepoint and cross-stitch).

We question stitching enthusiasts about

their spending by retail segment: purchase decision making, projects, learning, demographics, participation in related crafts, social media use, types of products used. For retailers, we delve into the profitability and sustainability of their businesses with questions about sales, growth, profits, inventory, store size, pricing, best practices, marketing methods, obstacles, business education needs and inventory management. Regarding wholesalers, we are curious about sales by customer type, growth, best practices, marketing methods, trunk shows and other retail-support programs. All of the reports this year are more user-friendly, allowing you to read just the survey results for one segment if you choose.

We ask that you do the following to make the results as useful as possible:

- Complete the retailer survey. Contribute your experiences by filling out the survey right away. Go to www.tnna.org and click on the retailer survey link. The more retailers who participate, the more valuable the information for the entire industry.
- Promote the stitching enthusiasts' surveys.

Be sure the voice of your customer is included in the 2013 results. TNNA will send survey promotional blurbs to members in March/April. Please include them in your blog posts, Facebook postings, newsletters, e-newsletters and other communications to your customers.

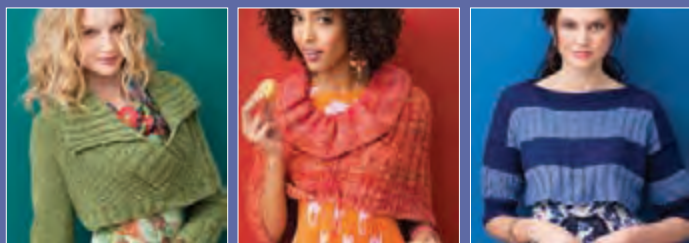
• Get the results. Attend the TNNA summer show in Columbus (June 22–24) and get an advance look at the results of each of the three surveys. Go to www.tnna.org under the resources and research tab to read the free executive summaries from 2010, 2007 and 2005. If you're a TNNA member, you can log in and read the full reports. And be sure to keep an eye out for the full 2013 study results in the fall. If you are not already a TNNA member, become one today so you can get the results and tools needed to either start your own business or support the one you already have.

TNNA, founded in 1974, is a professional organization representing wholesalers, manufacturers, distributors, designers, publishers and other companies supporting the needlearts industry. For more information, visit www.tnna.org or call (800) 889-8662.

The newest collection of fashion-forward knits from the best-selling author of *Hattitude* and *Cowl Girls*

In *Short Story*, popular knitwear designer Cathy Carron celebrates the hottest trend on the runway: cropped sweaters.

Knit in luxurious yarn and featuring an amazing array of creative shapes and stitch patterns, this cutting-edge collection of 35 designs has everything from cute cardis to tiny Ts to sexy shrugs, all perfect for layering with any look.



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Craft Yarn Council

BY MARY COLUCCI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Getting to Know Them

Are knitters and crocheters really that different? For the first time, the Craft Yarn Council decided to explore that question officially by restructuring its annual online research survey. In the survey, conducted in fall 2012, participants were asked whether they consider themselves primarily a knitter or a crocheter, or if they participate in both crafts equally. Of the 3,400-plus respondents, 43 percent indicated they are primarily crocheters and 36 percent identified themselves as knitters; 21 percent do both equally. Knitters are spread across every age group fairly evenly, except for the 45-to-54 group, where the numbers are slightly lower. By contrast, younger consumers, ages 18 to 34, identify themselves primarily as crocheters. Those in the 65-plus category are more likely to participate in both crafts.

There are many areas of close similarity among the groups. For instance, since they started practicing their respective crafts, 87 percent of all knitters and crocheters have taught their favorite fiber art to someone else, though knitters taught a few more people (12.6) than crocheters (7.8) did. Both groups hew closely in their charity work as well, though crocheters edge out knitters, with 60 percent of the former participating in charity stitching compared with 57 percent of the latter. People who knit and crochet equally taught more people (93 percent) and made more charity projects (65 percent) than those who solely knit or crochet.

The number of projects the individual crafting groups completed is also very similar. The mean number of projects that knitters made last year was 32.4; for crocheters, it was 34.7. For the third year in a row, scarves, hats, baby blankets and afghans were among the favorite projects among those surveyed. Hats and scarves were the most popular across all age groups. However, looking at primary knitters, we found that wraps/shawls and sweaters surpassed baby blankets and afghans as their third and fourth favorite projects, respectively.

Buying inspiration is in the eye of the beholder. For 82 percent of knitters, seeing a yarn they like motivates them to buy; for crocheters, seeing a project

sparks the motivation to buy yarn. When we asked respondents to rank the top three sources from which they are most likely to get project ideas, yarn company websites came out on top, with 46 percent, followed by social networking sites, with 40 percent, and knitting and crochet magazines, with 36 percent.

Again, when you look at the two groups more closely, differences are evident. For 52 percent of knitters, social networking sites like Ravelry are the most likely source for project ideas. For 54 percent of crocheters, it's yarn company websites. Knitters are more likely to purchase yarn every two to three months (41 percent), while 39 percent of crocheters are more likely to purchase yarn monthly, as are 41 percent of consumers who enjoy both crafts.

All three groups stated their primary reason for using the Internet is to find patterns (90 percent) and to get new project ideas (86 percent); this is true across all age groups. The next most frequent uses of the Internet are to watch how-to videos (54 percent), purchase yarn and supplies (52 percent) and seek advice (50 percent). Sixty-one percent of knitters say they purchase yarn and supplies online, compared with 43 percent of crocheters.

What bodes well for the industry is that 69 percent of all respondents plan to stitch up more projects this year, and a further 29 percent plan to make the same number. What's interesting is that the 18-to-24-year-olds are the most likely age group to do more, with 78 percent.

Because of the size of this study, we can project these trends across the industry to millions of crocheters and knitters nationwide. They'll be making more projects and, if 2012 is any indication, creating new customers by teaching even more people how to either knit or crochet, continuing the trend of years past. Research continues to reveal a passionate consumer. As one survey respondent said: "I love to knit and crochet. It's a stress-reliever. And I love to share my love of these hobbies with other people." Turns out, knitters and crocheters aren't so different after all.

The Craft Yarn Council was formed in 1981 to raise awareness about fibers. Visit www.craftyarncouncil.com or www.knitandcrochet.com for more information.



Ruffled Fingerless Mittens
by Marjorie Mitchell.
In Zealana AIR, A04, Natural.
Pattern available at zealana.com



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It's So Easy Being Green

Being eco-friendly not only appeals to customers; it can also help cut costs in your store.

BY CATHY RUMFELT

Have you ever considered the size of your store's environmental footprint? No doubt some of your customers already have. "More people are worried about sustainability-related issues than ever before," author Jacquie Ottman explains in her book *Green Marketing*. "The general public is beginning to comprehend the impact these issues will have on their lives...and is starting to act." As sustainability and environmental awareness become more important to consumers, there are easy steps you can take to make your store more eco-friendly—and at the same time save money.

Reuse

ReBelle, in Lexington, Kentucky, is the very model of an eco-friendly LYS. Owners Sarah Hood and Robyn Wade have ensured that almost every aspect of their store is green. "Sarah and I were environmentalists long before we opened a business," says Wade, "so keeping ReBelle as green as possible was a natural path for us." They searched out used store fixtures from local businesses, ultimately purchasing 25 percent of their displays in this way. Yarnology and More, in Van Buren, Arkansas, took the same route. "Rather than purchase new shelving, we brought in shelving—ranging from wood to metal to glass—that had been used before. It gives our store an eclectic style," explains owner Pamela Williams.

If your space is already established and you can't easily change your display fixtures, smaller steps can be just as meaningful. "I recommend that shops start with simple things, the things you do every day," says Wade.

Recycle

Allison Blevins, co-owner, with Christina Caspari, of Tangle in Grand Junction, Colorado, focuses simply on cutting as much waste as possible. "We recycle as much trash as we can: cardboard boxes, paper, plastic bags, plastics, metal," she says. If you can't recycle it, find a way to reuse it in the store. "All of the paper that would be trash gets used as scrap paper. We cut it in quarters and staple it into little pads," she explains.

Shipping materials can also be recycled or reused. "Most shops probably already recycle paper and cardboard waste, but the plastic bags that most yarn comes shipped in can be

recycled with plastic grocery bags at the supermarket," advises Robyn Wade.

Examine other frequently used items for potential savings. Stock recycled paper shopping bags instead of plastic, and give a bag only if a customer requests it. "Ask every single customer if she wants a bag. My experience is that when asked, fewer than a third will take one," says Wade.

Receipt paper also creates waste. At ReBelle, the co-owners buy BPA-free receipt paper and print only the receipts they need. "We don't print a credit card receipt for customers, only a register receipt. Doing so has probably saved 200 to 300 rolls of receipt paper since we opened, and that is a pretty substantial difference," Wade continues. You can also use recycled paper to print class schedules and signs. While it isn't always cheaper up-front, this small change will let your customers know you are committed to being green.

Allison Blevins admits, "Sometimes we spend a little more to be eco-friendly [using 100 percent recycled copy paper for class schedules and patterns] and other times we save money [by using, say, energy-saving fluorescent light bulbs]. Christina and I have always been willing to spend a bit more to be green, as environmental responsibility is a value we both share."

Reduce

Some LYSes choose to sell mostly eco-friendly yarns. Beth Elliott of Green Planet Yarns in Campbell, California, focuses her environmental efforts on her yarn selection. Inspired by her mother, who ran a yarn shop that sold only wool, she features only sustainable fibers in her store. "I decided to go back to my roots: natural fibers, undyed, naturally dyed, organic, recycled and domestic," says Elliott.

If you don't want to limit your yarn selection, there are other ways to make your yarn offerings more eco-friendly. Start a "yarn recycling" program to encourage people to reuse old skeins or donate them to a good cause. Allison Blevins explains, "We take donations and in turn disperse them to organizations in town that knit for charity."

Report

Making these changes in your store can also help your bottom line. "I think it is our duty to let customers know our intentions and the way we run our business," says Pamela Williams. "You find that many people seek out those who are like-minded. They want to promote local businesses and will shop with you more often if they are aware of the ways you are trying to help the community and the environment."

Going Green: Where to Start

If you start simple, making eco-friendly changes won't seem like a chore.

- **Turn down the heat.** The Department of Energy (DOE) recommends setting your shop thermostat at 68°F during the day in the winter and 10 to 15 degrees lower at night to use fewer resources and save up to 15 percent on your energy bill.
- **Change your incandescent light bulbs to compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs).** Energy Star has information about choosing the right bulb depending on whether you want a cool white light or a warm neutral light (www.energystar.gov). For more on low-energy lighting, refer to Daryl Brower's article "Seeing the Light," which appeared in the March 2011 issue of *Yarn Market News*.
- **Check into rebates from or initiatives with your electric company.** "Many electric companies have eco-initiatives," says Robyn Wade of ReBelle. "Ask if you can get reimbursed for some or all of the cost." The DOE also lists energy tax credits and rebates by state (www.energy.gov/savings).
- **Consolidate your orders.** Beth Elliott of Green Planet Yarns limits her ordering when she can. "I regularly place rather large orders, space permitting, to reduce the carbon footprint of the delivery of items," she explains. "Additionally, I choose to buy most of my notions and supplies from a nearby distributor to save on shipping and again lessen the carbon footprint."
- **Tell your customers what you (and the vendors you work with) are doing to help the environment.** "Emphasize the good," says Robyn Wade. "Create signage letting your customers know what positive things you and the various companies you deal with are doing."

Cumming, Georgia-based writer **Cathy Rumfelt** thinks CFL bulbs are just fine to knit by.



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Eyes on the Prize

Win or lose, applying for a small business award can reward an entrepreneur with renewed focus.

BY DARYL BROWER

Every year, organizations big and small, local and national, hand out awards to entrepreneurs who've managed to make their start-ups stand out from the crowd. Whether it's coast-to-coast recognition from big-name sponsors like American Express or a regional shout-out from your town's chamber of commerce, the benefits of being a winner are obvious: great PR, bragging rights, a smart plaque to hang on the door, perhaps a few dollars to reinvest in your business. But what about those who don't make the final cut? Can any good be gleaned from the time and effort it takes to fill out applications, pull together presentations and otherwise tout the praises of your shop or business? For the craft-based entrepreneurs we talked to, the answer is a resounding yes.

"It's a very insightful experience," says Blue Sky Alpacas founder Linda Niemeyer, who made it to the semifinal stages of the Ernst & Young Entrepreneurial Winning Women Program in 2012. "[The application process] really helped refresh and clarify Blue Sky's objectives." Jane Patrick of Schacht Spindle Company, a TNNA 2011 Business Innovation Award winner, is similarly sold on the benefits. "Applying for the award helped us think more intentionally about our Cricket program and its importance in helping new dealers promote weaving," she says. "Even though this was a program we were already running, applying for the award solidified some of our thinking."

Organizers at Make Mine a Million \$ Business, a contest in which female entrepreneurs compete for business development packages, pitch their application process as a "step-by-step guide to help you clarify what you want for your business, what you need to get it and how you'll use those tools to fulfill your plan." (Nell Merlino, the founder of this program, is the keynote speaker at this month's *YMN* Smart Business Conference in Baltimore.) Quilt shop owner Nancy Dill, founder of QuiltWoman.com and a top-ten finalist and award winner in the 2009 Make Mine a Million \$ competition, says that's exactly what the experience of applying

for the award brought her. Dill spent months filling out questionnaires and supplying financial information. "They want to know everything—your sales projections, your actuals, your goals for the business," she recalls. "We joked at the competition that the organizers know more about our financials than we do." But for Dill and others who've been through an award application process, organizing all that information is invaluable for the bigger-picture view it provides. "It makes you think and plan," explains Dill.

"It forced me to take a hard look at my numbers and my goals and to see where I could go with them. Even if I hadn't made it to the top ten, the process itself would have been well worth the time and effort."

Brooke Nico, co-owner of Kirkwood Knittery and a 2012 recipient of TNNA's Business Innovation Award, and Linda Niemeyer both liken the application process to writing a business plan (though "not as painful," jokes Niemeyer). Reworking that plan can help a shop or business owner pinpoint what's going right—or wrong. "You can know instinctively that something is or isn't working," says Niemeyer, "but actually putting it down on paper somehow makes it more tangible." Business experts advise revisiting a business plan every six months and updating it to a fit your current situation. "As an LYS we do this before each buying season in terms of assessing what yarns are still on the shelves and what cubbyholes are empty," explains Nico. "However, we don't often reflect on what our outflows are, or the intangible P&L of non-inventory items like classes, advertising or special events. Even something as simple as the ratio of reordering small versus large bags can provide useful information you didn't realize you needed to know."

Nico points out that for most stores, the original five-year plan is based on conjecture. "[The business] has no history yet, so you base your plan on marketwide trends and hope they satisfy the bank," she explains. The award application process, she points out, requires retracing those steps, this time with real data. "You can see, quantified, what you guessed right or wrong and then draw on those real-life

observations to fine-tune what went right and change what you need to." Reflecting on such matters is beneficial, but it's a task many LYS owners put on the back burner. "It's not so easy to get away from the day-to-day details and look expansively at what one is doing that can have a future positive impact on the business," says Jane Patrick. Applying for a grant or loan is a catalyst for that reflection. "Applications have deadlines," points out Nico. "You can't put it off. It forces you to make the time."

Nancy Dill says that the biggest payoff from her award application experience was the energy and fresh perspective she soaked up from fellow contestants. "I listened, I was listened to and I learned," she says. "We all had different backgrounds and businesses, but our basic issues were very similar. We all face the same challenges every day. It was just so great to trade ideas and give each other support." Nico agrees: "It leads you to examine other organizations to see what has made their businesses a success," she says. "There's so much to learn."

Winning Entries

Award opportunities for small businesses abound. A handful of national award programs are listed below; for local opportunities, check with your local chamber of commerce, networking groups, newspapers and other business-oriented organizations.

- **Dream Big Small Business of the Year Award:** www.uschambersummit.com/award
- **Ernst & Young Entrepreneurial Winning Women:** www.ey.com/US/en (search "Entrepreneurial Winning Women")
- **Make Mine a Million \$ Business Award/Count Me In:** www.makemineamillion.org
- **NAFE Women of Excellence Awards:** www.nafe.com/?service=vp&page/1225
- **SCORE Awards:** www.score.org
- **Small Business Week Awards:** www.nationalsmallbusinessweek.com/awards
- **TNNA Business Innovation Award:** www.tnna.org/?page=BizinnovationAward



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Why Sell When You Can Rent?

Some yarn shops are testing an equipment-rental program for customers. Can such a program work for you?

BY KIM WERKER

One of the selling points we mention when someone expresses interest in learning to knit or crochet is the low cost of entry: All you need are inexpensive needles or a hook and some yarn. Of course, many yarn crafters are keen to be introduced to pricier tools and equipment after they master the basics. We know that affordability is a powerful magnet in attracting crafters-to-be to knitting and crochet 101 classes, but what can we do to protect these new stitchers from the sticker shock that inevitably comes with related pursuits like spinning and weaving?

One approach is to launch an equipment-rental program. Anna Hunter, owner of Baaad Anna's in Vancouver, British Columbia, debuted her Community Craft Rentals program last April. Her equipment includes two drum carders, two spinning wheels, a knitter's loom and a ball winder and swift set. "People kept asking if they could try out a spinning wheel before buying one," she explains. "They also expressed interest in using my carder because they didn't have space for one at home. Others told me that the purchase of a swift or ball winder was too much of an investment for something they weren't going to use all the time. I started researching to see if anyone else was renting out these tools and couldn't find this type of program—at least not one this extensive—in the city."

The logistics behind such a program are as follows: A shop purchases tools and equipment at wholesale rates and then charges customers a lending fee. (To protect your investment, consider requiring renters to take a class on how to properly operate the equipment before they use it for the first time.) By charging a per-use fee, a store can potentially make more money off a single item than it would by selling that item at retail. As a bonus, renters may choose to purchase the big-ticket item through your store after renting it for a time.

Renters at Baaad Anna's must sign an agreement and leave a deposit and credit card number for each weekly rental. She allows customers to reserve particular equipment for a specific time and keeps a waiting list for high-demand

items. To set fees, Hunter researched the prices guilds across North America charge to rent similar pieces, but results were so inconsistent that she relied mostly on intuition. Demand has been high enough that she hasn't had to store unused equipment in the shop.

Other shops rent equipment by the hour, with the tools remaining in the store. Says Carol Secord of Wabi Sabi in Ottawa, Ontario, "When I was a stay-at-home mom, I thought it would be great to have a place I could go to learn and work on a project. I wouldn't have to invest in all of the equipment and find space to store it in an already full and busy home." Her store rents rigid heddle looms and spinning wheels in a dedicated room by the hour; it also has a dye kitchen and classroom space available for rent. Though Wabi Sabi's rental program, which Secord launched in 2009, isn't as popular yet as she'd hoped it would be, she plans to step up marketing this year. She's counting on a new sewing lounge in town to help firmly establish the concept of hourly rentals in her customers' minds.

The Net Loft in Cordova, Alaska, has had a successful loom-lending program in place for twenty years. Owner Dotty Widmann structures beginner weaving classes so that students complete a scarf during the first class, then borrow the rigid heddle loom and accessories for another four days, going home with enough yarn to make a second scarf on their own. All costs are covered by the initial \$60 class fee, and most students return to buy more yarn. The class lessons are immediately reinforced by what the weaving students do at home, and many students eventually decide to purchase a loom of their own.

More informally, Widmann invites weavers to use the floor looms in the store when they're not in use for a class, as long as the weavers purchase yarn in the shop. "It's always nice to have them weaving in the class space—which is also shop space—when customers come in. It's inviting for people to see, it creates a lot of interest, and it helps attract new students. I don't charge weavers to use the little floor looms in the shop."

The three stores profiled here based their individualized rental programs on their class

offerings, customers' interests, and shop and classroom space. If you're interested in starting your own program, examining these three aspects of your business would be a good place to start.

Getting 'Em In Gear

Before you initiate an equipment rental program in your own shop, solidify your answers to the following questions:

- Which crafts other than knitting and crochet are you interested in supporting in your store?
- Do any of your staff know how to spin on a wheel or spindle?
- What kinds of equipment do your customers ask to borrow?
- Do your class offerings complement the equipment you plan to lend out?
- Will you require renters to take an introductory class before they can rent certain items? Can you teach such a class?
- Does your local weaving guild already hold their monthly meetings in your space?
- Which type of rental program will work best for your store—an in-house program or one that allows renters to take equipment home?
- Do you have space to store items that are not out on rental?
- How much of a deposit will you require for each type of rental?
- How will you handle lost or damaged equipment?
- Will you develop a formal rental agreement? (Search for templates online.)
- For how long will you allow a customer to keep a piece of rented equipment?
- How much will you charge?
- Will you allow renters to apply some or all of their rental fees to the purchase of the same piece of equipment? Will you establish a time limit on such a program?

Kim Werker is a writer, editor and speaker who plans to learn to weave on a rented loom in the very near future. Follow her progress at www.kimwerker.com.

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Pinning It All Together

Pinterest can help you connect with your customers and boost your business.

BY CATHY RUMFELT

Put a pin in it," that classic business stall tactic, has undergone a 21st-century transformation. Pinterest—a virtual bulletin board on which one can visually "pin" photographic bookmarks to use as project inspiration—has captured the hearts of creative web surfers, so much so that you've likely heard more than one customer say she found her motivation there. (Knitters, crocheters and other crafters were early adopters of the URL, which launched in 2010.) While Pinterest is a fantastic place to post personal ideas and patterns, it can also be utilized as a business tool once you learn to leverage its unique properties.

What makes Pinterest unique is twofold: First, the visual aspect of the site makes bookmarking more eye-catching and user-friendly than it is on a site where you collect links without images. It's perfect for posting color combinations or comparing patterns side by side. Secondly, Pinterest creates a community of pinners; members can see and follow each other's pin boards.

This sharing feature helps spread trends quickly: A knitter pins a pattern and yarn possibilities; fellow knitters following her board like what they see and re-pin it. Soon stitchers everywhere are seeing this pattern/yarn combo—and heading into shops to buy the fiber. Amber Corcoran and Jaime Jennings often see the results of Pinterest's viral reach at their store, Fancy Tiger Crafts in Denver. "Many customers come into the shop with ideas for projects that they've seen on Pinterest. We love how a beautiful photo can inspire folks to make things by hand," Corcoran says.

Jimmy Beans Wool in Reno, Nevada, has been using Pinterest almost from the start. Kristen Ashbaugh Helmreich, the shop's social media and design specialist, turned her own personal experience on the site into a business marketing tool. When she started, she didn't really have a plan: "I went about it really organically and just pinned stuff that seemed interesting to me," explains Helmreich. "Eventually we started to notice more and more people were on Pinterest, and our followers grew and grew."

As JBW's Pinterest following expanded, Helmreich began tracking the store's stats. "Most quarters we see 30 to 50 percent growth on

Pinterest," she says. "It's now surpassed Facebook as the largest driver of traffic to our website."

Pinterest for Business Interests

Last November, Pinterest officially began hosting business accounts to encourage companies to promote their brands on the site. With a business account, a verified store can create boards to showcase anything—patterns, yarn, notions, style ideas—then link to a dedicated website, where surfers can find out how to buy said products. Though financial gains can be made through Pinterest, the site's true benefits tend to be loftier in nature. The owners of Fancy Tiger Crafts use their Pinterest page for inspiration: "A lot of our customers follow us and re-pin our projects and ideas, which in turn will inspire them to visit the store and start a new project," explains Jaime Jennings. "It also helps, when people pin pictures of our projects or products from our blog, to advertise the shop; so many new people have found out about us this way."

Helmreich sees the opportunity to build community among customers in other ways as well: "We just pin what's interesting to us—DIY stuff, knitting and crochet patterns, recipes, sewing, fashion, baby and kids' stuff. We can share common interests easily and quickly," she explains. "About 10 percent of what we pin is from our own site. It's interesting though—much of the content on Pinterest that links to our site was originally pinned by our customers, not us. We see Pinterest as advertisement, of course, but for the most part it's just a really great opportunity for us to engage with our customers and vendors in a way that is visual and concise."

Crazy Girl Yarn Shop, which has two locations, in Coralville and Cedar Falls, Iowa, also uses Pinterest as a business tool. Ann Rushton, the Coralville store manager, describes how the shops use the site: "We like to pin pictures of the items we carry, as well as different patterns and finished objects that we think will excite our customers. It's a great tool to use to see what's hot and trending out there in the knitting world." It also allows customers to see the yarns you carry in your store and lets them easily re-pin the images on their own boards when they are planning a project.

While you can encourage customers to

follow your store's Pinterest page, you can also follow them back. Doing so allows you to see what they are interested in in a broader context and can help build a deeper community. "Observing customers' pinning habits and interests gives us ideas for generating content for both Facebook and Twitter as well as our blog," says Helmreich. The Pinterest for Business site suggests collaborating with other pinners or asking for feedback on pins to create a conversation with your customers—the best way to find out how to serve them.

Get Pinned: Making Pinterest Work for Your Shop

• See what other businesses are doing.

Pinterest for Business has its own introductory page (business.pinterest.com) and a pin board (pinterest.com/pinterest/pinterest-for-business). Two of the most popular yarn-industry businesses on Pinterest are Jimmy Beans Wool (pinterest.com/JimmyBeansWool) and Plymouth Yarn (pinterest.com/plymouthyarn).

• Post more than just inventory.

Kristen Ashbaugh Helmreich of Jimmy Beans Wool sees the value in posting a variety of things to create community: "Pinterest is a great way to show people that we are not all yarn, all the time at Jimmy Beans. Like them, we have other interests too."

• Use the visuals to promote your store.

Show your customers the beautiful things you carry with boards for yarn, notions and other items you sell.

• Link to Pinterest on your store website.

Include a "Follow Me" button to increase your followers. The "Pin It" button encourages users to pin your content themselves; put it next to products on your website. Buttons and widgets to promote Pinterest can be found at pinterest.com/about/goodies.

Cathy Rumfelt is a writer living in Cumming, Georgia. She pins patterns, recipes and vacation ideas.

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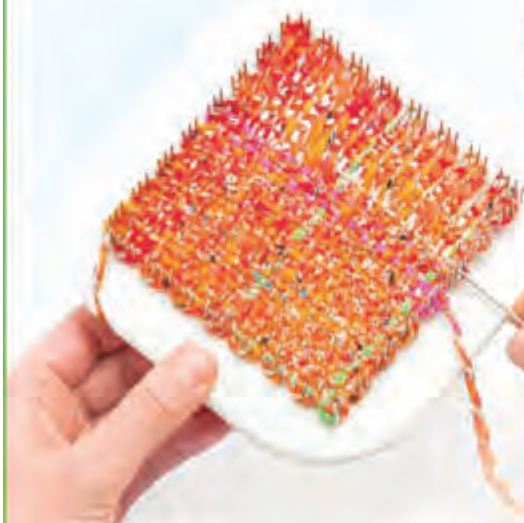
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Overtime Overview

The lowdown on extra compensation and little perks that can help keep employees happy and your business healthy.

BY MAYA MACKOWIAK ELSON

A tough economy affects everyone from business owners to part-time employees. Today's workers are putting in longer hours for the same or sometimes even less pay, which means that an increasing number of retailers are dealing with unhappy staff, business difficulties and, in the extreme, court battles. Yarn shops are not immune to the shifting expectations placed on American workers. Whether your employees are working extra hours at holiday events, doing inventory or posting on the shop's Facebook page from home, it's important to consider how these added duties affect their compensation, for the sake of the law, good business and morale.

By the Hour

First and foremost, as with any aspect of your business, it's important to familiarize yourself with the law. Labor laws are set by both federal and state governments, so they will vary depending on where you set up shop. According to the U.S. Department of Labor and the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), which establishes minimum wage, overtime pay and other labor concerns for full- and part-time workers, any hours worked beyond the standard 40 by an hourly worker are considered overtime. FLSA requires overtime hours to be paid at a rate of one and a half times the regular pay rate. For example, an employee who normally makes \$8 per hour would receive \$12 per hour for overtime.

Most salaried workers—executives, administrative professionals, outside salespeople and those who make more than \$455 per week, to name a few—are exempt from overtime pay because of their employment category or the nature of their job duties. But there are exceptions, and determinations can be complicated. It's best to check FLSA requirements for your specific salaried employees' situations to determine if they qualify for overtime. If they do, the overtime pay rate is the same as for hourly workers: one and a half times the average hourly rate, as figured from the salary.

Piece rate employees are those who are paid a fixed rate for each action performed or unit produced, regardless of how long it takes them to complete their jobs. This would include class instructors, sample knitters or a

tech specialist who comes in to set up your computer system. As long as a piece rate employee is not doing work outside the agreed-upon task, extra pay is not legally required.

Overtime pay can be an enormous business cost, so it's important to manage it well. Many yarn shops avoid overtime pay completely by sticking with part-time staffers who only ever work part time or by asking salaried staff to cover any overtime work needs.

Bonus Round

Beyond your legal obligations, you may want to compensate hourly and salaried employees alike for their above-and-beyond work. "All of our employees get a year-end bonus," said Kathy Elkins, owner of Webs in Northampton, Massachusetts. "It is based on how long they have been with us and how they positively contributed to the company over the course of the year."

At Jimmy Beans Wool in Reno, Nevada, employees are given positive feedback throughout the year. "We seldom wait until someone's annual review to provide feedback, and we often give small gifts—gift cards for dinner, movies and treats—anytime we see that an employee is doing a really great job," said Bethany Steiner, director of operations.

For a business like a yarn shop, bonuses and gifts aren't likely to offer a tax benefit. But it is worth keeping good records of such things and reviewing them with your accountant. You may find that bonus gifts are tax deductible.

The majority of yarn shops are small operations, run by the owner and a shoestring staff, and the legal requirements for extra pay rarely apply. However, offering little perks isn't just something to do because you are a nice boss; showing employees you appreciate their hard work can be good for your business, too.

When employees feel appreciated, the recognition has a positive effect on their work. According to a Gallup Daily poll, "Research has shown that engaged employees are more productive employees.... [They] are more profitable, more customer-focused and more likely to withstand temptations to leave."

Linda Carter of Retail Management Advisors, a Texas-based company that helps specialty retail businesses be more effective, says motivated

employees are one of the most important, manageable factors contributing to the success of a store. Simply spending more time with your employees, consciously trying to bring out their best and helping them develop leadership talent and knowledge, makes them feel appreciated and, thus, motivated. Other types of special compensation, like holiday bonuses, or simple extras, like free lunches or ice cream on a hot day, are also appreciated.

"We tell our staff all the time that our success is their success," says Kathy Elkins. "[My husband] Steve and I may be the owners, but we very much believe we are all in this together."

Compensation Education

Want to learn more about labor laws, overtime and other pay issues? Check out these government resources, business research companies and human resources blogs for crucial info and helpful insight:

- **Fair Labor Standards Act.** Review the entire document at the US department of Labor website, www.dol.gov/compliance/laws/comp-flsa.htm.
- **Department of Labor overtime calculator.** If you find yourself in an out-of-the-ordinary overtime situation, this calculator can help. www.dol.gov/elaws/otcalculator.htm
- **Compensation Cafe.** A blog about all things compensation, with tips and creative thinking about "pay." www.compensationcafe.com
- **World at Work.** This nonprofit professional association tracks compensation and other tools for retaining workers. It offers its members education, research, surveys and networking opportunities. www.worldatwork.org
- **Daniel Pink.** The author of the best-selling book *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us* writes an inspiring blog about many aspects of running a business, including compensation issues. www.danpink.com
- **Effortless HR.** A comprehensive blog covering a range of issues relating to small businesses, especially labor laws and employment. www.effortlesshr.com

Maya Mackowiak Elson is a writer in Brooklyn. She wishes her work perks included more free lunches.

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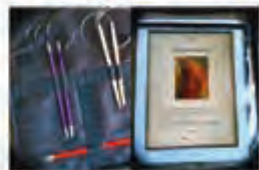
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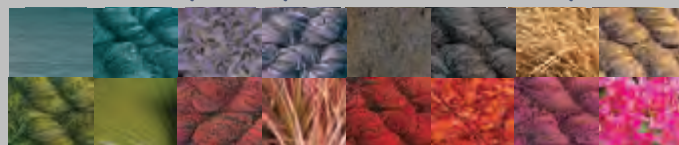
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Knitting in Beirut

BY LINDSAY MANZELLA

Beirut is not what you would call a crafty city: There are no super-stores such as Jo-Ann's or Michaels, and there are virtually no small specialty shops devoted to specific crafts such as scrapbooking, quilting or knitting. What you will find are hole-in-the-wall shops jam-packed floor to ceiling with everything from buttons and yarn to ribbons and seasonal decorations. Often unorganized and overcrowded, these shops make finding just what you're looking for quite a chore. Still, with some persistence you can unearth needles and yarn in shops tucked away across the city.

While most Lebanese who grew up in the mountains near the city can remember a mother or grandmother knitting hats and sweaters for the whole family, the tradition of knitting never really made it down to the capital as the population became increasingly urban. In Beirut there is a lingering perception that knitting is old-fashioned. Doha Sabbah, a new yet devoted fan of knitting, says, "Some of my friends make fun of me and relate me to grannies because I am knitting constantly. But honestly, it is the one thing I do with pleasure."

In Beirut you won't find many people knitting in coffee shops or cafés, though you may see the occasional older woman sitting outside the family shop with needles in hand. While it may not be the norm in Beirut, British

expat Claire Rees likes to knit in public. "You get some funny looks sometimes. I've had guys come up to me wanting to watch me knit, saying their grandmas did that, and women have taken my knitting off me to work a few rows. It's a good conversation starter—or stopper, as some people think I'm just old before my time."

When Rees moved to Beirut four years ago, she hoped to find a knitting

community; she had taken up the hobby on her own two years earlier while living in Amman, Jordan. After searching on Ravelry and asking around in vain, she decided to start her own knitting circle. "Really, it was just a group of friends and acquaintances who met at each other's houses to eat, knit and drink wine," she says.

Doha Sabbah, on the other hand, has found her knitting community at Beirut's only dedicated yarn shop, y.knot. Most evenings you can find her sitting at the big work table in the back of the shop, working on her latest project and chatting with a lively group of regulars. "A year ago I was passing through Saifi Village and discovered that y.knot was teaching knitting, so I decided to take lessons. It was like a dream come true," Sabbah says. "I have been spending most of my days there ever since."

Located in an upscale downtown neighborhood, y.knot was originally conceived as a boutique store selling yarn and finished knitted products. Owner Yildiz Diab had the idea for the shop one afternoon while chatting with her niece and complaining about how hard it was to find baby items that weren't



PHOTOGRAPHS BY LINDSAY MANZELLA

made of acrylic or mass-produced. After opening in 2006, y.knot evolved into a social place where people come to knit and chat. "In

Beirut, knitting is a niche market that was not being served. Y.knot was a new concept here, not only because of the products we sell but because of the welcoming atmosphere of the shop," explains managing director Hiba Shaaban. Although y.knot has proved a popular hangout, it is still the only shop in Beirut that offers a space in which to socialize while knitting.

The store specializes in high-quality yarn from Europe and the U.S. including Rowan, Adrifil, Anny Blatt and Lion Brand; most other local shops sell yarn brands from Turkey, Syria and Egypt, which are mainly acrylic or wool blends. With the high cost of reliable shipping to Lebanon, Internet purchases become prohibitive, making y.knot the only way for locals to get their hands on a large selection of quality yarn. "There aren't a great number of places to buy yarn," confirms Rees. "Y.knot has all the brands. I go there to treat myself when I'm looking for something really luxurious."

One of y.knot's goals is to revive the tradition of hand knitting and crochet throughout the country. By featuring modern and fresh knitted designs in the shop, Diab hopes to attract sophisticated shoppers looking for something different. The shop also tries to gain exposure for knitting as a hobby by participating in World Wide Knit in Public Day and by hosting a yearly Knit and Chat Week in the store, with daily events aimed at getting people knitting. "We market the events on social media, which brings in more knitters than just our usual customers," says Shaaban. It is during events such as these, she continues, that "friendships are formed between knitters. They help each other, swap ideas and even make the same projects."

But perhaps the best way to revive the tradition of knitting is to create a new generation of knitters. The store offers classes for beginners, which have been very popular, as well as drop-in classes for knitters needing help with a particular project. There are even classes for children offered most week-ends. "I am eager to tell my clients about the importance of teaching their children a craft," says Diab. "By doing so they will offer them a lifelong gift, one of patience, focus and serenity. In this age of consumerism and limited attention spans, this is the blessing of never having to say 'I'm bored.'"

Lindsay Manzella teaches English at International College in Beirut and occasionally engages in crafty pursuits such as knitting and sewing.

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Long Island Livestock

Yaphank, New York

BY DARYL BROWER

You can't get to Lima via the Long Island Expressway. But not far off that gridlocked stretch of road, which serves one of the most densely populated areas in the New York tristate region, you'll see a sight straight out of the remotest Peruvian Highland—llamas grazing on green pastures. "They definitely get the conversation going," says Tabbethia Haubold, owner of Long Island Livestock Co., of the 20-strong camelid herd on her 17-acre spread in Suffolk County. "People are really curious about the animals and surprised by the beauty of the fiber they produce."

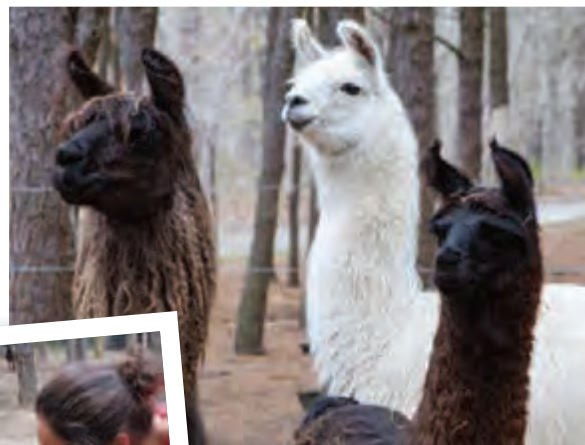
This fiber has become Haubold's calling card in the yarn world. Hand-spun in small batches, Long Island Livestock's skeins are undeniably gorgeous and wonderful to knit with. They're also hard to come by, available only through direct sales at fiber festivals and the occasional in-store trunk show. "We don't currently wholesale yarn," explains Haubold. "Keeping the production limited and local is what makes the yarn

to llamas that were brought in to protect the resident flock of sheep. "I fell completely in love with them," she says. Smitten with the animals' smarts and personality, Haubold began breeding, selling and showing llamas on the farm she owns with her husband, Christopher Magee.

She also began a career as a professional shearer, spending March through June traveling to farms along the eastern seaboard to separate llamas, alpacas and sheep from their woolly coats. On one of those visits, a client asked her if she'd like to learn to spin. "I didn't grow up knitting or crocheting and really knew nothing about where and how the fleeces I was shearing became yarn," she says. "But I figured I'd give it a try." That turn at the wheel spun Haubold's career path in a new direction. "I started thinking about all the yarns I could design from the animals I've shorn," she says.

So using fiber from her farm and others (she shears more than 1,000 animals a season), Haubold began a custom-spinning service, designing small batches of yarn—no more than 20 to 40 skeins at a pop—and selling the hanks at fiber fairs. A sales stint at a yarn shop helped her better understand the business, and she freely admits that the whole venture has been one long learning curve. LIL's undyed yarns incorporate fibers from a variety of llama and alpaca breeds, along with the occasional sheep or rabbit. "Sometimes I'll blend in a bit of silk, bamboo or nylon, but we try to keep it as all-natural as possible," she explains. The yarns are tagged with the number of like skeins produced and a picture of the animal it came from. "It gives the knitter a sense of how individual it is," Haubold says. "It's also a fun way for the knitter—and the recipient of the final garment [the tags are designed to be reusable]—to make a connection to the animal."

Connecting knitters to the animals that supply their yarn is another of Long Island Livestock's goals. "I think most knitters understand why merino is special, and they are a little knowledgeable about alpacas, but most of them are surprised to find out what a llama can produce—there are so



many varieties, and they all have different qualities." The outreach goes beyond fiber enthusiasts, as the farm runs regular programs for schools, scout troops and even senior centers. "We bring the animals to them or they come to us; we do shearing demonstrations, take them hiking with the llamas, you name it,"

Haubold explains. Yarn stores are also included in the venues her llamas have visited. "They travel well. And giving people the chance to interact with the animals helps them understand more about the ways both the animal and the fiber can be used." Haubold plans to increase those ways, with LIL's Shepherdess collection of all-natural lanolin-based skincare products as well as felted soaps in llama and wool varieties, playfully called Llama Loofas and Woolly Washers. Rovings in a variety of fibers are another wholesale item, and a line of patterns to support the yarns is in the works.

Long Island Livestock is also engaging the next generation of fiber enthusiasts with the company's youth show team. In addition to showing the animals they care for at various fairs and events, the nine teens on the team work on various aspects of the business: educational programs, packaging and labeling, sales at shows and even some hand-felting work. "It is a mutually beneficial relationship and a business model that I hope to continue to expand," says Haubold. "There's so much for everyone to learn."



special." She does, however, wholesale roving and conduct cash-and-carry LYS shows for yarn (store owners get a percentage of what's sold); a wholesale line may happen down the road. "We want to maintain that personal connection to what we design and distribute," she says.

A new knitter, Haubold followed a not-so-traveled path from field to fiber. "My background is in animal science," she explains. "And in that world there's a great disconnect between the breeding and raising of the animals and the making of things from their fiber." After earning a degree from Delaware Valley College in Pennsylvania, Haubold began working on an education farm run by Cornell University, where she was introduced

Snapshot

Long Island Livestock Company

125 Gerard Road, Yaphank, New York 11980

(631) 680-6721; www.lilivestockco.com

Years in business: Founded in 1996

Products: Limited-run llama and llama-blend yarns, rovings in several fiber types, felted soaps, lanolin-based lotions and salves, ceramic yarn bowls, stitch markers, patterns, hand-felting eco-friendly cat toys, socks, woven wool handbags, handwoven llama rugs, Pendleton Woolen Mills-produced llama/wool blankets and a complete line of llama-down bedding (pillows, comforters, mattress toppers)

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The Earnings Report

No one goes into business expecting not to get paid. But retail can be a tricky game. Is owning a yarn shop a truly viable way to make a living? LYSOs from across the nation weigh in on whether they pay themselves—or not.

By Cheryl Krementz

As a yarn shop owner, do you pay yourself a salary? It's a personal, awkward, intrusive question to ask. But to gauge the sustainability of the yarn industry as we know it, it's an important one. When posed recently on *YMN's* Facebook page and to a trio of retailer groups on Ravelry, the question inspired a clutch of deflected-with-humor comments like "What is this 'paycheck' of which you speak?" "Does buying myself lunch and coffee from the bakery next door count?" And the clincher, "Wait ... I'm supposed to pay myself?"

Yes, you are. And there are yarn retailers who do. But it appears that there are more who can't, or don't, for a host of reasons. Quippy social-media responses aside, our query opened a thought-provoking conversation about how and why LYSOs are or are not paying themselves. There is no across-the-board earnings formula or magic number to strive for; general business advice is just that, general, telling entrepreneurs to pay themselves "whatever's left" or "as much as you can." Though each owner's salary situation is as unique

as his or her shop, retailers do fall into three categories: those who consistently pay themselves, those who sporadically pay themselves and those who have never paid themselves.

Those Who Consistently Pay Themselves

"It's important to pay yourself. It irks me to hear folks say that they can't; I feel like they are being martyrs."—anonymous LYSO

"This is a business for me, not a hobby. I have to pay myself; if I can't, it's not a viable thing for me to do," says Mandy Petersen, who started paying herself as soon as the doors to her Chicago LYS Windy Knitty opened two years ago. "I will take this step, because if I don't, how can I expect my

business to be taken seriously?"

As at all yarn shops, profits fluctuate, which can make the act of writing herself that monthly check "scary." (Because Windy Knitty is an LLC, Petersen takes a "draw" on the business rather than earning a traditional paycheck like those her employees receive biweekly; for more on the discrete owner-pay implications of LLCs and corporations, see "Earn, Pass or Draw," page 38). One month in particular, March 2012, was tenuous enough for Petersen to eschew her regular draw, an aberration she has since corrected by partially paying herself back for those lost wages. She also recently gave herself a 4 percent cost-of-living increase. "It's not much," she says, "but symbolically and personally it means a lot."

At the Yarn Underground in Moscow, Idaho, co-owners Shelley Stone and Marisa Gibley also recently upped their pay—from \$2 an hour to \$5. They pay themselves only for the time they physically split at the shop, four hours per day, five days a week, not for extra time they put in at home handling the books, social-media marketing and the like. The women, each with a pair of small children at home, have husbands with viable incomes and a willingness to help with child-care, which affords them the opportunity to subsist on a less-than-minimum-wage pay grade.

Stone and Gibley bootstrapped the opening of the store, a two-person LLC, over Thanksgiving weekend 2010 and started taking their small draw three months later. "Two dollars an hour is better for morale than nothing," says Stone. A salary was always part of their ideal business plan, in which 50 percent of the profits would go toward inventory, 25 percent to bills (rent, utilities, etc.) and 25 percent to everything else, including paying \$8 an hour to a new part-timer who works in the shop on the one day the partners do not. Stone endeavors to keep the owners' draw at 10 percent of that last quarter of the pie, 5 percent each.

"Yes, we are frugal," Stone says. "We opened with homemade shelving and used furniture. But our customers care more that we have a welcoming sitting area than the fact that the couch is old." Their raise was

possible after they paid off the business's only loan, rendering the shop debt-free. By starting small and sticking to her "business sense"—keeping costs to "the essentials," paying ahead for product, never incurring interest or late fees, taking advantage of free shipping and, when not buying in bulk, ordering only enough "to get by until the next time you can get free shipping"—the partners have been able to grow the business exponentially while still taking a nominal salary. "I do think it's sad that I pay my employee more than I pay myself," but in time she sees her salary reaching the level of "half a house payment," says Stone, whose grand plan is to sell the store well down the road as a retirement nest egg. "In the end I think the shop and the name will be profitable."

Ball & Skein & More in Cambria, California, founded in 1978, is an example of a shop that has eased into its profitability over the years. The shop's third set of owners, Oz and Kris Barron, bought the LYS as an S corporation in 2009, with enough savings set aside to coast a "good two years" without taking a salary. After a year of "growing like mad, our accountant said, 'It's time to start paying yourself; otherwise, it's not a business,'" says Oz. Three months later, they took their first cut. The married couple now rely on the salary earned as proprietors. "This is how we eat," he says. "We live on the money from the store. We get a paycheck, and it's the same every paycheck."

That amount was originally based on projected profit, a monthly figure, Oz says, "I have to hit because my payroll demands it—and I'm the payroll. It really focuses you." Cash in the bank from strong sales periods helps get the couple through the inevitable lean months. By the end of the year, Oz says they strive to net 20 percent of the shop's profit, "a reasonable goal for a well-run small-business profit margin." To get there, the Barrons spread out their buying dollars among 90 different vendors, which allows them to pay more nimbly and preserve cash flow. They also, says Oz, "question every single buying decision: 'What is this costing me?' 'Who am I selling it to?' 'How am I going to sell it?' We constantly reevaluate, even yarns that are selling well. Sometimes reps have been stunned that we've not reordered certain popular yarns, but it was time to move on. Because if that buying decision doesn't earn money for the store, how do we get paid?"

"The previous two owners of the shop ran the store like a business, so that 30 years later people come and say, 'I used to go to this yarn store. It's still here; isn't that cool?'" he continues. "We feel an obligation to this community of fiber fans to run the shop like a business so that it's here in the future. We owe it to them." And by understanding that they owe themselves the fruits of their labor, the Barrons are able to "provide a level of service to this community we couldn't otherwise. I teach a business course at TNNA and am always stunned when I talk to owners who don't pay themselves and just accept it," Oz says, "so I don't directly talk about making a profit. But I do talk about the fact that you're supposed to make money from your shop."

"I never went in expecting not to draw some sort of salary," says a former East Coast LYSO who paid herself between \$35,000 and \$40,000 per year while running her shop, a figure she admits is on "the high end of the spectrum" for LYSOs. "I had to. I had no other source of income."

After purchasing an established shop, an S corp, and inheriting a staff that was already being paid 50¢ to \$1 over hourly minimum wage—pay that she was able to keep increasing—the owner crunched the numbers and settled on a figure that would cover her costs to grow the business and then some. "I always brought home at least twice my mortgage and grossed even more," she says. "I did that basic accounting thing—gross sales less cost of goods sold less expenses—so my salary was an expense." She never ran at a loss, holding annual sales to pick up the slack during traditionally slow times and ensuring cash flow during the slow season by securing a \$5,000 line of credit every May that she paid off by August or September.

Despite her success and love for her

shop community, she admits to being burned out by day-to-day retail and "totally seduced" by the prospect of a stable corporate salary; she jumped when that opportunity arose. Knowing that so many of her peers were operating in the red, "I felt guilty that I made money" as an LYSO "and I hung with retailers I knew were paying themselves something regularly," she says.

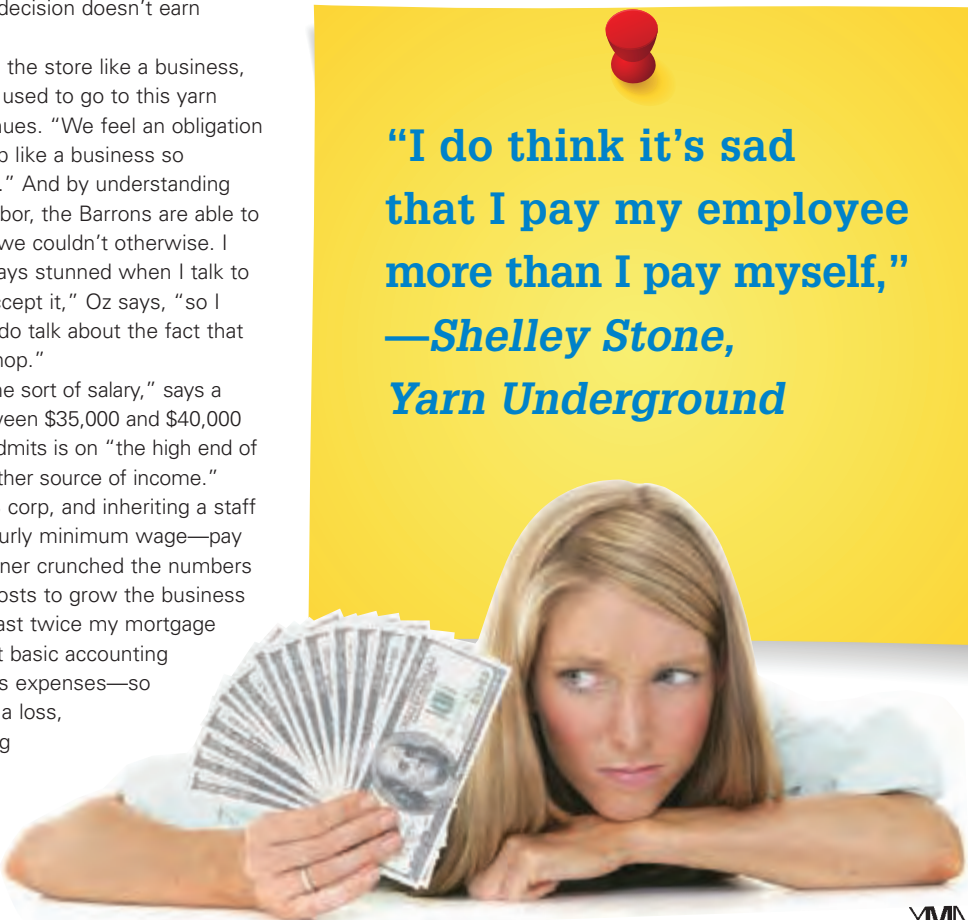
Those Who Sporadically Pay Themselves

"A lot of owners say they'd never do it again knowing what they know now."—anonymous LYSO

"Regularly" is the rub for the owners who pay themselves on a fluctuating basis, depending on what the shop takes in during a given stretch of time—month to month or even week to week. "It ain't easy," says a retailer who's been at the yarn game for 26-plus years and has yet to hit on the right formula for paying herself a consistent salary. "I pay my employees first—they're all part-time, so that's no big deal. Then, depending on the time of year, I'll take a small salary. When we're slow I won't, but I'm taking one again now [after the holiday season] every week. It's a movable feast, depending on the numbers."

As this owner's shop is set up as an S corp, she earns a paycheck as an employee of the shop and simply lets her payroll service know whenever she needs to tweak or curtail her take-home; the service then adjusts tax withholding accordingly, a process the owner "wouldn't feel comfortable doing by myself." Of retirement age, she now receives the Social Security benefits she's contributed toward off and on over the years she's owned the shop, and she does enjoy a second income through her husband's job. "We're not driving fancy cars, but the condo's paid," she says. "Every once in a while I say, 'Oh, I'm going to retire.' But there are still plenty of people coming in."

In White Rock, New Mexico, Warm Hearts Yarn co-owner Katie Brousseau augments yarn sales with a consignment gift section that incorporates handmade toys, jewelry, "even fly-fishing ties," she says.



**"I do think it's sad
that I pay my employee
more than I pay myself,"
—Shelley Stone,
Yarn Underground**



"The commission collected in December amounted to about three quarters of our monthly rent. This was great, and we were thrilled to have most of our rent covered, but having consignment does have an added time cost for us—record keeping, accounting, paying consignors

and working with many different people. While I would like to say that I would keep perfect books if I were accountable, pun intended, to just myself, it is simply not true. I feel that being accountable to others—my partner and the thirty-plus consignors we currently have—helps me stay on track and not procrastinate."

This in-depth accounting also forces her to examine the numbers so closely that she is in no doubt of when the margins are too tight to accommodate owner pay. "My partner and I look monthly at our account—the expenses and sales of the previous month, what we're expecting for the next month," Brousseau continues. "Sometimes we pay ourselves based on the difference of profit and expenses; sometimes we don't. During the times we don't, we tell ourselves that we are reinvesting."

"Owning a yarn store is a labor of love. I was paid more as a public school teacher—and at this point, probably even as a substitute teacher—than I am now. I am happy, though, helping others with projects, teaching new enthusiasts, being immersed in beautiful colors and textures every day." However, she adds, "It would be nice to have every month be a month when we can pay ourselves."

For a seasoned LYSO in Virginia who pays herself "occasionally, mostly rarely," her true reward is not financial. "The main reason I don't take a salary consistently is that from day one I've paid a full-time manager who allows me to have free time; that is a form of payment for me. I'm not totally chained to the shop 24/7. That's a choice I have made. My free time is more important than a paycheck."

Though she's officially in the shop just four days a week, this retailer does do a "fair amount" of work from home, including time-consuming website, blog and Facebook updating. She tends to pay herself in the months around the holiday season, when cash flow is stronger, to the tune of about \$24,000 per year. "There are times that I resent it, [knowing] how much more I'd have in the bank if I'd been able to pay myself [consistently]; it does get a little frustrating," she admits. Technically, she "probably could" pay herself a more livable wage, "but that would take me lower than my comfort zone in cash flow." What she does appreciate is the strong community around her shop and the quality she believes she offers her customers, quality she will not compromise in an effort to cut inventory corners so she can add to her personal coffers. "I'm not ordering an inordinate amount of stuff, and I don't want to short-change the mid- to high-range yarns I do have. I love yarn and want stuff in here that I'd want to use, not [inexpensive] stuff that will sell well." And for the fiber she really loves, "I'll give myself a screaming discount benefit—it's another way I can pay myself."

Which is not to short-change the simple joy of receiving a tangible paycheck. "I have been paying myself the last couple of pay periods, and it feels really good," she says. With the shop set up as an S corp, she uses a paycheck service to process staff salaries. "When the paycheck company calls and asks 'Anything for you?' I always get a little 'Yay' when I say 'Yes.'"

Those Who Have Never Paid Themselves

"I don't know how the local yarn shop is going to survive."

—anonymous LYSO

The third group of LYSOs—those who can't find the wiggle room in their margins to take home money they work so hard for—would no doubt love to hear a resounding "yay" from their payroll pros or accountants. The doubts that keep indie retailers in knots are well expressed by Patsy Engelhard, who has yet to draw a personal salary from her two-year-old shop, Knit 1 Oxford in Oxford, Mississippi. "I worry about this a lot, because I love my job," she says. Engelhard opened her shop as a "passion project" after retiring from the nonprofit world and feels fortunate that she and her husband were "in a position to invest the money. I certainly thought the shop would be self-sustaining sooner, and on paper we should be rocking-and-rolling, but there have been forces working against us."

Included in these are the general economy, but also "companies I buy from selling to [discount] web stores," siphoning budget shoppers away from her store, and mistakes she admits to making as a new retailer

EARN, PASS or DRAW

The two main corporate structures yarn shops form under are an LLC (limited liability company) and an S corporation. Both protect an owner's personal assets from business debts and liabilities, and though both are considered "pass-through tax entities," they require salary and taxes to be handled differently.

In an LLC, owners, known as members, are not permitted to be paid as employees; instead, they take "draws" on the business instead of a traditional salary, essentially writing themselves a check out of which taxes are not taken. Because of this, the money owners get from draws must be counted as personal income on their individual tax returns; since no withholding is taken out of these draws, owners must make up for it by paying estimated taxes—federal and state, FICA and, if the income reaches a certain threshold, self-employment tax as well. Draws can be taken consistently or whenever the owner desires.

In an S corp, owners can earn a salary like any other employee. The benefit of this system is that all taxes are automatically withheld from the paycheck, but any profit distributions taken on top of the owners'

and a fairly new knitter, like hiring too many employees at the start and locating the shop in a high-rent district. Engelhard is learning to adapt to day-to-day conditions on the ground. She still has a robust staff—four part-timers, plus herself—"because I think my customers deserve the expertise." She's cultivating a loyal clientele with unique events like the area's first fiber festival. And she's becoming more assertive and selective about which vendors she'll patronize. "If a customer wants three skeins, instead of going with a company that makes me buy a ten-skein bag—forcing me to swallow seven or lose the customer to the web—I'll go with a company that will sell me the three skeins. I'm more discriminating now about who we'll work with."

As for the bigger picture, "It's demoralizing. I worry that we're going the way of the bookstore," she says. "We're privileged enough to do this at this point in our lives and take a loss because [owning the store] makes me happy, but if someone walked in and said 'I want to start a yarn shop,' I would be hard pressed to encourage that." Engelhard is working diligently to turn things around—and to remain optimistic. "Because I don't have to

put food on the table [with a shop salary], I'm OK. I'm definitely in for another year, and if things look like they're going up, we may continue. If it looks like the shop is never going to be able to sustain itself, we have a hard choice to make. It does get unjustifiably stupid after a while."

For newer retailers who are building a shop from the ground up, the lack of a salary may be the cost of getting established. "I've given this a lot of thought," says Mary Penxa, owner of Two Rivers Yarns in Brunswick, Maryland. "At the beginning, every penny needs to be invested back into the shop, primarily in inventory but also in other things like furniture, advertising, perhaps even an employee. Shop owners who are impatient and feel they must take cash out of their businesses are sliding down a slippery slope if they do it too soon. I am just beginning year number three and I have not taken a single cent out of my shop yet. On the other hand, I doubled my business last year, and this year is already exceeding last year's figures for January. I am definitely headed in the right direction, but I doubt seriously that I will be able to take any money out of the business this year either. It's a marathon, not a sprint, and to build up a good clientele, estab-

salary are not treated as such and can lead to double taxation later. The IRS expects the owner of an S corp to take a reasonable salary and may be inclined to audit those who don't. (See guidelines on what constitutes "reasonable" at www.irs.gov/Businesses/Small-Businesses-&Self-Employed/S-Corporation-Compensation-and-Medical-Insurance-Issues).

Of the retailers we spoke with, one, an LYSO from the Southeast who requests anonymity, is set up as an LLC but wished she had structured her business as an S corp. The main reason—the traditional paycheck is proof of salary, so when she applies for a credit card or loan, there is no doubt as to how much she makes in a year. As for dealing with S corp taxes, the former East Coast owner doubled her withholding on her salary, so she ended up covering any hidden tax issues and likely enjoyed a return at tax time.

Tax and salary issues can be complex, so it's smart to have a tax professional or accountant available to you—not only to help you through the financial technicalities but also to provide an objective sounding board on the subject of business plans and budgets. Says Nancy Hamilton of Connecticut's Black Sheep Yarns, "You need to hire someone who can do what you can't do—someone who has no emotional interest and can walk you through your budget."

lish a reputation and figure out what works and what doesn't, you have to patiently reinvest and not bleed your shop dry."

For Lisa Abbey and her five co-owners at Back Alley Fibers in Caro, Michigan, the solution to reaching and maintaining sustainability was to remove the salary factor altogether. The partners have a "very unusual" arrangement: "We pay ourselves with the joy of being in the business together," Abbey explains. In other words, the partners in this LLC do not take a financial draw personally; all profits that aren't used for operating expenses are reinvested back into inventory.

The partners all have another line of income—two work regular paying jobs, one is a stay-at-home mom and the rest are retirees—and each has a dedicated responsibility toward the business (Abbey is the secretary who organizes a monthly partners' meeting and keeps on top of the books and the class syllabus; others handle the shop website, ordering and displays) as well as a scheduled day to work in the shop; weekends are shared. There are no employees other than the owners, who also teach. "I don't think any of us had any idea how much time it takes to grow a business,"

Abbey says. "Having partners makes things so much easier."

Abbey is proud of the communication and trust built up among Back Alley's co-owners. "It's wonderful that none of us carries the weight of the store on her shoulders; it's a shared endeavor that lets us do things for our loyal knitters and pick up the slack for each other.... Taking the financial part out of it makes it less fraught; we know that decisions aren't going to end us," she continues, adding that she and her colleagues feel "very much paid in intellectual stimulation, enjoyment" and the ability to cultivate a knitting community in the "thumb" of Michigan. The one financial perk they do enjoy: "We take a small discount when we buy our own yarn."

Nancy Hamilton also basks in an unusual situation: The owner of Black Sheep Yarns in Kent, Connecticut, gains extraordinary exposure as the host of "Fiber Arts with Nancy," a knitterati-interview radio program that airs every Friday morning on a nearby NPR station, WHDD 91.9. "The store has a great reputation in a 50- or 60-mile radius," says Hamilton's husband Mark, who helps out in the shop from time to time but has a day job that acts as the couple's lifeline income. "Nancy has a management philosophy that puts the customer first—she teaches for free, helps for free, and the knitters all love her." Despite that love and the reach the radio show affords her three-year-old brand, Hamilton has yet to enjoy a salary.

"I wish I could figure out how to pay myself," she says. "I started very underfinanced, so the money has gone back into building the inventory and the clientele and getting my name out there. Paying myself hasn't been part of that, but it is on the agenda. We're just not there yet."

Hamilton is working with an accountant who is helping her reach that goal. "Doing the bookkeeping, what we have realized is that I'm overbuying. This year, instead of just filling in, I brought in new product—higher-priced items, trying to attract a different clientele, and it's worked. My sales are all up. I can justify what I've spent. But if I toned it down," the funds for a salary would have been available. Hamilton currently works solo, with backup from Mark and their daughter. "I can't pay an employee; that would mean extra expenses, increased insurance, workman's compensation," she says. "I'd rather spend the extra \$200 or \$300 a year I'd pay in workman's comp insurance to pull in new product." It's a vicious cycle.

Hamilton's accountant believes that she's on track to take a salary soon, certainly within the timeline of the shop's original five-year plan. "I'm revisiting the business plan and going over it so we stick to the budget," she says. "I make more than enough every month. I should be taking a salary. But I end up buying new product. I don't think I'm unique."

She's not. Reinvesting in inventory with profits that could be used for a personal salary is common among LYSOs. But, as Shelley Stone pointed out earlier, if you're using more than 50 percent of profits to do so, a budget retweak—with salary accounted for—is in order.

"If you make \$10, pay yourself \$5—put the other \$3 toward inventory and \$2 toward expenses," says our former East Coast owner. "To those owners now who say, 'I've been trying to figure out how to pay myself,' just do it. Write yourself a check with some tax withholding, even if it's not minimum wage. Get in the habit of doing it regularly, and you won't miss the money."

Yarn shop owners: Please take our quick survey on salaries. We'll print the results in an upcoming issue. Go to surveymonkey.com/s/YMNsalaries.

The KAL comes to the LYS



By Leslie Petrovski

Last fall, 10 knitters gathered bright and early on three consecutive Saturdays at the Tucson Yarn Company to knit Jamie Thomas's Lolita vest. According to store co-owner Cyd Engel, the lacy drape-front garment is the ideal knit-along project: talk-proof (meaning simple to knit), figure-flattering and easily adaptable to yarns in inventory.

Not only did KALers finish their initial vest, but several bought yarn for a second and third. "When they get through a kimono jacket or Lolita vest and then turn around and buy materials to make another one, we know we've hit on something good," Engel says.

According to the *Vogue Knitting Knitopedia*, a knit-along is an "organized group effort to knit a certain project," during which participants can share their progress, notes and tales of woe through a dedicated blog or forum. Though collective knitting has been endemic to the craft since people took up sticks and string, the modern knit-along proliferated online in the early 2000s, when the Internet made it easier for knitters to connect and for patterns to go viral. Today knit-alongs and crochet-alongs (there are also quilt-alongs, bead-alongs and stitch-alongs for different kinds of crafters) are fixtures of modern needlework culture.

Larissa Brown, who with her husband Martin John Brown wrote *Knitalong: Celebrating the Tradition of Knitting Together* (STC Craft), defines the term more broadly as people knitting together for a common purpose. "When people think of a knit-along," she says, "there's usually some defined theme around it. People are often knitting the same item, especially if it's something complex. Or they are making one item together, like contributing pieces to a blanket. So there's a shared theme or goal as opposed to a knit night at a friend's house."

Knit-alongs appeal to knitters for many reasons, whether it's the desire for "adult supervision" in mastering an unfamiliar skill or pattern or the hope that peer pressure will propel them over the finish line. "People like to knit what other people are knitting," says Jenni Krosnowski of Twisted Loop Yarn Shop in Prior Lake, Minnesota, who hosts knit-alongs



Tastings, trunk shows and other special events can boost sales and customer goodwill. Here's how to make sure things run smoothly.

ILLUSTRATION BY LISA HENDERLING

on the store's Ravelry page. "They like the support and knowing that other people are messing up like they are; that makes them feel better. Knit-alongs are totally goal-driven. People know that if they participate in a knit-along, they'll get it done."

KALs and CALs have flourished in our increasingly virtual world. Ravelry alone has 32 pages of knit-alongs, some long defunct, others still vital and churning out projects ranging from dishcloths and socks to shawls and afghans. Inspired by the Mystery Stole on the blog Pink Lemon Twist, Renee Leverington launched the first Mystery Shawl-along as a Yahoo group in 2005. That first shawl pattern, which she now sells as the Mystery Diamond Shawl, lured an estimated 2,000 to 3,000 participants eager to see how each pattern clue would take shape in the final shawl. These days Leverington is on her thirtieth mystery shawl (www.groups.yahoo.com/group/mysteryshawl30) and has more than 1,000 members in her Mystery Shawl-along Ravelry group, a complement to her Yahoo shawl groups, all of which are still going strong.

Michelle Hunter of the website Knit Purl Hunter (www.knitpurlhunter.com) has acquired a following through the Skacel-sponsored knit-alongs she hosts online. A former teacher and the author of *Building Blocks: Improve Your Knitting Skills One Square at a Time*, a video-supported skill-strengthening book, Hunter began making videos to augment the classes she taught at her LYS, Knitting Temptations. A fan of Addi needles, Hunter included the needles in the materials' lists for her sell-out classes.

The needles' distributor, Skacel, noticed the sales spikes and continual reorders from the Dublin, Ohio-based shop. So when Hunter and Karin Skacel, CEO of Skacel Collection Inc., finally met at TNNA, a partnership seemed inevitable: Hunter pitched her book, and Skacel pitched the

idea of video-enabled knit-alongs.

Skacel published Hunter's book, and since January 2011 the company has contracted with her to host regular knit-alongs featuring Skacel-distributed yarns and tools. These free KALs are mystery projects in which pattern clues are delivered in four weekly posts; the techniques explored in the project are supported by Hunter's videos. To encourage knitters to finish and provide project photos, Skacel offers prizes like Addi Click needle sets and goody bags. "I can't say enough how fun it is to be connected to knitters all over the world," Hunter says.

From Skacel's point of view, the knit-alongs are also successful. "We always see an increase in sales when Michelle starts a KAL," says Karin Skacel. "The knitters that actually use the yarns requested end up being big fans of the yarn and buying more. And I've seldom run into a knitter who has participated in only one of her KALs. They seem to be addictive."

Recognizing the potential of knit-alongs to galvanize knitters to gather and buy yarn, yarn shops have been getting in on the action. "Something I see happening," observes Larissa Brown, "is that stores are holding knit-alongs and calling them classes, for which they charge a fee. Essentially they're knit-alongs at which someone is present to answer questions and help customers. But of course many yarn shops host knit-alongs for which there is no charge or class structure."

At Wild Purls Yarns in Billings, Montana, owner Julia Leslie-Warmer holds annual knit-alongs during the slower spring/summer months to generate customer enthusiasm and stimulate yarn sales. "There is true seasonality to this business," she says. "If I can bring people in during our non-peak season, when the weather is good and everyone is outside, that increases sales during a slow time." *(continued on page 42)*

"A store can decide to hold a KAL for good business reasons, featuring a yarn they want to sell or getting people to cross the threshold a number of times. But you have to have some heart. Ask yourself: 'Why do we love this pattern we're sharing?'"



And it builds loyalty—and that never hurts.”

The Tucson Yarn Company added a regular knit-along about a year ago to augment its other social knitting programs. Having had good success selling \$50 Knit-In Cards, which give customers the opportunity to drop in 10 times on any of the store’s thrice-weekly daytime help sessions, TYC decided to start a Saturday knit-along catering to working knitters.

Rather than being led by a teacher, The Tucson Yarn Company’s free knit-alongs are “hosted” by an employee who doesn’t teach at the shop, thereby differentiating the KAL from a class. She facilitates the group and answers questions but doesn’t teach. KALers are admitted at 9 A.M., an hour prior to the store’s opening, and projects, which are typically staff-selected, change monthly.

How do you get people on board to knit the same project?

- **AVOID CLIQUISHNESS.** “Do whatever you have to do to stop your KALs from becoming a club,” advises Cyd Engel of the Tucson Yarn Company. “We’ve all gone into yarn shops where everybody’s yakking at the table and you feel like you’ve interrupted a Kiwanis Club meeting—and you’re not a Kiwanis. I want new people to be able to join at any time.”
- **CHOOSE ROAD-TESTED, WELL-WRITTEN PATTERNS.** Otherwise you or your knit-along host will be spending hours troubleshooting the design and managing your customers’ frustrations.
- **DISPLAY PROJECT SAMPLES.** Better yet, display two samples worked in different yarns you want to move. And, of course, be sure you’re well stocked in those featured yarns.
- **MAKE THE CHOSEN PROJECT A SKILL-BUILDER.** Michelle Hunter of Knit Purl Hunter likes to address new techniques in her KALs. “People like the challenge of learning something new,” she says. “It gives you a sense of accomplishment, and that’s rewarding for people.”
- **PROVIDE INCENTIVES.** Instead of offering a discount for KAL-related purchases, at the Tucson Yarn Company KAL participants receive a 10 percent store credit based on the purchase of their KAL-project yarn—but not until they come for the first session. In this way, KALers are motivated to show up to the first session to get their credit, which is conveniently stored in the shop’s POS system and can be applied toward their next purchase.

“We steer the projects,” explains Elaine Mathias, who works at TYC and hosts knit-alongs. “Usually it’s something we’ve started that we love; it’s easy enough to do while talking and has created a lot of buzz in the store.”

In addition to creating a vibrant atmosphere, Cyd Engel says, the Saturday knit-alongs “give us access to people who work during the week. There’s more of an attitude that this is ‘me’ time. And they’re more likely to have disposable income than those who don’t work.”

Ultimately, KALs are another way to lure people into making additional trips to their LYS. In 2009, in advance of the first Sock Summit, Larissa Brown hosted a charity knit-along for a pattern in her book that used sock yarn, the Barn-Raising Quilt by Shelley Mackie. Brown offered the pattern for free for the duration of the KAL. Participants from all over the world sent their squares to Portland-based Abundant Yarn and Dyeworks (a bricks-and-mortar store at the time; it is now online only), where volunteer seamers stitched them up into four blankets for a silent auction to benefit Doctors Without Borders at Sock Summit.

The project not only generated funds for the nonprofit; it brought local knitters into Abundant Yarn multiple times to accomplish the project. “They came in and bought yarn, then they brought their squares in and participated in sew-alongs,” Brown says. KALs tend to be most successful when they involve knitting for the greater good or when the shop is particularly enthusiastic about a particular yarn or design. Says Brown: “A store can decide to hold a KAL for good business reasons, featuring a yarn they want to sell or getting people to cross the threshold a number of times. But you have to have some heart. Ask yourself: ‘Why do we love this pattern we’re sharing?’”

Car-ribbon QUEEN *(continued from page 17)*

its stiffness slow you down long enough to enjoy the cool, papery hand and the resulting dense, moldable fabric.

Always in the vanguard of yarn development, **Austermann** makes no exception with **Cool Cut (#8)** (9 solid and 3 multi colors; 100% cotton; 55yds/50g), its new addition to the **Skacel Collection**. Made from cotton jersey fabric that’s been sliced into stitchable strips, this ribbon frays naturally at the edges yet maintains the sturdy, soft and elastic qualities of its parent material—a boon to knitters who normally shun unyielding cotton. Its elasticity endows it with the pliant hand that occurs naturally among animal fibers.

Cotton ribbons aren’t limited to solid strips, however. If you’ve ever been tempted to roll up a mesh ruffle yarn and knit it smooth, **Berroco’s Karma (#3)** (12 colors; 100% cotton; 66yds/50g) is your dream come true. Technically a tape, it rolls naturally at the edges, taking the appearance of a chainette. The result: a quick-stitching bulky that’s big on size and light on weight. The strand becomes even more rounded as you knit, so unlike a traditional ribbon or tape, its stitches are even and beautifully well defined. The fabric gets its texture, instead, from the surface of the yarn itself, which renders nicely in the softly tonal colorways.

While cotton ribbons tend to have a casual feel, synthetics, with their penchant for glitter, flourish in ribbons’ multidimensional fabrics. **Classic Elite Yarns’ Sanibel (#2)** (12 colors; 42% cotton, 58% viscose; 125yds/50g) bridges the gap between these two qualities. Most of the strand is made up of a flat cotton chainette that changes between two values of one color. Between each color shift runs a shorter length of shiny viscose that’s been woven right into the same chainette. Best suited for stockinette and simple lace mesh, it’s one of those yarns that do the work for you.

If yarns followed astrology, **Tartelette (#7)** (20 colors; 50% cotton, 50% nylon; 75yds/50g) from **Knit One, Crochet Too** would be a Gemini. On one side of the railroad-style strand run woven threads of matte cotton; on the other runs a glossy, color-contrasting nylon. For additional depth, variegated sections of the yarn have been overdyed in a darker shade. As expected, the railroad construction curls up when knit, but with each half maintaining its own personality: The stiffer cotton threads arch softly into springy cylinders, while the gauzier nylon threads crease, creating the look of glimmering scales.

Despite the name, **KFI/Louisa Harding’s Sari Ribbon (#10)** (90% nylon, 10% metallic; 132yds/100g) is really the inverse of the cut-and-tied sari silk ribbon yarns on the market: Its construction is designed to create fabrics that mimic the look of sari silk. Available in a bright array of 18 variegated colors, this wide railroad ribbon sports a bold stripe of metallic thread down its center. As stitches form, the ribbon curls in on itself, creasing cleanly where it folds and creating a flat stitch surface. The fabric’s sheen echoes the look of reflective silk, especially when the metallic threads push to the forefront, causing patterns to form.

A single multicolored metallic strand zigzags across the surface of **Prism’s Constellation (#11)** (hundreds of colors; 95% nylon, 5% metallic polyester; 54yds/57g), a very wide railroad-style ribbon. This construction gets the most out of the traditionally scratchy metallic component while minimizing the amount of surface area it covers. It curls up when knit, but rather than crease, the woven fibers loop into tiny coils. Be sure to treat FOs with a little extra TLC, as jewelry will snag the surface. Really, though, this dazzler is bling enough on its own.

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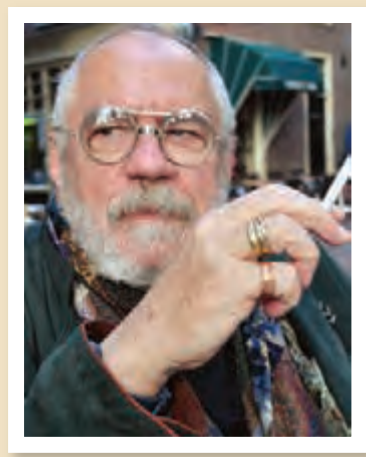


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Koos van den Akker

Dutch fashion designer Koos van den Akker was trained in Paris at Christian Dior and has had a long career in fashion, but he is best known as the creator of the “Cosby sweater,” worn by Bill Cosby for eight seasons (1984-1992) on the popular Cosby Show.

YMN’s Erin Slonaker talked with him about his iconic work.



YMN: Where does the knitted fabric you use come from? What does the sewing of the pieces entail?

KA: I use cut-and-sew knitted fabrics bought in a fabric store. I cut them up and combine them with woven fabrics. It’s like painting with fabric. It’s making pictures one after another, and it just happens to be clothes. An apprentice composed the book *Koos Couture Collage: Inspiration & Techniques* about my work; it’s very popular with craftspeople.

the years, and his wife is still a good customer.

YMN: How does it feel to have created garments that are now a cultural touchstone?

KA: It’s fun. I am totally enjoying the rebirth of that phenomenon. I’m thrilled that young people are having Cosby Sweater parties.



YMN: How did Bill Cosby discover your work?

KA: A friend of his needed a present for his birthday, and she gave him a sweater I was working on. He wore it during the filming of an episode of *The Cosby Show* and got an enormous response from people who wanted to know more about it. So he decided to make it an image for the show. He called and asked me to make more for him. That’s how it started. All the sweaters he wore were one of a kind.

YMN: How long before you were working for the show?

KA: I never worked for the show; I just made sweaters for Bill. I would make five or six every couple of months, and after I sent them, he would call and say, “OK, time for a new lot.” He never ordered anything specific. He is a delightful man who appreciated very much my work and the way I worked, and supported it.

YMN: Tell me about the creation of one of the classic sweaters. What inspires you when combining fabrics and colors?

KA: It is a process of collaging. It can be sweaters; it can be coats. The inspirations are from my life in New York City—all of the things I see as I walk around.

YMN: You have a background in sewing, not knitting. Do you know how to knit?

KA: No, I don’t knit at all. I love sewing.

YMN: Was the process of making the sweaters for Bill Cosby special or different because it was for his TV show?

KA: No, it is the same as making things for my store. I create things, they are hung in the store, and I hope people buy and enjoy them.

YMN: How did your upbringing in the Netherlands influence your design aesthetic? What other influences do you credit with the ingenuity of your work?

KA: The Netherlands never directly inspired me. Living in New York inspires me—everyday adventures. I started doing collages after I moved to New York City in 1968. But, spending five weeks in Holland last fall, I see that my clothes are very Dutch somehow. My collaging is exceptional in New York City, but it was everywhere in Holland.

YMN: What do you have on your plate these days?

KA: I am very busy filling my store on Madison Avenue. Just recently I was in Amsterdam doing a show, in the form of a staged interview, about my life, with Marcel Musters and his company, Mugmetdegoudentand (www.mugmetdegoudentand.nl/rietjemeetskoos). We are in the process of finishing both a documentary film and a book about my life and work.

YMN: Are you and Bill Cosby still in touch?

KA: I have made many things for his family over



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