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ROSE CALLAHAN

This issue marks the 50th one of the current incarnation of *Yarn Market News*.

Fifty! That's a lot of Smart articles, interviews, tidbits of news and even more books, all in some way about yarn. Those of us who work on this magazine live and breathe yarn—just like you do. But sometimes, I confess, I want nothing to do with it. I want to bake something inspired by *The Great British Bake Off/Baking Show*. To play a video game (okay, I'll allow for it to be yarn-themed, when I play Yoshi's Woolly World). Maybe just to go to the gym. So I schedule a little time away. Inevitably, though, I find that I've tucked my knitting bag into my purse before heading out for the day. Or I realize I've spent an entire evening browsing patterns on Ravelry. It's just that hard to stay away.

I'm sure many of you feel the same way at times. But it's a new year, a fresh start, and it's time to refocus on what makes the yarn business so great. This issue is devoted to finding the right balance in work and life, in an article by Cheryl Kremenz (page 44). And it's also about finding the right balance of sales outlets—how do you get to your customers? Leslie Petrovski tackles that topic on page 40. And Carol Sulcoski gets us thinking about the future, because staying abreast of trends will not only inspire you; it will also help you inspire your customers (page 48).

Burnout is real. But *Yarn Market News* is here to keep you motivated and ready to face another day. Perhaps a cup of tea and a quiet spot to read the issue is just what you need. Take some time with the books section (page 14), which perhaps you don't always read closely—there's so much inspiration there, ready for the taking. Read about two Business Innovation Award Winners in the retailer and manufacturer categories (pages 36 and 38, respectively) and see what new and ingenious things they've done—ideas that can perhaps rejuvenate your own business.

One thing I hear from all attendees of the Yarn Market News Smart Business Conference is how they feel like completely new yarn sellers once the conference ends. The sessions, networking and experiences allow them time outside their daily routines, and they head back brimming with ideas—and resources—for making positive changes. I do hope I'll see you in Atlanta from March 6–8 so that we can be inspired together.

Erin Slonaker, Editor in Chief



on the cover

Pining for Yarn

Verdant trees in a few shades of gorgeous greens from Ancient Arts Fibre Crafts sit in a bed of snow. Choose yarn by weight, then pick from among their hundreds of unique colorways.
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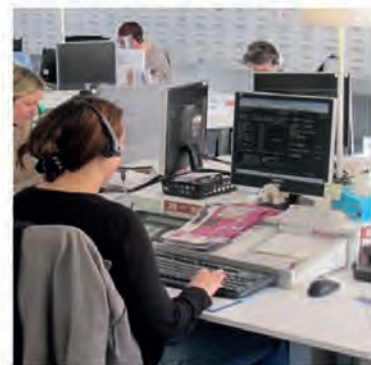
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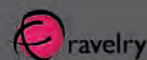
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The next issue of YMN will mail in April 2016.



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MAKING AN EXHIBITION OF HIMSELF

▼ It started with quilts—15 of them, selected by designer **Kaffe Fassett** from the collection of the Quilt Museum and Gallery of York, England. Fassett then used the quilts, dating from 1780 to 1949, as a jumping-off point for creating his own collection of 20 new patchwork designs. The result is a fascinating exhibition titled “Blanket Statements,” at the James A. Michener Museum in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. The show, which runs through February 21, will appear at only two American museums, the Michener and the San Jose (California) Museum of Quilts and Textiles (March 12–June 28); when the second exhibition closes, the quilts will be archived in

the U.K. and unavailable for viewing by the public. “Kaffe Fassett possesses an incredible eye for color and design,” notes the Michener’s chief curator, Kirsten M. Jensen. “His selection of the historical quilts and his stunning responses to them reflect that sensibility. Visitors who might not be attracted to textiles initially will find the patterns and color in these pieces breathtaking.” A companion exhibit, “Pattern Pieces,” focuses on the role of quilts as both useful and artistic objects, looking at pattern, shape and color in various works from different time periods and in various media. Learn more at www.michenermuseum.org and www.sjqiltmuseum.org.

NO BONES ABOUT IT

▼ You’ve knit with yarn made of wool, cotton, maybe even corn, soy and milk fiber. What about yarn derived from animal bones? Philipp Stössel, a doctoral candidate working at a Zurich, Switzerland, laboratory, recently created a buzz in the textile world when he announced the successful creation of yarn made from gelatin. Gelatin is derived from the by-products generated by slaughterhouses. Stössel was inspired to create the unusual yarn after noticing that adding an organic solvent to a gelatin solution created a filament-like mass of fiber. He began playing with the process, eventually figuring out how to extrude the fiber through tiny openings, then harden it. The resulting fibers were then spun with a spindle. The yarn has luster, is porous and in many ways is comparable to sheep’s wool, but it has, alas, a tendency to dissolve in water. Stössel is currently working on improving the yarn’s water resistance, a necessary step before it can be marketed for clothing.

MOVERS AND SHAKERS



▼ **Meghan Babin** (left) was recently named editor of *Interweave Knits*. She has extensive retail experience as manager of the Cornwall Knitting Shop and has had several designs published in *Interweave Knits*, *KnitScene* and *Knitty.com*. Says Lisa Shroyer, content strategist for the F&W/Interweave Knitting Group, “[Meghan] has a fresh but classic aesthetic, grounded in the good stuff

of knitting—fiber, yarn choice, texture, silhouette, proportion, style. She is ambitious and driven and down to earth and funny, and she has great ideas.”

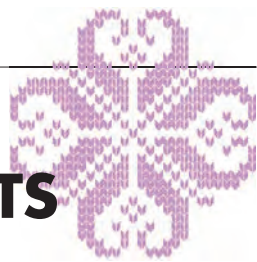
Holli Bibler has been named the new executive director of The National Needlearts Association. Bibler has a strong background in event management and planning, marketing, sales and process improvement. She replaces Patty Parrish, who served TNNA as executive director for eighteen years. Best wishes to Bibler in her new position and thanks to Parrish for her dedication and service.

DAPPER DISHWARE

▼ Retailer West Elm debuted a set of fetching plates that yarn lovers are sure to covet. Designed by artist **Rachel Kozlowski**, the plates feature quirky animals decked out in hand-knit sweaters. Kozlowski, a knitter, took inspiration for her “Dapper Animal” line from Peruvian and Scandinavian culture. Her work relies heavily on line drawing, making the

textural detail of knitting a perfect subject. “Knitted fabrics have a very distinct appearance and can be very dimensional,” she says. “For the Scandinavian animals, I incorporated shawl collars and Fair Isle patterns, while the Peruvian textiles were a bit more geometric.” See more of Kozlowski’s work at www.rachelkozlowski.com.





OFF THE CHARTS

▼ **Abby Milward's** wish was to marry her day job as a software engineer with her passion for knitting. What started out as a bit of code writing to create a gauge grid turned into a multiyear project, culminating with the release of Chart Minder. Chart Minder is a free website that enables users to create their own charts for knitting, crochet and even cross-stitch. Users can opt to show their chart the traditional way, as blocks, or as simulated stitches, with adjustments made for different gauges and swatch sizes. Thoughtful features like automatic saving make the site especially helpful. Milward describes her work on the site as a labor of love, providing tips and answering questions in a dedicated Ravelry group. Learn more at www.chart-minder.com.



LOGO A-GOGO



The UK Handknitting Association, a nonprofit organization that promotes hand knitting and associated yarn crafts in the United Kingdom, adopted a new logo last fall. Says the Association's Juliet

Bernard, "The world of knitting has changed a lot in the past few years, so we felt it was time for us to adopt a logo that is truly representational of the industry and our future plans. The new design is both engaging and has a proactive feel to it—everything we want UK Handknitting to stand for." The new logo was officially launched on September 1, 2015, to coincide with the Association's "Commit to Knit" campaign, part of the U.K.'s national knitting week. www.ukhandknitting.com



SAVE THE PEERIES

▼ The encroachment of modern life is threatening the long tradition of Shetland knitting—and spurring textile lovers the world over to take action. In 2010, primary schools on the Shetland Islands discontinued knitting classes, leading to serious concerns about the viability of the craft. Although some parents and grandparents continue to pass down fiber skills, overall fewer and fewer young Shetlanders are knitting.

"The real Shetland knitting we all love is in danger of fading away if we don't help," explains Stephen Sheard, founder

of Rowan Yarns. Fortunately, lovers of Shetland style, led by nonprofit preservation group The Brough Lodge Trust, are fighting back. Last fall, a program called The Shetland Peerie Makers Project ("peerie makers" means "little makers" in the Shetland dialect) was conceived; the pilot project proposed using volunteers to teach knitting in five Shetland communities for a year to try to keep the vibrant Shetland knitting tradition alive.

In just 16 days, a crowdfunding campaign had reached its initial goal. "People across the

world have backed the idea," says a grateful Pierre Cambillard, chairman of the Brough Lodge Trust. "The support has been about more than money, too. We've had dozens of messages from folk who obviously care very deeply about Shetland's knitting culture and want to see it thrive." A second crowdfunding goal was announced shortly before press time to extend the project for a second year. Donate to the cause at www.broughlodge.org/hand-knitting; learn more on the project's Facebook page.



CAT'S MEOW

▼ Whether you're a devoted fan of Cat Bordhi's customizable sock patterns or simply disinclined to fiddle with math, you're sure to welcome Sokompanion. The new mobile app was created by Tse Si'ani Studios, an indie studio located on the Navajo Nation, to accompany *New Pathways for Sock Knitters*, Bordhi's innovative book on sock construction. The app allows users to design or customize sock patterns using Bordhi's Master Numbers system, which is explained in written and table form in *New*

Pathways. Explains developer Red Hien, "Once you are familiar with the Master Numbers system, which requires a few basic foot measurements, Sokompanion makes custom socks a snap. The app will do the calculations for you, eliminating math mistakes, so you can develop patterns quickly and get to knitting immediately." Sokompanion is available for both Android and iOS devices (both iPad and iPhone); MSRP is \$4.99. View a trailer for the app on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=JhI6JZot_rk.



OKEY-DOKEY CROQUIS

▼ Fashion designers often sketch designs using croquis, stylized templates of the human body—or what passes for the human body. The traditional croquis used by designers tend to show elongated, excessively thin bodies, perched at odd angles, rather than bodies that resemble the real-world women who will wear the designs.

Author **Gretchen Hirsch**, known to her fans as “Gertie,” wondered why so many sketches are shown on

bodies that, as she puts it, “look like aliens.” Her latest book, *Gertie's New Fashion Sketchbook* (STC, 2015), presents a brand-new collection of croquis for designers (and fledgling designers) to use, created by illustrator Sun Young Park.

Gertie set out three goals for her croquis: They had to be realistically proportioned, to better represent what women's bodies look like; they had to be customizable, to reflect individual differences in

body types; and they had to be posed in more natural ways, rather than the contorted poses often seen in fashion spreads. In addition to the hundreds of croquis provided in the book, Gertie also includes an overview of design through the decades, tips on sketching and pointers for creating sketches that mirror the user's own individual figure. Visit Gertie and hear more about the sketchbook at www.blogforbettersewing.com.

MARATHON FUNDRAISING

▼ You may have read about marathon runner **David Babcock**, who manages to knit and crochet without missing a step. Babcock entered the *Guinness World Records* book in 2013 for knitting the longest scarf while running a marathon (it was 12 feet long). Now Babcock has teamed up with **Lion Brand Yarn Co.** to raise money to support Alzheimer's disease research.

Fall events included the “Doily Dash,” Babcock's attempt to crochet the world's largest doily as he ran the Kansas City Marathon, and participation in the New York City Marathon, during which Babcock finger-crocheted flowers (made with yarn provided by Lion Brand)—long associated with the Alzheimer's Association—to hand out to spectators along the route. “I hope that [my crocheted flowers] will remind people how devastating this disease is and that they can do something to help.” At press time, more than \$10,000 had been raised.

Lion Brand is also collaborating with **Project Knitwell**, a Washington, D.C.—area nonprofit that seeks to introduce the benefits of knitting to people in stressful situations, especially caregivers. *The Comfort of Knitting* is a how-to booklet that explains the basics of knitting, tips for stress relief and seven beginner-level patterns. All proceeds from sales of the booklet will be donated to the Alzheimer's Association and Project Knitwell to support their work taking care of the caregivers.



ACHIEVING PAIR-FECTION

▼ German sock-yarn powerhouse **Regia** has made it easier for knitters to knit identical (rather than fraternal) socks from a single ball of self-patterning yarn—without weighing grams or rewinding. New Regia Pairfection sock yarn comes predivided for a sock knitter's convenience: The beginning of the ball and the center are marked with yellow starter thread; simply unravel the thread to begin the first sock.

When you're ready to knit the second, simply unravel the second section of starter thread, and you'll begin at the exact same point in the pattern repeat. The premier Pairfection line includes eight on-trend stripe patterns in 100g (420m/459yd) balls. It is distributed in North America by Westminster Fibers. us.schachenmayr.com/news/regia-pairfect-two-identical-socks-one-skein



FAERIE TALES

▼ Renowned author **Alice Hoffman** is known for her adult and young adult fiction; her cousin **Lisa Hoffman** is a knitwear designer whose work has appeared in books and magazines including *Vogue Knitting*. The talented cousins combined forces last fall, announcing an ongoing collabor-

ation in *Faerie Magazine*, a quarterly publication devoted to “all things enchanted.”

“It's a beautifully designed and printed literary magazine, and we are doing a combined story/knitting column for them,” explains Lisa Hoffman. Each issue will feature the “Faerie Knitting” column, with an orig-

inal fairy tale penned by Alice and an accompanying original knitwear design by Lisa. The series began in the autumn 2015 issue with the story “Blue Heron” and the accompanying Blue Heron Shawl (left). Kits will be available at the magazine's website; read all about it at www.faeriemag.com.

EXPANSION TEAM



▼ The party game “Cards Against Humanity” has soared in popularity since its official launch in 2011. (For the uninitiated, players compete to fill in the blanks by using preprinted phrases dealt on cards). An enterprising yarn shop has created a set of 36 knitting-themed cards, dubbed “**Knitters Against Swatches**,” that can be added to an official Cards Against Humanity deck to increase the fiber content in a game. Robyn Wade and Sarah Hood, owners of Re-Belle in Lexington,

Kentucky, were inspired by a friend who made his own Kentucky-themed unofficial expansion pack for the game. “Everyone in our local knitting group went crazy for them,” says Wade. They decided to make their own knitting-themed pack for customers. Response was so enthusiastic, they finessed the product and made it available for purchase. “While the cards are aimed at knitters,” notes Wade, “most are relatable for crocheters and a few for general crafters.” Purchase a pack at www.squareup.com/market/rebelle/knitters-against-swatches.

IN MEMORIAM

Margrit Lohrer (1945–2015)

▼ Margrit Lohrer, co-owner of Morehouse Merinos in Milan, New York, died on October 22, 2015, after a lengthy battle with ovarian cancer. Born in Switzerland, Lohrer emigrated to the United States in 1961. She and her husband, Albrecht Pichler, purchased a farm in New York’s Hudson Valley to use as a weekend getaway, later moving there so they could give their full attention to the sheep and fiber they so loved. Over time they developed their own flock, which produced fine merino wool in weights from lace to bulky, in scores of colors both dyed and natural. Lohrer’s friend Melanie Falick described her beautifully: “For more than 20 years, Margrit, a woman I met over a skein of yarn, was a friend and an inspiration. Self-assured, hardworking, generous, creative, passionate, pragmatic—she showed me the kind of person I want to be. She showed me what a good life looks like.”

THE GANG’S ALL HERE

▼ British fashion brand **Wool and the Gang** recently completed a successful crowdfunding campaign, raising more than \$1 million pounds (approximately \$1.5 million in U.S. dollars) to expand their business. Founded in 2008, the company describes its mission as taking the factory out of knitwear production. The company sells yarn, knitwear and crochet patterns, and kits direct to consumers, but it also sells finished products created by “gang members”—crafters who make items in their homes for sale on the WATG website. (A recent article in *The Guardian* estimates that the company has a roster of more than 3,000 “makers” worldwide.) WATG CEO Lisa Rodburn notes that the influx of funds will be used to grow the company’s operations in the U.S., one of its growth markets. The brand recently added crochet to its product mix and saw crochet kits increase to 13 percent of kit sales in just a few months. The company plans to expand into other crafts following the success of its crochet launch. Read more about WATG at www.woolandthegang.com.



GOING DUTCH

▼ Knitwear designer **Constance Willems** has a passion for history—Dutch history, to be precise. She spent three years studying historical Dutch knitting, focusing on ways that knitting has been portrayed in art. She learned that the Netherlands has a long and vibrant knitting tradition, extending

back to at least 1620.

Willems recently released the results of her study in a booklet entitled *Dutch Knits*. The booklet depicts three centuries of knitting “through paintings, drawings and later on in pictures, taking the reader from the Dutch Golden Age to the end of the 1960s,” the author

explains. One of her favorite findings? Feared admiral Piet Hein, who led a fleet of privateers seeking treasure from the Spanish navy in the early 1600s, “was described in Dutch literature as knitting on his ship in harbor while his sailor men were cleaning the ship.” Order a copy via Willems’s website, knitdesign.com.

TRADE ALLIES

There’s a new trade organization in town, designed to help makers of all kinds make connections—and make money doing what they love. **Kristin Link** and **Abby Glassenberg**, both founders of popular sewing websites (Sew Mama Sew and While She Naps, respectively), believed there was a need for craft-industry professionals to collaborate across fields and market segments. Says Glassenberg, “Our goal is to create a new kind of trade organization that serves makers, suppliers, designers and pro bloggers from all areas of craft.”

The **Craft Industry Alliance** debuted last fall, with an impressive website and an ambitious set of offerings for crafty professionals: secure online groups (including specialty groups) to foster open communication among members, a spiffy digital

journal released bimonthly, webinars, a digital library of helpful documents, even classified sections to help members find the services they need. Glassenberg explains: “We are dedicated to serving business owners from all areas of craft because there are fundamental issues that we all share. Our members are teachers, authors, designers and yarn company owners. All of us can benefit from knowing what to charge for a speaking engagement or how a licensing contract should read. All of us need to think about saving for retirement or choosing a healthcare plan. We also want to succeed at marketing our products, getting more teaching gigs, writing more books and growing as a business. Membership can help with all of that because it connects you with other businesses that are working toward the same goals.”

BEANIE BAGS



▼ The latest entry into the world of yarn subscription boxes: Beanie Bags, from the Reno yarn shop **Jimmy Beans Wool**. The shipments, which cost \$10 for U.S. subscribers, include a selection of yarn samples carefully curated by the Jimmy Beans staff, along with fiber-related notions and tips from Jimmy Beans' experts, all housed in a handy zippered pouch. A link is also provided for both knitting and crochet patterns selected to work with the yarns in that month's shipment. Consumers can sign up for an ongoing subscription or purchase 3-, 6- or 12-month subscriptions. The first batch of subscriptions sold out; signups open each month. www.jimmybeanswool.com

KNITTING KNOTIONS

▼ Fans of the free knitting e-zine called **Knotions**, which first went live in 2008, will be pleased to learn that Knotions is back—with a new logo, a new layout and a mobile-friendly design. Says founder and editor Jody Richards, "I was making [back issues of] Knotions mobile-friendly in response to updates to Google earlier this year and I realized I missed Knotions." A few months and one intensive update later, Richards was ready to relaunch. In addition to the site's new look and improved functionality, Richards plans to expand the site's blog to give readers insight into the technology and marketing behind the magazine, all while publishing new issues four to six times a year. Follow along at new.knotions.com.

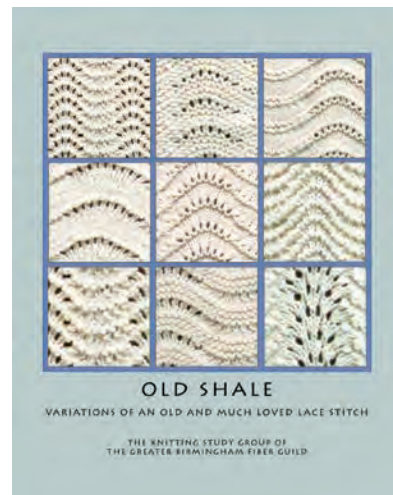
CASTING OFF

▼ Pennsylvania knitters said good-bye to two well-loved institutions in 2015. Last September, **Rosie's Yarn Cellar** closed its doors after nearly 20 years of providing hand-knitting supplies and instruction. Located on the basement level of a brownstone in Philadelphia's Rittenhouse Square neighborhood, the shop first opened its doors (under the name Sophie's Yarns) in 1995 and quickly became a gathering place for fiber lovers with its carefully curated selection of yarns and classes. "Closing was a sad necessity," muses owner Lisa R. Myers. "But in the shop's last weeks, there was an outpouring of affection and appreciation that overwhelmed me. I'm forever grateful to my customers and colleagues for the community we created together."

The **Mannings Handweaving School and Supply Center**, known to its many passionate fans simply as The Mannings, announced last summer that it would be closing its doors at the end of 2015. Known for its extensive selection of knitting, spinning and weaving products as well as its comprehensive class roster, The Mannings was a destination for fiber lovers for decades. Founded by Osma and Milo Gallinger as Creative Crafts in south central Pennsylvania in 1949, the business changed hands in 1960, when Katharine and Harry Manning purchased it and gave it their name; Carol and Ron Woolcock bought the business in 1985 when the Mannings retired, expanding it to reflect Carol's interest in knitting. The Woolcocks made the decision to close the shop after they failed to find a buyer.

OLD SHALE NEW TRICKS

▼ Shetland knitters have been crafting garments using the lace pattern known as "Old Shale" for centuries. That didn't prevent members of the Knitting Study Group of the **Birmingham, Alabama, Fiber Guild** from finding something new to say about the time-honored stitch. Ten fans of the traditional lace stitch devoted themselves to systematically studying the stitch pattern, looking at different numbers of yarn overs, different methods of working increases and decreases, and different background rows. Each participant knit multiple swatches to demonstrate the effect of each change on the overall look of the stitch. Their labor of love—a handy e-book—is free for all knitters to enjoy. It's available via Ravelry and includes photographs of each variation along with charts, written-out instructions and the participants' reflections on their work. ravelry.com/patterns/library/old-shale-variations



BRITTANY NEEDLE WAX

▼ The makers of **Brittany** needles and crochet hooks want you to take good care of your beautiful wooden tools, and they've even created a special needle wax to help make the task easier. Brittany Needle Wax is made in the USA from all-natural ingredients including beeswax and vanilla oil. As Brittany's Mischri Barnes explains, the wax helps "maintain the finish and enhance the slickness of your wooden knitting needles and crochet hooks." Simply apply a small

amount of wax, let it dry, then buff it to a smooth finish. "Our testers have given it great reviews. As far as we know, there is nothing else like it on the market," says Barnes. Brittany Needle Wax is available in 1-ounce jars with a MSRP of \$12; wholesale orders of five jars are shipped with an attractive display box.



KNITTED KNOCKERS



▼ One in eight women in the U.S. will develop breast cancer, and more than 1.2 million breast cancer survivors have had a mastectomy without reconstructive surgery. Those sobering statistics are behind the **Knitted Knockers** movement, a non-

profit organization that seeks to inspire knitters and crocheters to create soft breast prostheses made with love—and yarn. KnittedKnockers.org was started by **Barbara Demorest**, a breast cancer survivor who wanted to get back to work as quickly as possible following her mastectomy. She was shocked when her doctor told her that she'd have to wait up to eight weeks before her surgical site had healed enough to tolerate wearing a traditional prosthesis. Instead, he suggested that she find someone to knit her one.

"I had a friend," Demorest recalls, "who showed she cared when she made a knitted knocker for me. That gift changed my life. Not only was it practical and beautiful, it was made with love." The knitted

prosthesis was soft and light, could be worn inside a regular bra and was inexpensive to make. Unlike a traditional prosthesis, it could be worn soon after surgery and didn't require a special pocketed bra. Now Demorest solicits donations of knitted and crocheted prostheses with one goal in mind: ensuring that every breast cancer survivor who wants one can get a knitted prosthesis free of charge. Because demand is so high and continues to grow, she urges all crafters to get involved with the cause, whether that means spreading the word about Knitted Knockers, knitting or crocheting prostheses, or donating money to offset costs (postage alone costs more than \$600 per month). www.knittedknockers.org

YMN CALENDAR

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

January 9–11

TNNA Winter Trade Show
San Diego Convention Center
San Diego, California
tnna.org

January 15–17

Vogue Knitting LIVE!
New York Marriott Marquis
New York, New York
vogueknittinglive.com

January 29–30

Oxford Fiber Arts Festival
Oxford, Mississippi
www.knit1oxford.com

February 11–14

Madrona Fiber Arts Winter Retreat
Hotel Murano
Tacoma, Washington
madronafiberarts.com

February 18–21

Stitches West
Santa Clara Convention Center
Santa Clara, California
knittinguniverse.com/west

February 26–28

New England Textile Arts Network's Spa Knit & Spin
Freeport, Maine
netafiberforum.blogspot.com

February 26–28

Sheep in the City Getaway
Comfort Suites Hotel
Oak Creek, Wisconsin
sheepinthecitygetaway.com

March 3–6

Rose City Yarn Crawl
Portland, Oregon
rosecityyarncrawl.com

March 4–6

Annual Pittsburgh Knit & Crochet Festival
Four Points Sheraton
Mars, Pennsylvania
pghknitandcrochet.com

March 6–8

Yarn Market News Smart Business Conference
Atlanta Airport Marriott Hotel
Atlanta, Georgia
www.yarnmarketnews.com

March 18–19

Fibreswest
Cloverdale Exhibition
Park Grounds
Cloverdale, British Columbia
fibreswest.com

March 18–20

Madison Knitters' Guild Knit-In
Alliant Energy Center
Madison, Wisconsin
madisonknittersguild.com

March 31–April 3

Interweave Yarn Fest
Embassy Suites Loveland Hotel,
Spa & Conference Center
Loveland, Colorado
interweaveyarnfest.com

March 31–April 3

Stitches South
Gaylord Opryland Resort
& Convention Center
Nashville, Tennessee
knittinguniverse.com/south

April 1–3

Dallas-Fort Worth Fiber Fest
Irving Convention Center
Irving, Texas
dfwfiberfest.org

April 2–3

Alpacapalooza
Clark County Event Center
Ridgefield, Washington
alpacaawa.org

April 15–17

Smoky Mountain Fiber Arts Festival
Great Smoky Mountain Heritage
Center
Townsend, Tennessee
smokymountains.org

April 22–23

Creativ Festival
International Centre
Mississauga, Ontario, Canada
csnf.com

April 30–May 1

Toronto Knitters Frolic
Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
frolic.torontoknittersguild.ca

May 7–8

Maryland Sheep & Wool Festival
Howard County Fairgrounds
West Friendship, Maryland
sheepandwool.org

May 13–15

Vogue Knitting LIVE!
Pasadena Convention Center
Pasadena, California
vogueknittinglive.com

▼ Sequence Knitting

By Cecelia Campochiaro
Chroma Opaci Books; \$60
ISBN: 978-0986338106

Fascinated by a one-row pattern for a scarf, Cecelia Campochiaro began studying different pattern multiples and progressions of stitches. She developed what she dubbed



"sequence knitting": the process of taking a single sequence of stitches and repeating

it, sometimes with subtle shifts, to produce a pattern. Campochiaro spent the next few years experimenting with this technique, exploring how color, knitting direction and other factors affect these one-row patterns. The end result: an information-packed coffee table book that thoroughly explains the theory behind the process. Inside you'll find instructions for basic designs using sequence knitting and a comprehensive array of stitch patterns arising from her experiments. More than 40 patterns, mainly for accessories (scarves, shawls and the like), offer a chance to play with some of these addictive stitch patterns and show the potential for applying Campochiaro's work to garments.

▼ Good Measure: Knit a Perfect Fit Every Time

By Deborah Newton
Sixth&Spring Books; \$29.95
ISBN: 978-1936096916

You'll be forgiven for picking up a copy of Newton's latest book simply because you like the patterns inside—there are



23 women's designs, and all are gorgeous—but it would be wrong to skip Newton's excellent chapters on garment

fit. She begins by defining good fit in knitwear, then goes on to cover practical skills (taking accurate measurements, drawing a schematic, considering body type) before walk-

ing readers through just about everything one needs to know about fit. Ease, silhouette, sleeve structure, necklines: check, check, check and check. An extensive section on alterations explains how to customize patterns for fit and for other reasons, like a preference for working, say, top down and in the round. And yes, there are the patterns: mostly sweaters, with a few surprises (ribbed shorts, a leaf-embellished skirt), all beautifully designed and fitted, and shown on models with refreshingly real-world figures.

▼ 30 Slippers to Knit and Felt

By Arne & Carlos
Trafalgar Square Books; \$24.95
ISBN: 978-1570767418

The Scandinavian favorites are back, this time applying their whimsical sensibility to the humble slipper. It's fun to see the sources the designing duo use as a launching pad for their



fantastic footwear, from the classic bunny slipper (indeed, an entire chapter is devoted to rabbit-themed slippers) to

Sami moccasins, Native American motifs, Norwegian stars and, of course, botanical motifs inspired by their beloved garden. Helpful how-tos illustrate techniques; the plethora of photographs (showing projects as well as the colorful ephemera that inspired them) make this book a pleasure to leaf through, even if you never make a single cozy slipper.

▼ The Modern Natural Dyer

By Kristine Vejar
Stewart, Tabori & Chang; \$29.95
ISBN: 978-1617691751

When Kristine Vejar traveled to India in 1999 to study art and architecture, she found herself entranced by colorful textiles. She learned how natural dyes could be used to produce glorious hues—and thus a dyer was born. In her first book, she provides readers with a comprehensive primer on the process of dyeing with colors derived from natural sources: flowers, leaves, bark, even fungi and insects. Start by learning

about specific dyestuffs and fibers, walk through the general process



of dyeing, then use individual projects to explore and refine your dyeing techniques. While Vejar includes some basic knitting projects in the book, she also uses other textiles (finished totes, silk scarves and ribbon) for those who wish to see how dyeing impacts already finished fabrics. Lush photographs by Sara Remington add to the swoon factor.

▼ Cold Weather Crochet

By Marlaine Bird
Interweave/F+W; \$22.99
ISBN: 978-1632501257

Anyone foolish enough to still think of crochet as knitting's ugly step-sister has clearly not been paying attention to the elegant and innovative crochet patterns that have been published over the past decade. Marly Bird is at the forefront of this crochet renaissance, and her latest book highlights a wonderful selection of garments, accessories and afghans showcasing the beauty of



modern crochet. Colorful but modern granny squares, thrummed slippers, cozy cowls with matching hats

and an ethereal wrap show the many different ways that crochet can keep the wearer both warm and stylish. Bird's charming projects and serious design chops make this a must-read for the hook-happy and will no doubt entice new crocheters into the fold.

▼ Geometric Knitting Patterns

By Tina Barrett
Barron's; \$23.99
ISBN: 978-1438005454

If tessellations make you tremble and Greek keys unlock your heart, you'll want to snap up a copy of Cornish designer Tina Barrett's jam-packed book of geometric knitting patterns. More than 750 stitch patterns are included, with everything

from stripes and checks, chevrons and diamonds, Fair Isle motifs and graphic designs to slip stitches, geometric-style lace and cable patterns—truly, the breadth of styles and sheer number of motifs included are remarkable. Pattern



stitches are divided into nine categories, and each chapter includes a project using a pattern from that chapter.

An especially nice touch: Knitting charts use knitter's graph paper, with rectangles rather than standard graph-paper squares, to more accurately show the finished motifs without distortion.

▼ 60 Quick Cowls

Sixth&Spring Books; \$17.95
ISBN: 978-1936096930

The perennially popular cowl gets its due in this pattern-packed volume, part of the publisher's "60 Quick" series in collaboration with Cascade Yarns. Lush merino/alpaca-blend yarns in versatile worsted weight mean these cowls are indeed quick to knit—and you'll find virtually every style and



technique represented by the talented team of designers. Texture, cables, color-

work and lace—along with some more unusual design features such as zippers, buttons and knots—keep things interesting. The great mix of designs and flexibility of a cowl's fit mean there's something for everyone in this book.

▼ One-Skein Wonders for Babies

By Judith Durant
Storey Publishing; \$18.95
ISBN: 978-1612124803

Judith Durant continues her popular "One-Skein Wonders" series with a volume devoted entirely to the babes among us. It's a match made in heaven, since a baby's small size means plenty of garments that don't require plenty of yardage. As with



other books in the series, you'll find a plethora of charming patterns

(101 in this case) stitched by an impressive roster of designers and yarn shop owners, each style requiring only one skein of yarn (although specific yardage requirements vary from brand to brand and among the different weights of yarn). Patterns are handily organized by type: tops, bottoms, dresses, hats, footwear, toys and more. Lots of color photos, schematics and charts make this a super value for anyone who knits for babies; you'll find plenty of adorable inspiration and oh-so-cute designs—enough to create an entire baby trousseau if you're so inclined.

▼ Short Row Knits

By Carol Feller

Potter Craft; \$22.99

ISBN: 978-0804186346

If your short rows keep coming up short—or you're so anxious you



avoid short rows entirely—you'll want to peruse the pages of Carol Feller's workshop/pattern

book. Feller's love of the technique shines through from the first page, and she smartly breaks her "lessons" into thirds. First up: the actual process of working short rows using four different techniques, along with hints for working short rows in different stitches and directions. The middle section shows how short rows can be used to change the shape of knitting, including simpler slopes and more complicated shapes. Last up are specific ways to use short rows in garments, including bust shaping, shoulder slopes and sleeve caps. Best of all, the projects provided for practice are stylish, inventive and attractive, creating the best incentive of all for mastering the techniques Feller explains so well.

▼ Adventures in Mochimochi Land: Tall Tales From a Tiny Knitted World

By Anna Hrachovec

Potter Craft; \$19.99

ISBN: 978-0385344593

A hungry donut, Bubbles the dolphin and a blimp named Hugo are just a few of the whimsical characters you'll meet in this book. When Hrachovec began creating her adorable—and adorably tiny—knitted figures, she never thought she'd also be creating an entire world for them to



inhabit. An exquisitely small knitted explorer who travels through knitted forests, villages

and oceans guides you through that world, telling tales of the residents therein. The first half of the book is devoted to these delightful stories, photographed with adorable detail; the second half consists of 25 patterns that allow the reader to create her own teeny octopus, muffin-shaped mountain or carnival tent, to name a few.

▼ Mini Skeins Knits

Lark Crafts; \$14.95

ISBN: 978-1454709169

Whether you've succumbed to mini-



skein mania and started collecting the teeny hanks or just have an assortment of oddballs in your stash, this

colorful collection may be just what you're looking for. The focus is on patterns that take relatively small amounts of multiple colors of yarn, in weights from fingering through worsted. Twenty-five patterns show the versatility of mini skeins, used for colorwork, stripes of every ilk, and chevron and ripple stitches. Patterns include accessories such as socks, hats, shawls and wristers along with a few sweater projects, all shown in clear photos that accentuate the beauty of the yarns. Gradients, ROYGBIV progressions, jewel-tone brights

and random color combos will inspire you to cast on instead of just admiring your neat little minis.

▼ Knit Your Own Pet

By Sally Muir and Joanna

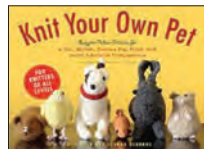
Osborne

Black Dog & Leventhal

Publishing; \$14.95

ISBN: 978-1579129958

Knitted-pet purveyors Muir and Osborne have charmed knitters with their detailed patterns for breed-specific dogs and cats, zoo animals and other wildlife. Now they bring their zoological panache to a wider audience, with a delightful book aimed at a wide range of knitters, including



younger folks and beginners. Unlike earlier books in the series,

this compact volume includes a how-to-knit lesson and gives more streamlined patterns to make the tiny creatures accessible to knitters of all skill levels. Now those who fawn over their ferret, gaze adoringly at their goldfish or revel in their rabbit can knit up miniature toy versions—

as can those who love Shetland ponies, hamsters, canaries, snakes and more.

▼ Knitting Ephemera

By Carol J. Sulcoski

Sixth&Spring Books; \$14.95

ISBN: 978-1936096985

It's *Schott's Original Miscellany* meets the fiber arts: Carol Sulcoski



has gathered here every historical, factual and just plain interesting tidbit you could possibly ever

want to know about yarn. Are you aware that a single bale of cotton can make 215 pairs of blue jeans or more than 3,000 diapers? Or that the origins of the argyle motif were born in 16th-century Scotland, thanks to the county ruled by Clan Campbell, Argyll? It's all here, and more, in this engaging tome. Dazzle everyone in your knitting group with your knowledge, or just be a better advocate for the industry we all love by knowing more about it. —Erin Slonaker

BESTSELLER WATCH

Here's what topped the bestseller lists the second week of November 2015:

Amazon Knitting List

1. *Loom Knitting Primer*, by Isela Phelps (St. Martin's Griffin)
4. *60 Quick Cows* (Sixth&Spring Books)
5. *Cast On, Bind Off*, by Leslie Ann Bestor (Storey)
6. *The Knowledgeable Knitter*, by Margaret Radcliffe (Storey)
7. *One-Skein Wonders for Babies*, by Judith Durant (Storey)
8. *Short Row Knits: A Master Workshop*, by Carol Feller (Potter Craft)

Amazon Crochet List

2. *A to Z Crochet* (Martingale & Co.)
5. *Crochet One-Skein Wonders*, by Edie Eckman (Storey)
7. *Connect the Shapes Crochet Motifs*, by Edie Eckman (Storey)

Barnes & Noble Needlework & Fiber Arts List

1. *60 Quick Cows* (Sixth&Spring Books)
2. *A Life in Stitches*, by Rachael Herron (Chronicle Books)
3. *Cats in Hats*, by Sara Thomas (Running Press)
4. *Knitting Pearls*, edited by Ann Hood (W.W. Norton)
5. *750 Knitting Stitches* (St. Martin's Griffin)

GO with the FAUX

As a runway trend, fur is here to stay. Yarn companies have followed suit, offering more innovations in faux-fur yarns than ever before.

By Christina Behnke



Red Heart Boutique Fur

Specs: 8 colors; 100% polyester; 11yds/100g

Gauge: 4 sts = 4" on U.S. 17 (12.75mm) needles

Distinctions: Followers of street style might recognize how Boutique Fur encapsulates the recent "Muppet fur" trend. The fringe takes the form of tufts instead of strands, and as such, the fiber is bound at the center—rather than at one edge—amping up the fluff factor.

Projects: Take the punk fur trend from runway to real life with a set of super-bright boot toppers.

Trendsetter Yarns La Furla

Specs: 14 colors; 91% polyamide, 9% polyester; 75yds/100g

Gauge: 20 sts = 4" on U.S. 8 (5mm) needles

Distinctions: Leave it to Trendsetter, high-end purveyor of all things novel, to offer an upscale eyelash. Replete with silky softness and languid drape, thanks to the nylon content, La Furla's long, fine fringe creates a sense of kittenish élan that recalls a marabou boa.

Projects: When we say drape, we mean drape—glam scarves, wraps and trims flaunt it best.

Lion Brand Yarn Fun Fur

Specs: 58 colors; 100% polyester; 57yds/40g

Gauge: 16 sts = 4" on U.S. 10½ (6.5mm) needles

Distinctions: So ubiquitous, the name is practically genericized: Mention "eyelash" and most crafters will think "Fun Fur." Tightly spun for maximum shine, its wispy fringe works equally well as a carry-along or stand-alone yarn workable in a wide gauge range.

Projects: Playful crafters stitching for kids or pets will love the foolproof care requirements. Just imagine the dog-sweater possibilities!





Louisa Harding/KFI Luzia

Specs: 14 colors; 80% viscose, 20% nylon; 43yds/50g

Gauge: 11 sts = 4" on U.S. 11 (8mm) needles

Distinctions: Easily the most convincing faux on the market, this fluffy eyelash mingles two lengths, textures and colors of fine, densely woven fiber to create the appearance of double-coat fur.

Projects: The prolific Harding has designed a collection of fanciful tams, capes and collars specifically for Luzia; also check out her projects that pair it with her more traditional plied yarns.



Bergère de France Abakan

Specs: 6 colors; 68% polyamide, 32% polyester; 38yds/50g

Gauge: 15 sts = 4" on U.S. 10 (6mm) needles

Distinctions: Abakan embraces fur's glitzier notions with glittering polyester filaments that are laced among shorter, matte nylon lashes. Sturdy yet lightweight, the I-cord base creates a dense backdrop that lets the contrasting textures (literally) shine.

Projects: This satin-smooth blend is also machine-washable, making it an ideal choice for crocheting fuzzy toys or accessorizing little girls with a penchant for dress-up.



Rozetti/Universal Yarn Wicked Fur

Specs: 6 colors; 90% nylon, 10% polyester; 109yds/125g

Gauge: 14 sts = 4" on U.S. 10 (6mm) needles

Distinctions: Wicked, perhaps, but certainly cruelty-free. While most eyelash yarns sport well-defined fibers, the malleable, satin-soft fringe on this faux fur assumes a lifelike wave. Duotone strands of different lengths enhance the naturalistic effect.

Projects: Looking for drama? This bulky weight gives cuffs an untamed quality, but we imagine that a rocker vest could really harness its wild nature.

Prism Plumette

Specs: Hundreds of colorways; 100% nylon; 95yds/57g

Gauge: 24 sts = 4" on U.S. 6 (4mm) needles

Distinctions: In the pelt realm, shearing fur creates a more casual patina. Prism applied this concept to faux-fur Plume; Plumette, the result, preserves the luxuriously glossy hand in a shorter, sleeker pile that renders hand-dyed color with singular dimension.

Projects: Knit fabrics resemble crushed velvet, making this a subtler choice befitting fuzzy sweaters. The low pile also takes to crochet with ease.



**yarn reviews
continue on
page 18**

GO with the FAUX



Tahki Yarns/Tahki•Stacy Charles Sherpa

Specs: 5 colors; 48% wool, 46% alpaca, 6% nylon; 114yds/50g

Gauge: 13 sts = 4" on U.S. 10 (6mm) needles

Distinctions: Not a fur in the immediate sense, Sherpa instead creates pelt-like fabrics. Netted in a nylon binder, wisps of brushed fiber contrast with densely packed slubs, which produce the look of spotted animal prints when knit up.

Projects: The wool/alpaca blend is smooth yet spongy, ideal for comfy, lightweight cardis with a bombshell bent.

HiKoo/Skacel Collection Caribou

Specs: 15 colors; 100% nylon; 93yds/50g

Gauge: 10 sts = 4" on U.S. 9–11 (5.5–8mm) needles

Distinctions: Downy, curly fringe makes Caribou an eyelash in construction only: It looks more like fleece than fur, making it a groovy alternative to more glamour-focused fauxs. The nylon content makes it next-to-skin soft.

Projects: Use it to add serious cuddle to plush toys or fur-lined accessories. (Tiny Owl Knits, known for her toy-like designs, recommends it for her rugged "Wolfpup" hat and "Twig" cowl.)

Plymouth Yarn Arequipa Fur

Specs: 6 colors; 59% baby alpaca, 41% fine merino wool; 65yds/50g

Gauge: 10 sts = 4" on U.S. 11 (8mm) needles

Distinctions: Here, the binder is as integral as the crisp fringe: Along with elasticity, the hefty I-cord base provides a departure from the usual shag look. Fabrics look whiskered, with a hint of alpaca glimmer.

Projects: The neutral palette coordinates with Arequipa Bouclé and silk-blend Arequipa Worsted, so mix and match away. And remember, hooks heart chainettes.

Rowan Fur

Specs: 4 colors; 97% wool, 3% polyamide; 66yds/50g

Gauge: 12½ sts = 4" on U.S. 10½ (6.5mm) needles

Distinctions: Fine, neatly trimmed plies of velvety wool are bound at the base of Fur by a strong nylon filament. Lustrous rather than shiny, it offers a sophisticated option for fleece devotees looking to join the trend.

Projects: Simple scarves, chic cropped jackets and fur-lined cowls set off its understated look; toys become instant heirlooms.





Mirvana

Needle Arts

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Updates & Changes

I'm really looking forward to our Winter show in San Diego (January 9–11). There'll be lots of amazing programs and activities, including a new twist on the popular Building Better Business Series, the Yarn Group Quest, Fashion Show, Sample IT! and our first winter show Yarn Café, a great place to sit and relax while enjoying a taste of the latest fibers.

If for some reason you can't attend, I want to remind you to renew your TNNA membership. In an effort to make TNNA Affiliate Membership a better fit for industry professionals, we worked with a member volunteer task force to make some changes to the category options. We are very pleased with the results. When joining as an Affiliate Member, you can choose from the following categories: Academic or Museum Professional; Business and Creative Services; Manufacturer's Representative; Organization; Publisher. The new Business and Creative Services category was created to be more inclusive of the needs of our members. This category is for individuals and agencies that offer creative and

business services to the needlearts industry, including authors, bookkeepers/accountants, copy editors, designers, fiber artists, finishers, graphic designers, illustrators, marketing specialists, photographers, teachers (business-to-business and consumer), technical editors, website developers, video production and more.

TNNA values your involvement in these aspects of the industry, and as a member you are part of an influential network of needleart professionals with access to the many benefits of membership, including free entry to TNNA's trade show events; a listing in TNNA's new online Business and Creative Services Directory; trade show badges with category indicated for better show-floor recognition; a members-only online forum to discuss issues pertinent to your business; a business discount program; business tool kits and industry-specific data; having a collective voice for the professional class within the TNNA environment. TNNA Affiliate Membership is \$60. For more information, visit TNNA.org or call (800) 889-8662.

Board of Director Election Results:

Our elections have taken place, and we have a new slate of creative people to help shape our organization. Jacqueline Sava of Soak Wash joins the board; Barry Klein of Trendsetter Yarns and Barbara Bergsten of Barbara Bergsten Designs were reelected. Melissa Prince of Melissa Prince Designs takes over as Needlepoint Group Chair. The new 2016 TNNA Executive Committee is as follows: Dave Van Stralen of Louet North America, president; Don Lynch of Associated Talents, Inc., vice president; Gwen Bortner of Two Sides–Two Points, secretary/treasurer.

Buyer Bucks: New in 2106 is our Buyer Bucks program, which gives TNNA Retail Members \$1,000 to offset show expenses. For details, visit tnna.org/buyerbucks.

2016 Summer Show:

The TNNA 2016 summer show will be held in a brand-new location. We'll see you in Washington, D.C., from June 11–13.

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.

Melanie White, Denver CO

made it her own

Pattern:	Petiole
Yarn:	Gems Merion - Worsted
Color:	#43 Pewter



louet

MADE IN AMERICA



TNNA Winter Trade Show

January 9-11, 2016 • San Diego, CA

EDUCATION BEGINS JANUARY 7

The NeedleArts Trade Show

June 11-13, 2016 • Washington, DC

EDUCATION BEGINS JUNE 9

NEW FOR
2016!

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To learn more go to tnna.org/buyerbucks



GO TO WWW.TNNA.ORG TO REGISTER OR LEARN MORE!



Building Relationships

When I began my tenure on the TNNA board and as Yarn Group chair, I was surprised by the sometimes adversarial relationship between wholesalers and retailers. While it's true that at times I'm frustrated with my customers, it's not the business of those consumers to understand the inner workings of my shop. However, I feel strongly that if retailers—a wholesaler's customers, after all—better know how a wholesaler works, and vice versa, together we can inspire more consumers, which in the long run improves business for all. So I asked a few respected wholesalers their thoughts on working with and helping retailers bring in more customers.

Betsy Perry, owner of Classic Elite Yarns, observed that her entire pattern of business engagement is based on what retailers do and what she and her staff predict they'll do. "We count on future orders to plan our buying patterns. If retailers aren't able to forecast their needs, it's hard for us to predict ours," she says. "And once we are

'in the season,' it's difficult to change course." That's in addition to the long lead times required to procure yarn for retailers, and the very high minimum orders wholesalers are required to place.

Barry Klein, president of Trendsetter Yarns, notes that "we are exactly like [stores], but on a larger scale. We rely on creative product to inspire our customers. We rely on good customer service and delivery of goods. The only difference is, we don't have the ability to buy one of anything. Our commitments are way more sensitive to quantity."

Courtney Kelly, co-owner of Kelbourne Woolens (and the newly named Yarn Group chair), says she looks for creative ways to work with yarn shops to get people into their stores. "Our approach is to reach out to the end user directly to guide the knitters to the shops. But if we can partner with yarn shop owners in creative ways to help them reach their customers, we're all for it," she says.

One way Yarn Group has worked to bring

retailers and wholesalers together is through the Quest, the "interactive treasure hunt" held at recent TNNA conferences. "The Quest has been a truly excellent opportunity for us to connect with retailers," says Felicia Lo, owner of SweetGeorgia Yarns. "Rather than give away little freebies or promotional goods, we choose to give away information. [At the most recent TNNA conference], Questers had to ask us for details about a new yarn or color we were launching for the season, and it always opened up a conversation that became something more. It gave us the opportunity to form working relationships with new shop owners."

"Let's work together to drive the sense of community and experience," Betsy Perry encourages. "Wholesalers can help retailers with beautiful yarns, designs, marketing materials, etc. Then retailers can generate enthusiasm and work to build individual communities in their shops. This will help each facet of our industry to grow."

TNNA's Yarn Group is an industry-encompassing group that promotes the growth of the yarn industry, creates awareness and appreciation of the craft, and encourages partnerships among members of the community.



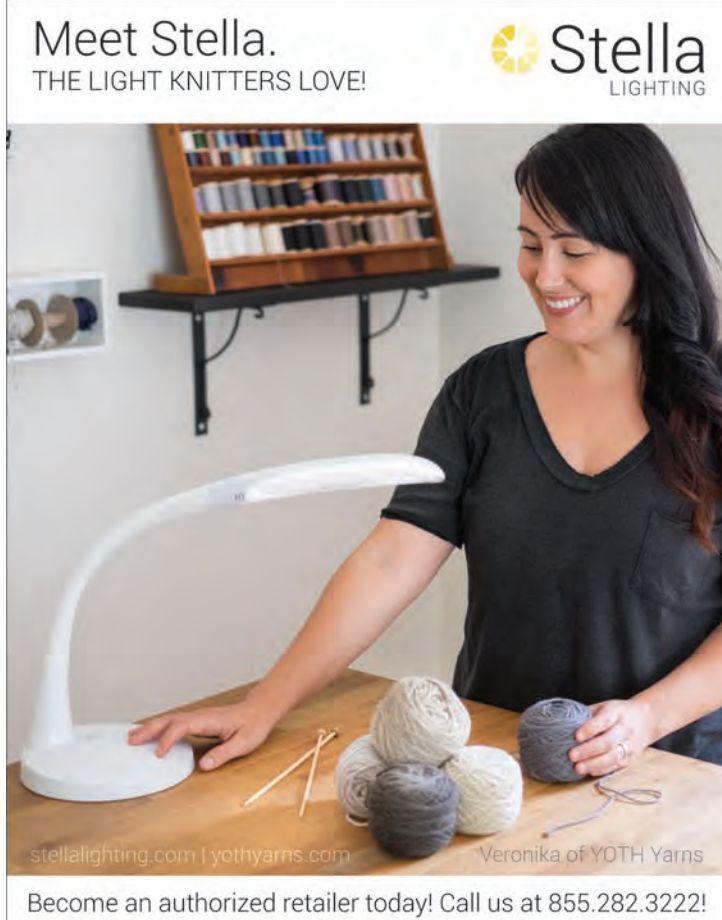
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SPINNING & WEAVING GROUP

BY CHERYL NACHTRIEB, CHAIR



Put the Party in Your Plans

Whether you have a bricks-and-mortar shop or an Internet store, an important way to attract customers is to make your store part of the action, regardless of where that action is happening—online or down the street. Take, for example, the Spinning & Weaving Group's hand-spinning contest Spinzilla, which takes place every October. Spinzilla represents an incredible opportunity to increase business in your shop. If you already carry spinning equipment and fiber products, you can use Spinzilla to encourage more spinning-related purchases. If you don't yet carry these products, Spinzilla can be your entrée into this lucrative product segment.

To make the most of Spinzilla or any other consumer event, spend some time mapping out your plan of action. Use newsletters, blog posts, event calendars, various forms of social media and in-store signage to whip up excitement before, during and even after the event. In

addition to in-store and online marketing activities, involve the community at large by creating events held in neighborhood spaces—libraries, coffee shops, bookstores. At these events, be sure to have on hand signage and collateral materials promoting your shop (brochures, class schedules). Most of all, be prepared by having enough product in stock.

For Spinzilla, my shop, The Recycled Lamb, stocked up on a wide variety of fiber. You want the participants to feel special; if you let them know you had them in mind when you purchased the (yak/silk, cashmere, hand-painted bamboo/merino) fiber, they'll show their love by making a purchase. We overstocked spinning equipment, including bobbins, storage bobbins, drive bands, nuts and bolts and springs and strings. Make sure word gets around that you have plenty of stock on hand. Create specials just for the Spinzilla participants and special packages related to the event to attract new

customers. Make the product irresistible.

Events can also help fill classes by driving interest in a topic, so schedule classes as adjuncts to the event. For example, we invited Beth Smith, a popular spinning instructor, to do several workshops five months prior to Spinzilla, one of which was "Speed up your Spinning," marketed specifically to attract potential Spinzilla participants. Think about how to introduce educational components disguised as a party into your marketing: We hosted a Spinning Wheel Spa day for Spinzilla participants and a fiber-prep day. During the event, hold contests with prizes—they don't have to be big, but make them fun. Branded prizes that include your logo and the event logo are great. Lastly, wrap up with a show-and-tell at your shop after the event. You'll start building excitement for the next event right away; with luck, your efforts will bring in new customers who will want to stick around to see what's next.

The goal of the Spinning & Weaving Group is to ensure a vibrant marketplace by promoting the joys of hand spinning and weaving. Learn more at www.tnna.org/page/SWGHome.

The advertisement for Ancient Arts Yarns features a background of colorful, multi-colored yarn skeins in shades of blue, green, and yellow. In the center, there is a white circular logo containing a stylized handprint. Below the logo, the text reads "Ancient Arts YARNS" in a serif font, followed by "over 110 brilliant colours!" in a smaller font. Further down, it says "visit us at: ancientartsfibre.com" and "Come see us at TNNA in San Diego!". At the bottom, a dark blue banner contains the text "nature • inspiration • glorious colours!" in a white, cursive-style font.

Ancient Arts
YARNS
over 110 brilliant colours!
visit us at:
ancientartsfibre.com
Come see us at TNNA in San Diego!
nature • inspiration • glorious colours!

The advertisement for Notions Marketing has a bright pink background. At the top, the "NOTIONS MARKETING CORPORATION" logo is displayed in white, with "Global Creative Arts Distributor" written below it. The main headline "Find it all here!" is in a large, white, cursive font, followed by "Your distributor for all things knitting." in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. Below this, there are six circular icons arranged in a 2x3 grid, each with a white icon and a label: "Yarn" (yarn skein), "Needles & Hooks" (crossed needles), "1,000+ Books" (open book), "Crochet Thread" (ball of thread), "Organizers" (basket), and "Tools & Gifts" (scissors). At the bottom, the text reads "Discover 1,500+ brands and experience the best service in the market. Contact us today!" followed by the website "notionsmarketing.com" and phone numbers "616.243.8424" and "800.748.0250".

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Keeping Consumers Engaged

Love Yarn Day (ILYD), the holiday that celebrates all yarn crafts, turned five last October. "Stitch It Forward" asked all fiber fans to share their affection for yarn by teaching at least one person to knit, crochet, weave, spin or yarn-bomb. To broaden participation and engagement, CYC created templates: easy-to-follow idea sheets for retailers, guilds and groups. We sponsored two contests for enthusiasts to show off their passion and encouraged yarn lovers to add #stitchitforward and #ilyd2015 to their social media posts to show their love for yarn and motivate others to join in.

The Stitch It Forward Photo Contest connected with the most people, likely the result of the amusing contest categories: the most people taught (shown in a single photo); the youngest person taught; the oldest person taught; the biggest Stitch It Forward failure; the funniest location for teaching. In contrast, the I Love Yarn Day 2015 Video Contest was more of a challenge: Capture on video all of your deepest yarn fantasies. Suffice it to say, there are some very interesting

fantasies out there. We attribute the enthusiastic support for these contests not only to our consumers' passion but also to the great prizes contributed by Council members.

Counting down to ILYD, we contributed daily posts to social media, with tips on teaching others how to knit and crochet, free patterns, yarn party ideas, inspiration and links. Every year, as the scope of ILYD has grown, so too have the social media metrics.

CYC initiated a new viral campaign in 2015 called #StitchAwayStress. It launched in April, which is also National Stress Awareness Month. Inspired by the success of the Stitch Away Stress campaign, the Council wants to have some more fun with the stress-reducing benefits of knitting and crochet in 2016, this time on one of the most stressful days of the year: Tax Day (April 18 in 2016).

Many of you will remember the lemon stress ball designed by Twinkie Chan, which we introduced as part of the Stitch Away Stress campaign. The initiative was an instant hit, and with the

help of guilds and groups across the country that pledged to crochet and knit the lemon stress balls, the Council plans to hand out thousands of them, along with a message about the stress-reducing benefits of these crafts, to taxpayers on the busy streets of New York City in April. Hopefully, they will be inspired to take up knitting or crocheting and experience the benefits themselves. In addition, CYC will continue its campaign to promote the healthy benefits of our crafts via social media sites throughout the month of April to generate more social media buzz.

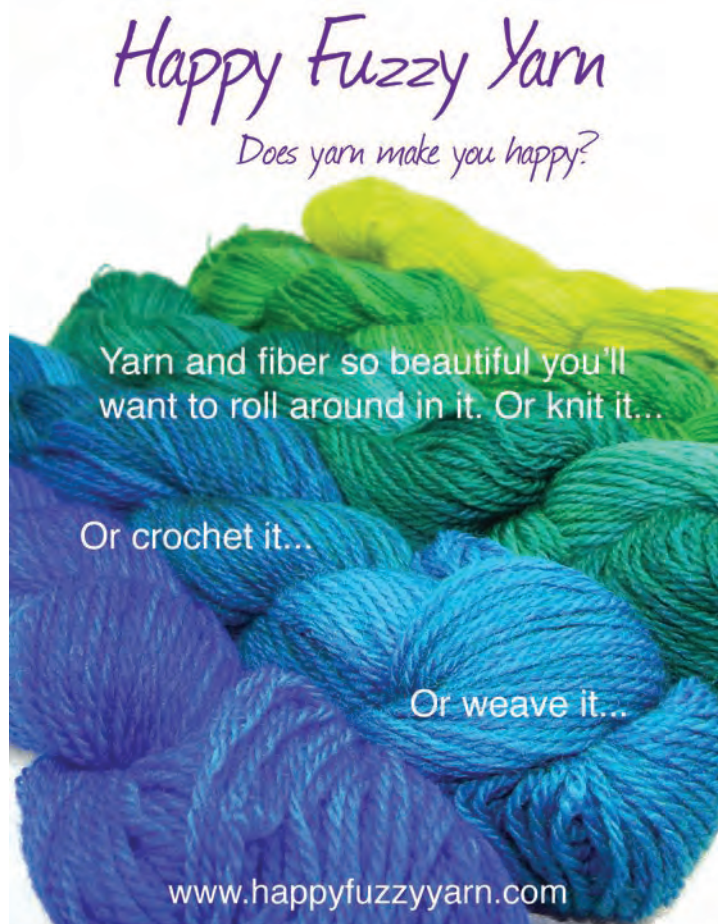
The Stitch Away Stress theme is a great promotional handle for retailers as well. CYC's consumer research shows that 93 percent of crocheters and knitters reported the crafts give them a feeling of accomplishment; 85 percent credit them with stress reduction; and 68 percent praise the crafts' powers to improve their mood. It's a great idea around which to build a series of classes or in-store events and keep your customers engaged.

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




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Going Local

Ravelry can allow you to connect with users on the other side of the world or right in your hometown. We know that many of our members use the site to connect with other Ravelers in their local communities, seeking products from nearby yarn shops (of course!), discussion groups based in their areas, and even locally made products. Around the site there are quite a few location-based features that can help you connect your shop to nearby users or find local designers or products.

To take advantage of the location-based features, make sure you have your location set in your Ravelry profile. To do so, on your profile page, click on the "edit profile" link underneath your username at the top left. In the "personal bits" section midway down the page, select your country, state/region and city. Click the "save changes" button, and your location will be set.

Shop Directory

We have the largest yarn shop directory online, searchable from our "Yarns" tab. If your shop

isn't in the directory, or if it is listed but you aren't connected to it and are thus unable to edit your listing, our Shop Wizard will help you. Just visit www.ravelry.com/yarnshops for more information and a link to the Wizard. Once you're connected to your shop's directory page, you have total control. Adding photos to your shop's page will help to give users a feel for your store and entice them to visit. Use the notes field to publicize special events, link to your website's classes page or get the word out about a regular craft night.

Find Local Yarns and Patterns from Local Designers

You can also use Ravelry search to find yarns and designers local to your shop—useful for finding a new local yarn to carry, making a shop sample in a pattern from a local designer or just seeing what Ravelers near you are creating. To find local yarns, go to Advanced Yarn Search by clicking the link on the main "Yarns" tab or visiting www.ravelry.com/yarns/search. On the left side of the screen, we have all kinds of

filters (such as fiber type and weight) for you to apply. On the bottom of the list of filters is a box that says "more search options." Inside that box, click on the "yarnie within" link and you'll be able to filter to find yarns from yarn companies, spinners and dyers located up to 60 miles away, based on the location that you and the yarnies have set in your Ravelry profiles.

We recently added a brand-new "designer within" filter that works in the same way, to help Ravelry users find patterns from designers local to them. Like the "yarnie within" search, this is found in the Advanced Search—just click on the link to Advanced Search from the main patterns tab or visit www.ravelry.com/patterns/search. In the "more search options" box at the bottom left, click on the "designer within" link and set the distance you'd like (anywhere between 10 to 60 miles).

We believe it is so important to support local businesses and hope that these features make it easier for you to use Ravelry to connect with your community.

For more information about In-Store Pattern Sales and other Ravelry services for local yarn shops, please visit ravelry.com/yarnshops.

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The Master Hand Knitting Program

Do you have the chops to become a master knitter? The Master Hand Knitting (MHK) Program is open to all members of The Knitting Guild Association. MHK not a test or a competition but rather an educational undertaking that encourages knitters to improve their skills through a course of self-guided study.

Knitters participating in the program are required to successfully complete three levels, working at their own pace. At each level, these knitters are asked to show mastery of different and increasingly challenging techniques. Members of the Master Hand Knitting Committee review each submission and provide written comments and suggestions, praising the items that are worked well and pointing out weaknesses or errors; participants then work to improve their weaknesses and move on to the next level. The committee may suggest additional resources or instruction to help participants correct mistakes; a co-chair is available to provide guidance should the knitter need help.

Each level requires knitters to demonstrate

specific skills by knitting swatches and specified projects. They are also asked to research and answer questions, write reports and evaluate knitting resources. At each level, knitters are required to assemble a binder of their work, which becomes a valuable resource. By Level 3, participating knitters will have the skills needed to design both a traditional hat and a sweater—the crowning achievement of the program.

Once all three levels have been completed to the satisfaction of the committee, the knitter is awarded the title of Master Knitter. Many Master Knitters go on to teach and design. They are sought after as tech editors and test knitters, because designers know their work is of the utmost quality.

Intermediate and advanced knitters will find the program to be a fun challenge, from reevaluating basic skills to designing complex garments. The program pushes each knitter to learn and grow, making this a rewarding experience.

Program participants enjoy a great camaraderie throughout the MHK journey. The TKGA Ravelry group, which has more than 5,000 mem-

bers, has an active discussion forum in which knitters share the ups and downs of working through the program. The same is true at TKGA's annual conference, where committee members, Master Knitters and participants share their knitting knowledge through classes and demonstrations. At the conference, new Master Knitters are acknowledged at a special ceremony in which they are awarded a certificate and a pin. Master Knitters who show outstanding talent are asked to join the review committee, whose members evaluate submissions and guide participants through the program. The title of Master Knitter draws respect throughout the knitting community.

TKGA is more than 8,000 members strong. Whether you're knitting for fun or pursuing excellence in your knitting skills, you will find membership in TKGA beneficial. TKGA's motto says it all: "Mastering your knitting through education." For more information about TKGA or the Master Hand Knitting Program, visit www.TKGA.com.

The Knitting Guild Association (TKGA), headquartered in Zanesville, Ohio, is a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting knitting. Its official publication is *Cast On* magazine, published quarterly.

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Finding the Crocheters

Last January, I became president of CGOA. While it is my first stint on the board, I'm no stranger to the organization or the yarn industry. As a book editor for the past 25-plus years, I've listened to many discussions about how local yarn stores can capitalize on the crochet customer.

Finding the right equation that results in bringing these customers into your stores is the goal. Crocheters use and love yarn, and you sell yarn. Seems like a match made in heaven, right? But we know it's not that easy. There is still a stigma surrounding crocheters, one that says they are nothing but frugal and will never buy the yarn you carry in your shop.

Let's look at the facts. Crocheters historically use much more yarn than knitters. They often make large afghans that can call for more than 2,000 yards of yarn. Those afghans are going to be used by moms, dads and kids and need to be washer/dryer-friendly, so using yarn that retails for \$10 to \$20 a ball and is made of fibers that

cannot stand up to regular laundering doesn't seem to make much sense. I believe crocheters are using sound judgment when they purchase acrylic yarn for these projects.

But that doesn't mean they only crochet afghans or that they won't shop in your stores. I'd like to share with you my experience at the CGOA conference in San Diego last summer. A few situations really called to my attention the fact that crocheters are indeed buying and creating with the very yarns you carry. First, the design competition: In the many categories and among the many fibers used, high-end yarns were chosen for a large number of projects. Next, the member fashion show, which encouraged makers to model their creations. Almost exclusively, their shawls, capes and dresses were made with higher-end yarns. And lastly, the marketplace was hopping. I personally stood on the show floor and watched countless crocheters buy beautiful hand-dyed yarns.

Here are a few thoughts about enticing a

new generation of crocheters into your shop:

- Display crochet models that can be completed with just one skein of yarn. Newer customers may need help getting over the sticker shock, and one-skein projects will help.
- Invite a local CGOA chapter to an open house one evening—one planned just for them. Think about offering a discount on any yarn purchased that night.
- Be flexible about where yarn for projects visitors are working on when they attend your stitching nights was purchased. They may be using yarn that didn't come from your shop today, but they are always planning their next projects, and your generosity of spirit and understanding will make an impression.
- Encourage the regular attendees of your stitching night to bring friends who crochet.

As I write this, I'm preparing to teach beginner crochet classes at my LYS. I hope you too are making every effort to make crocheters feel welcome. It's a win-win for everyone.

For more information about the Crochet Guild of America, visit crochet.org or e-mail CGOA@offinger.com.

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Understanding Inventory Management

What comes in and what goes out is the most important aspect of managing your store. BY KIMBERLY AGBAYANI

Yarn shop inventories are highly idiosyncratic, making careful inventory management especially important. We often have to carry colors that do not sell well to make yarn lines work as a whole; we have to stock sweater quantities of yarn in the same dye lot; we have to have on hand certain slow-selling needles or hooks for the few customers who may need them. These factors increase our days on hand or lengthen our inventory turnover. And yet, it is often in our businesses' best interest to have items in inventory for the fewest number of days that we can manage, because every day that inventory is on the shelves, it is depreciating in value and tying up our funds.

On the up side, well-managed inventory keeps our funds liquid and gives us the flexibility to change as the industry changes and as consumers' tastes change. It keeps "out of stock" to a minimum and our sales-to-labor ratio manageable. So, where to begin?

Days on Hand

Days on hand may be the primary indicator of the health of a store's inventory, so it behooves us to keep our inventory mobile so we have enough resources to run the business. We want this inventory to turn over consistently, yet we also want to keep enough stock on hand to satisfy our customers. You can think of days on hand as "When will I recoup my investment?"

Determining your days on hand requires two pieces of information: total retail value of current inventory (TRV) and projected gross yearly sales (PYS). The equation is $(TRV/PYS) \times 365 = \text{Days on Hand}$. If you are not comfortable projecting sales, use last year's total gross sales. (Creating projections is simply using last year's data and recent comparative sales to make an educated guess. When it comes to purchasing, I use a conservative projection.) Now that you have this number, what do you do?

Sustainable Level of Inventory?

Determine if it is a sustainable days on hand for your shop. Every shop will have a different healthy baseline, based on gross yearly sales. The smaller the gross yearly sales, the longer the acceptable

days on hand; the converse is true for stores with higher gross sales. It is fairly safe to say that your inventory should not exceed one year's gross sales. Stores with higher gross sales should use six months as a goal. If your days on hand is greater than you would like it to be, it is time to slim down your inventory and order carefully. It is unlikely that you will need to increase your inventory.

Reducing Inventory

I recommend settling on a ballpark number as a goal for inventory, then determining whether you need to discontinue items or just to jump-start sales in certain areas. Whichever you choose, move the excess inventory out of your store as quickly as possible. Every time you touch/move product, it is costing you, so aggressive sales can get the prod-

wrap in your shop. Lots of people want to make it in the same color, and they buy the yarn to do so. It takes four skeins to make the wrap, and one to two customers per week purchase the yarn and pattern. You typically order from this vendor monthly. Ideally, you'll want 32 skeins in stock; therefore, your par is 32 for that particular yarn and eight for the pattern. These numbers ensure, to the best of your knowledge, that you won't miss a sale or have too much stock sitting around. Or, take the example of an uncommon needle size: You may order needles every two weeks, but you sell said needle size only once every two months. The par for this item is two, which comfortably allows a sale without an out-of-stock. Maintaining an ordering schedule can make establishing pars a bit easier and make out-of-stocks even less likely.

Taking Advantage of Available Resources

Your POS system is a veritable treasure-trove of information. Investigate all the reports it has to offer, even if you are unsure how to use them initially. Some useful reports to look for: total retail inventory value; gross sales by date; sales by product; sales by family/category; labor hours. Whatever your start page is, make sure that the information on that page is serving you. Every day I log in to our POS system I am greeted by a snapshot of the business activity, which I find very helpful. Use social media to be aware of what is trending and to keep a finger on the pulse of the industry. Ravelry is also an amazing resource for seeing what people favor, but remember that this data is only from Ravelry members, so it is not a fully representative sample.

uct out of the door with less energy and labor. Use your resources to support your decision making: Your POS system's reporting functions will provide you with the data you need to make informed decisions. Find out what is selling well and what isn't selling at all, and act accordingly. If something hasn't sold in a year, it doesn't belong in your store.

Avoiding Out of Stocks

Now that you're slimming things down, how can you avoid out-of-stocks? By establishing pars for your products. A par is the ideal number of items to have in stock for a given stockkeeping unit (SKU). How you determine this number is based on how many items you sell in the time between your typical orders. For example: You have a sample of a

How Often to Check

I check the inventory numbers at least once a week to make sure we are on track. It helps to check gross sales, basket average (average individual sale/invoice) and total inventory to give you the picture you need to adjust as necessary. Once you have the math worked out on these items, the next step is Category Management, which is a great way to make sure that your mix of products is balanced and that your inventory reflects the demands of your customers. We'll cover that topic in the next issue.

Kimberly Agbayani is the Operations and Inventory Manager at Tolt Yarn and Wool in Carnation, Washington.



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In the Zone

Whether you're hanging a new sign, installing an awning or otherwise altering your shop's facade, make sure you're up to date on local zoning ordinances.

BY DARYL BROWER

When Oz and Kris Barron did a build-out of their Cambria, California, store Ball & Skein & More, it seemed things were going smoothly. They'd obtained the proper permits and hired a reputable contractor. Everything was on track for a grand reopening. Then came a preliminary inspection. "We had to widen our entrance ramp after we'd started construction to be ADA compliant," Oz explains. They also learned that the walls in the storage room were too close to the sprinklers and would need to be moved. "It wasn't a huge issue—the walls were simple and we just widened the ramp, but it did delay things," he says.

Glenda MacDonald of Westcoast Wools in Vancouver, British Columbia, had plans for a "fancy" shaped sign before she opened up shop but quickly

issues like MacDonald's may seem more arbitrary. After all, what does it matter if the sign outside the store is round instead of rectangular or illuminated?

Planning for Payoff

The answer is, it matters a great deal—at least in the eyes of municipal planning boards, the entities that help determine how a city's streetscape should look. "Design guidelines for central business districts are typically developed to address the vision of the community for their downtown and are documented in their redevelopment plan or their master plan," explains architect Heather Wilkerson, owner of The Primitive Hut, an architectural design firm in Highland Park, New Jersey. Wilkerson, who has served on planning boards in both New York and New Jersey, explains that zoning laws that

tomers and keep them coming back. Create an attractive, welcoming downtown and you'll not only bring in shoppers but also new businesses that keep the area thriving.

So before you order that new sign, install an awning or invest a few hundred dollars in terra-cotta planters to flank your doors, it pays to be proactive by popping by the local planning board or zoning commission office to find out exactly what can and can't be done. If you just barge ahead and hope for the best, you may end up having to take your new additions down or make changes to them, which will cost you both time and money.

You Can Fight City Hall

If it turns out that your vision is prohibited by local ordinances, don't despair—there's still an opportunity to work something out. To fight for a design element that isn't in compliance with local zoning rules, you'll need to file for a variance, something easily done at your town's municipal office. Detail your plans with visuals, if possible, and explain how the changes will enhance both your shop and the surrounding area as a whole. In most cases, if you present valid reasons for the requested changes and can show that the variance will not lessen property values or interfere with use of the property by current residents, you'll get approval. In some cases, you may have to go before the city council or municipal government to plead your case. Keep in mind that such efforts can be time-consuming (and potentially costly), so if the effort looks like it's going to be a tough one, make sure the exception to the rule you are looking for is one that will really benefit your business.

In the end, MacDonald decided it wasn't worth the hassle to change the style of her shop's sign. Instead she repurposed the existing sign left by the former tenant (which complied with city rules about size, height from the ground, etc.), and she's happy with the result. "We would have had to get approval from our landlord as well as the city to change it," she explains. "And I really doubt that spending more money on a sign would have brought in extra customers—and that's really the basic question for every bit of spending in a new store. In the end it was much better that we spent the money on additional inventory."

Street Smarts

What a streetscape looks like really does make a difference in terms of customer perception and behavior. A 2006 study by the Danish urbanist Jan Gehl observed that people walk more quickly in front of blank facades and are less likely to pause or even turn their heads in such locations than they do when walking in an area where there are lots of windows and doors that allow them to see into the establishments. Faced with brick walls, frosted glass or obstructed windows, pedestrians simply "trudge through" in the hope they'll find something more interesting farther down the road. On streetscapes with more lively facades and windows that welcome a look in, people are more likely to pause, look around and absorb their surroundings. Research by the environmental psychologist and neuroscientist Colin Ellard shows that pedestrians who find themselves in these more open environments experience positive emotions and actually want to be there. They feel, in Ellard's words, "lively and engaged" and have positive feelings about the surroundings—and that includes your business. Want to learn more about the psychology of streetscapes? Pick up Ellard's latest book, *Places of the Heart* (Bellevue Literary Press, 2015).

changed her mind. "We were put off by the number of permits and approvals we'd have to get from the city," she explains. "Apparently, the process takes months and costs a small fortune—and that doesn't even include the cost of the sign itself."

Both shop owners' headaches can be attributed to zoning laws or ordinances, rules that define and restrict everything from how a business can use the property on which it's located and the height of the building to the type and size of signage and what can be hung in street-facing windows. And while the issues Ball & Skein & More ran into are easily understood—sprinkler placement is a safety issue and ramp widths ensure that a customer in a wheelchair can safely navigate the entrance—aesthetic

restrict the types of businesses that can be located at ground level (typically retail and restaurants, with services and residential above), that require certain percentages of windows to face the street, or specify that entrances must open onto Main Street aren't adopted on a whim or to create massive amounts of paperwork: "They're established to create an engaging, lively and safe Main Street," she explains. "Other guidelines including signage, material quality and lighting are in place to enhance the streetscape in line with the community vision and as a safeguard to existing and prospective business owners that all businesses will be held to a standard that will not detract from their business." Put simply, the goal is to design a streetscape that will attract cus-

Daryl Brower, a New Jersey-based freelance writer, is a frequent contributor to Yam Market News.

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Feed Me, Facebook

BY CHERYL KREMENTZ

Maximize your organic post reach in spite of the platform's algorithm of diminishing returns.

It's been nearly a year since Facebook changed its News Feed algorithm. That means it's been nearly a year since the first time you stared at your company's page Insights and wondered, "Why isn't anyone seeing my posts anymore?"

The simple answer is that the reach of an organic post on Facebook—the number of people who see a given unpaid post—has decreased exponentially, down by more than half since 2010 and precipitously so since January 2015. Facebook claims that currently 16 percent of a business page's fans see a single organic post in their personal News Feeds. But other number crunchers have indicated a much lower range, between 6 and 9.96 percent for a local business with fan likes of 0 to 25,000.

No doubt, an organic reach of, at best, 1 in 10 fans is a blow to small business owners with limited ad budgets who've invested tons of time and effort soliciting page likes and creating engaging posts. "It's really frustrating," says Gaby

course, they want us to pay to boost our posts, but even a boosted post doesn't always seem to get to the right audience. We're still working to get it right." (For the record, Facebook denies the algorithm change is mercenary, but rather the best way to deal with the explosive growth of content competing for News Feed real estate.)

Some shops, like Llama Llama Ewe in Ridgefield Park, New Jersey, have been turning to other formats—Instagram, Twitter, proprietary email lists—to take up the FB slack. Despite the stat squeeze, however, a Facebook page remains a critical marketing tool for niche entrepreneurs.

"Since Facebook is essentially free advertising, we have to take what we get," says a sanguine Kristen Maddox, owner of Strings Attached Yarns in Dayton, Ohio. "I think of it as the communications link to my best customers/friends of the store. Everything I do goes out on Facebook first." Here are some ways FB-reliant LYSOs can crack the code to cope with the "reachpocalypse."

LYSO Boost-Post Strategy

"I've found that by boosting about 50 percent of my posts, spending around \$2 each, a lot more people see them. I usually spend \$50-ish per month on FB advertising, but it's targeted, going to people who actually are interested and want to see it. FB is a business too, and it if I use it as a business, it should not be free. I'm small potatoes, with around 730 followers; so \$2 per ad might not go as far with thousands of followers."

—Kelly Judson, Double Ewe Yarn Shop, Circle Pines, Minnesota

"If a significant event is taking place, I boost, but not for much money. I know beyond any shadow of a doubt that my newsletter brings in more customers and bigger spenders."

—Kristen Maddox, Strings Attached Yarns, Dayton, Ohio

"Some posts seem to randomly reach more people, regardless of how many likes or comments there are. I hesitate to spend any money on boosting posts until I can see some sort of pattern in what makes a post perform better. And Facebook's little notes that 'this post is performing X percent better than X percent of other posts on your wall' doesn't seem accurate. I don't have time to check their math, though, so I just keep wondering. We try to spread our news around on various social media sites and cultivate our newsletter following."

—Andrea Mielke Schroer, Mielke's Fiber Arts, Mauston, Wisconsin

Peterson, co-owner of Yarnology in Winona, Minnesota, who believes the algorithm switch is a blatant attempt to force businesses to pay for either ads (general campaigns that promote a store, initiative or sale) or boosted posts (targeted promotions that increase single-post reach until a user-set maximum budget is exhausted). "Of

Content That Connects

Facebook doesn't broadcast its complex secret-sauce recipe, but we know certain content components the algorithm weighs to determine organic-post reach. According to a February 2015 study by the social-media analytics reporting site Locowise, posts with links to websites other than the page's

home URL do best, reaching 18 percent of fans. Posts with videos and text updates reach 9 percent, and those with photos, 7 percent.

Knowing these stats, compose posts accordingly. Link to a great cowl pattern to coincide with the announcement of a new shipment of space-dyed chunky. Film a staffer opening a box of long-awaited lace-weight. Be strategic about how you phrase posts (avoid "buy now" entreaties) and how many times you post about a sale or in-store event, especially if you link to a shop web page; Facebook diminishes the reach of successive posts that include the same URL. Also, Facebook puts priority on posts generated natively as opposed to posts scheduled via third-party platforms like HootSuite.

A page's organic-reach zone can include fans, friends of fans and businesses that have liked your page, depending on individual privacy settings. Facebook acts as a gatekeeper, populating News Feeds incrementally. If the first wave of readers appears to be interested in a post, as indicated by interaction, the more Facebook thinks it will appeal to a wider audience and the broader the ultimate reach will be.

Encourage every in-store customer to like your FB page. Require employees to like and share each post. Ask customers to upload pics of their finished projects in the comment section. When a fan comments, like that comment or reply to show that you're eager to interact.

Speaking of interaction, face-to-face engagement is an important way for a yarn shop owner to prompt customers to become proactive FB fans. Every time you or a staffer speaks to an in-store customer, encourage her to like your FB page. When she does, explain the two ways she can alert Facebook that she'd like your posts to populate her News Feed. One is to employ the "See First" option: Once a business page is liked, hover over the Following tab to the right of the Liked tab and select "See First." This will put the page's posts at the top of the user's News Feed. (The other option, "Default," puts posts at the algorithm's mercy.) Second is to allow for notifications: Once a business page is liked, hover over the Liked tab and select "Get Notifications." This will alert the user every time a page post goes live—an option best for shops that don't post frequently throughout the day; FB fatigue is a main reason fans unfollow pages. Also, ask what time your customer tends to read her Facebook feed and schedule based on your findings. On Facebook, as in life, good timing matters.

Former YMN contributing editor **Cheryl Krementz** is a social media specialist for Wakefern Food Corp.

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Tell Me About Yourself

Interviewing techniques to help you find the right fit for your staff.

BY BOBBI LEWIN

Your staff are truly the fiber of your shop, but finding the right candidates for hire is a tricky business. Though commonalities between hiring for corporations and small businesses exist, staffing a yarn store presents a number of unique challenges. Customers expect a different experience when dealing with yarn-shop staff than they do at other retail establishments, so misjudgments in hiring can be costly.

Selecting Candidates

Although the hiring process usually begins with a job posting, many yarn stores look first to their customer base for potential staff. Craig Rosenfeld, owner of Loop in Philadelphia, says that when he has a vacancy, he'll often ask customers who seem like they'd be a good fit, or he'll run ads on social media or Craigslist. Laura McCormick and Laura Alonso, customer service managers at Churchmouse Yarns & Teas in Bainbridge Island, Washington, agree: They believe looking to your customers as potential staff members can be an effective way to find people with the skills and attributes you desire, provided you interview them thoroughly. The advantage of considering customers is that you've already had a chance to observe them on an average day and are familiar with their level of expertise. McCormick notes that how the person treated the staff as a customer is a key factor in deciding if she gets an interview.

Whether you are interviewing customers who want to transition to staff or are looking through résumés submitted online, social media is a handy way to learn more about a candidate—a resource hiring professionals are turning to more and more. Allison Isaacs of ImagiKnit in San Francisco recommends looking up the person's Ravelry profile to see the types of projects she is working on, which will help you gauge her knitting skills. You can also peruse Facebook profiles, blogs, Twitter and Instagram to quickly learn the positive or negative nature of a person. Social media can also be a good place to post your employment ads.

Finding the Right Fit

Creating a comfortable atmosphere for interviews

goes a long way toward putting candidates at ease and allowing them to be themselves, which will help you to discern the character attributes that will bring value to your business. Loop's Craig Rosenfeld says he likes to start by talking about things unrelated to the shop or knitting: "General topics not specific to them or the job are the best way to get them comfortable."

Allison Isaacs conducts her interviews away from the store, usually at a nearby coffee shop, which creates a more casual atmosphere and prevents her from getting distracted by what's going on at the shop. She even brings her dog along to help put candidates at ease. Isaacs says she is "down to earth and goofy" and likes to be herself during an interview. "I think I'm pretty easy to talk to, so if there's an issue with that, maybe this isn't the right position for them," Isaacs says. Her goal, during interviews, is to truly "meet the person and get to know what he or she is like."

After establishing rapport with a candidate, move on to discussing the particulars of the available position. Rosenfeld likes to start by asking people what they are looking for in a job. "Sometimes you hear things that are totally out of sync" with what the job actually entails, he says. Isaacs finds it important to spell out the physical requirements of the job so there are no surprises later. She once hired a person who, it turned out, was afraid to climb ladders—a problem in her high-ceilinged shop.

Rosenfeld cautions that even if a person performs exceptionally well in an interview, giving all the right answers, he or she may still be completely wrong for the job. He recommends asking "an open-ended question in which you ask them to tell you about their experiences to give you a fuller sense of who they are."

Laura Alonso says their interviews always end with a question asked by Churchmouse co-owner Kit Hutchin: "Do you consider yourself a kind person?" Remembering her own interview, Alonso says, "I found it to be a reflective question and somewhat tough to answer; I wanted to be honest with myself but not too harsh." Someone who answers "of course" immediately without

really thinking about the question may not be as believable as someone who ruminates on the it for a moment, she says.

"A key to being a good interviewer is being a good listener. Really hear what they have to say—or, sometimes, don't say—so you can decide if that person is the right one for your staff," says Rosenfeld.

Tips and Techniques

You want the candidate to talk, so try not to dominate the conversation yourself. Silence is uncomfortable, and people will try to fill it. If you are quiet, the candidate is likely to fill the void. Prolonged silence, however, can work to make the candidate nervous.

Ask open-ended questions—e.g., ask candidates to describe a time when they faced a great challenge at a previous job and how they overcame it. You can also describe scenarios typical to your store and ask how the candidate would respond. Craig Rosenfeld says he looks for a person able to think on his feet. "You really can't anticipate what [customers] may say or do," he says; he wants someone who can handle whatever is thrown at him.

Because of the family nature of many small businesses, it may be tempting to ask personal questions that cross an inappropriate line. Check with your local Small Business Administration office or the EEOC to learn about your rights and responsibilities in hiring and interviewing.

Bobbi Lewin is a freelance writer living and knitting in Sydney, Australia. She writes about her adventures down under on her blog, bobbilewin.com.



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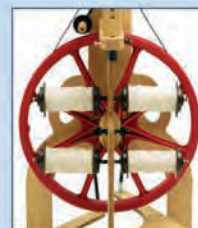
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RETAIL PROFILE

BY DARYL BROWER

Hank and Purl's Fiber Arts Knittery

When Hank and Purl's opened in Rochester, Minnesota, in November 2011, it filled a much-needed niche. The city's last true yarn shop had shuttered its doors not long before, leaving local knitters at a loss for fiber.

So Deb Zipse, a recently retired teacher who was one of those knitters left out in the cold, decided to do something about it. "I figured a town this size could certainly support a shop," she says. She was right. The knitters—locals and those stitching away the hours at the nearby Mayo Clinic—came in droves. Just two years into the business, the shop had outgrown its original home and moved to a new location, doubling the space. That provided room for more yarn and more special events and programs—enough that in 2015, the shop won TNNA's coveted Business Innovation Award. "It's been a roller coaster ride," Zipse says. "But I'm having a great time."

So are Hank and Purl's customers. "This is a fun, community-oriented shop," Zipse says. "We tell people that if they're not laughing when they come in, they sure will be when they leave." The store makes its home in a 50-year-old strip mall, but one that's a bit more attractive than most. "There's a brick sidewalk and a little more ambiance outside than your usual strip mall provides," Zipse explains. "And we have loads of parking."

Inside, it's all about the atmosphere. The space is clean and modern, with blond wood floors, plenty of comfy seating, loads of sample garments and lots of natural light courtesy of the large front windows. Dark wood cubbies are stuffed with



yarn, and skeins and tools hang neatly from slat walls, making everything easily accessible. "People come in and just walk around touching everything," Zipse notes. Whimsical touches abound, from the colorful patterned chairs to the two oversized plush sheep named Hank and Purl who sit by

the front door. Purl has needles in hand and sources her yarn from Hank. "It's a fun touch," says Zipse of the shop mascots. "We dress them up for the holidays."

Putting people at ease is Zipse's goal. An electric fireplace keeps things cozy during the winter months, and there are always dishes of candy and other treats on hand. "This is a refuge for so many of our customers," she says. "Homey touches help them unwind."

Yarn (Shibui, Madelinetosh, Ito, Geilsk, Rowan, Imperial, Classic Elite, Noro, Bergère de France, Jagerspun, Berroco and more) is a big part of the draw, of course, but it's the store's commitment to keeping the shopping experience fresh and fun that keeps customers coming back. "We try to step out of the box," Zipse says of her events and attention to service. She and her staff brainstorm regularly to take events a step beyond your basic trunk show or seasonal sale, and the successful programs they came up with in the past year, along with Zipse's careful explanation of how each event helped build both sales and goodwill, are what earned the store TNNA's Business Innovation Award.

Take these examples: To keep summer sales from slumping, the shop teamed up with a local pub to host Hank's Happy Hour, a summer-long event that teamed in-store specials (a new one each week) with the chance to sit and stitch in the shop while enjoying snacks and conversation. Those who made a purchase got a card for a two-for-one drink special at the pub. Each happy hour had a theme; on July 4, customers were treated to lemonade, mini corn dogs and 20 percent off all American-made yarns. Other events have included a Mad Hatter-themed needle tasting (complete with un-birthday cake), a Valentine wine-and-chocolate event (with pink and red yarns on sale) and, one of Zipse's favorites, a couples night that encouraged customers to "share a glass of wine and the knitting experience with your significant other." The shop has also instituted what Zipse has dubbed the



Yarnivore Club, a six-month series that introduces customers to a new yarn and a new project each month. "We cast on and complete the projects over good food and good conversation," she says.

Zipse's enthusiasm and innovative thinking are catching, and it's paid off not just in happy customers but in big returns for the shop as well. Sales increased 25 percent over the previous year, classes are full, and the number of regulars has doubled. "Our goal was to increase support for our knitters and in turn to increase their frequency of visits to our shop," she says of the events. It's also broadened customer demographics. "They're getting younger," Zipse says. "Those in the 30- to 50-year-old range are our customers now."

A good part of the appeal for customers, no matter their age, is the attention they get inside the shop. Zipse's staff is small but dedicated, and customer service is key. "We want people to feel welcome and wanted from the moment they walk in," she says. Customers can ask for advice anytime, but specific hours are also set aside for Hank's Help Desk, when Zipse brings in extra staff to help customers with their current WIPs. An ever-growing class list ensures that clients learn new skills to keep them interested and inspired, and an e-newsletter list with 1,600 active members keeps them abreast of what's going on.

A map on the wall keeps track of where all those customers are coming from; Zipse is thrilled to be not only providing a source of yarn for Rochester's knitters but to be a place where people can come to enjoy conversation and companionship. "We've gone from the local yarn shop to the place to be," Zipse says. "It's great."

Hank and Purl's Fiber Arts Knittery

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COMPANY PROFILE

BY MARYAM SIDDIQI

Soak

TNNA's Needlearts Business Innovation Awards 2015, Yarn Wholesaler winner.

Soak was originally meant to be a secondary product that went along with our knits. Now, I own a forklift and have a warehouse full of detergent," says Jacqueline Sava with a laugh. In 2006, Sava launched Soak Wash, a natural plant-based liquid soap ideal for delicates and knitted pieces. Sava, who at the time was selling a line of knitted accessories, credits customers asking for fiber-care advice for giving her the idea for Soak.

"I would take teenagers and young people aside and give them lessons on hand-washing, reminding them that they shouldn't leave their woolen items lying around on the bedroom floor, where they could get picked up and put in the washer," she says. "And then they would ask what they should use, but I didn't really like any of the products that were on the market."

Soak was intended to be a complementary offering to Sava's knit line, but soon people in the knitting community encouraged her to sell it in yarn shops. In 2006, she attended her first trade show to promote her new product. "On the first day, there was this massive lineup of people at the booth, and I was like, 'Ah! OK!'" Sava says. From that point on, her energies have been focused on growing her line of care products.

This is Sava's first laundry soap—over the course of two years, she worked with a team of chemists and fragrance houses to develop the soap's formula and with packaging designers to develop the look and vibe of the line—but her background in product design and development gave her a head start in terms of brand identity. Conveniently, she was also studying for an MBA in strategic management and marketing while developing the wash and thus applied Soak to her studies as often as she could. "I did pricing projects and used Soak; I did a big growth plan and used Soak. I tried to incorporate [business decisions] into all the learning activities," Sava says.

She launched with three scented washes—aqua, floral and citrus—and it's been constant innovation ever since. "They've all gone into retirement," Sava says of the original washes. Currently, the company offers Soak in Yuzu, a blend of tart citrus and eucalyptus that was first released in 2013 and is the top-selling wash

right now; Fig, the newest fragrance, a blend of fig, lychee and dandelion launched in 2014; Lacey, full of spring blossoms and bergamot; Celebration, a sweet, delicate red tea blend; and a scentless detergent. Soak also launched Handmaid, a line of hand cream, in 2012. And in 2014, Flatter, an antistatic and wrinkle-release spray, debuted. "It's great for spray-blocking lace and things that you don't want to fully saturate," Sava explains. "We launched it originally for our quilting customers, but knitters have really taken to it as well, so that's been great."

With constant product innovation, a busy online shop, and distributors in Canada, the United States, England and Europe, Japan and Australia, one could be forgiven for thinking Soak is a large operation. In fact, Sava's team members—including her—can be counted on one hand. "People think that if you're really well branded and organized that you must be huge, which is not the case. So we're always trying to balance



what we want to do next with how many resources we have," she says.

The team's hard work was recognized in 2015 at The National Needlearts Association's May conference. There, Soak won a Business Innovation Award in the Yarn Wholesaler category for the company's success with its Soakboxes—specifically, the collaboration with British yarn and knitwear designer Erika Knight. These gift boxes pair Soak washes with British blue wool from Knight's yarn collection and two patterns designed by Knight. Sava calls the project "cross-pollination"—a means for both brands to reach new audiences, editorial opportunities and



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Employees: 5

Fun fact: Soak's first offices were in the Toronto Business Development Centre (TBDC), a nonprofit organization that nurtures the growth of new and emerging businesses. "We had a cute office with big windows in a loft space in downtown Toronto until we realized we needed a loading dock," Sava says. In the fall of 2015, TBDC celebrated its 25th anniversary and featured Soak as one of its 25 most successful businesses of all time.

marketing successes.

"The idea is to use one brand to fertilize another. This Soakbox allowed us to prove that one plus one doesn't equal two—it equals all the opportunities you can find," Sava says. "Working with such an amazing British designer allowed us an opportunity to expand into that market, get us new distribution in the U.K., lots of editorial coverage and social media awareness, as well as elevating the brand profile for both us and Erika Knight."

As a result of this success, Soakboxes have not only become a must-have purchase for knitters but a covetable collaboration for yarn companies. "We have created this weird world in which everyone wants to be in the Soakbox. It's a neat position to be in," Sava says. "It was really nice to be recognized by The National Needlearts Association as an innovator in the industry, because I think people need good examples of strategic work. A lot of people think, 'Oh, you just need to have an idea and make it work.' Well, you have to have an idea for sure, but then you have to make it into a commercial, sellable product."

Asked how the company plans to toast its tenth anniversary, Sava says: "We're working on gallon refills, because people have been asking for them forever. But I don't have anything more exciting that I'm willing to divulge." Given the company's creativity, it's likely she has some colorful things up her handwashed sleeve.

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There's more than one way to wind a skein

By Leslie Petrovski

CASE STUDY:

Apple Yarns puts a shiny new face on its online store.

The North Saskatchewan River sluices through Edmonton, Alberta, cutting the province's capital city in half. To meet the yarn needs of this bifurcated city—the northernmost in North America—sisters Barb Barone and Cynthia Hyslop maintained two yarn shops: River City Yarns West, on the north side of the river, and River City Yarns South, on the south side.

After five years of running the two stores, the siblings were exhausted. So they closed River City Yarns South, consolidating all of their stock, workshops and classes under

one roof. Then to help customers on the south side of the city—and throughout Canada—get their yarn fixes, they decided to take their show onto the open road of the information superhighway.

"A lot of our customers come from outlying areas—different towns throughout the province," explains Hyslop. "They like to shop here but can't always get here. We wanted an online store so we could reach customers who are more than an hour's drive away."

River City Yarns is far from alone in wanting to reach beyond the physical limitations of its location. Bricks-and-mortar retailers, whether they're selling yarn, books or cosmetics, recognize that having additional channels through which they can reach customers not only brings more people into their physical locations but also boosts revenue. According to a report by the American Retail Federation, 44 percent of consumers research products online before heading to the store. And in 2014, retailers reported that their mobile sales grew 87 percent during the first three quarters.

Increasingly, too, retailers are going to great lengths to meet customers where they are. Guests of Virgin Hotels Chicago can now order a new outfit online from one of two Windy City Gap stores, and within three hours a Virgin concierge will deliver the clothing to their rooms.

Though it's possible that a concierge at a high-end hotel might make an emergency yarn run for a guest, for yarn shops interested in meeting customers "where they are," it means going online and working targeted, fiber-related events.

The importance of selling online

Studies show people shop online for convenience and ease even more than for price. Allison Isaacs, who owns ImagiKnit in San Francisco's Castro district, says the store's online shop serves plenty of customers who live in the City by the Bay and like to take advantage of the free shipping on orders over \$75 and the \$4 flat rate. "We have a lot of customers who live in the city but order online," she says, "so they don't have to drive across town or take public transit. Plus, we ship so quickly, they can often have their purchase the next day."

Isaacs estimates that she's had three or four incarnations of online shopping in the 13 years she's owned the store. But it was only a year ago that she really began to take it seriously, improving the user experience and adding more yarns to the online merchandise mix. "I was concerned that things [in general] were moving more in that direction," she explains of her decision to reinvest in online retailing. "We wanted to capture some of that business."

Laurie Carter, owner of Apples to Oranges Yarn and Gifts in Silverton, Oregon, said she opened an online shop because her closest offline competitor is 20 miles away. "If people are looking for yarn in this area" and don't want to drive, she says, "they're looking online."

At River City Yarns, not only did the sisters want to increase access for customers across the river; they also recognized an opportunity. Though U.S.-based customers have myriad online options from which to source knitting and crochet supplies, Canadian consumers have fewer Canada-based virtual stores to choose from. With the Canadian dollar slipping vis-à-vis U.S. currency—plus international shipping rates from the United States—Canadian knitters who lacked a nearby LYS were feeling the pinch.

"The exchange rate has been a problem," Hyslop says. "Our dollar is worth
(continued on page 42)

After about seven years in business, Andrea and Andrew Evans, owners of Apple Yarns in Bellingham, Washington, realized that to grow their business (short of opening a new physical location), they needed to focus on their online shop.

"We were pulling as much as we could out of the bricks-and-mortar store," Andrea explains, "and we thought it would be a good business move to put more emphasis on the online store. And it *has* been a smart business move."

Today, the couple view Apple Yarns as two stores—Apple Yarns and apple yarns.com. In addition to investing in online store infrastructure (they use Shopify), the Evanses have rethought how they buy for the business—larger purchases can mean deeper discounts and free shipping from wholesalers. This has enabled them to offer more products and color choices to both offline and online customers.

They've also incorporated their dot-com into all advertising and marketing, including social media (Apple Yarns has nearly 7,500 "likes" on Facebook), Ravelry ads, in-store postcards handed out with free shipping offers, and a freeway billboard.

As part of their effort to extend their reach beyond Bellingham, the Evanses recently went mobile with a booth at the October 2015 Vogue Knitting LIVE event in Chicago. Partnering with Barb Demorest of Knitted Knockers fame (www.knittedknockers.org), Andrea sold kits for the knitted breast prostheses for \$15.99 (donating \$4 back to Knitted Knockers for each kit sold) in addition to yarns from dyers local to her home shop. To keep expenses down, Andrea and Demorest shared booth and hotel expenses. Held at the beginning of Breast Cancer Awareness Month—with sales fueled in advance by Andrea's social media posts—the show was a hit. "It was really, really good for us," Andrea reports. "It was so good, we're headed to Vogue Knitting LIVE in New York and Stitches West in Santa Clara."

Andrea sees the shows as a way to extend the friendly Apple Yarns brand ("We're best in person," she says) and make new friends for apple yarns.com. Andrea collected email addresses at Vogue Knitting LIVE, and customers received a discount coupon code to use later on the store's website.

[Apple yarns.com](http://apple yarns.com) revenues are increasing and currently stand at about 10 percent of revenues. The goal, Andrea says, is for the online business to reach parity with the store on the ground.

"We play a game all day: Which store has the most sales," she says. "The sales on the dot-com really matter. Right now, they're the icing on the cake."

about 75 cents U.S. So it's a great deal for American customers. And Canadians trying to buy yarn don't have to pay the exchange rate premium and international shipping."

The online investment

Getting an online shop up and running, however, represents an enormous investment of time and money. To revivify her online shop, Alison Isaacs purchased new software and hardware. (She declines to name it, because "I'm not that thrilled with it and don't want to mislead anybody.") Every time she upgrades her digital marketplace, she estimates it sets her back five figures in new infrastructure.

ImagiKnit's new online shop features a colorful "storefront" with easily clickable categories for yarn, needles, books, patterns and gift cards. Though the new online store retains ImagiKnit's seductive shots of skeins piled into soft-serve-like swirls, staff have spent countless hours getting more and more of the store's inventory photographed and posted to the online shop.

Getting goods online is a heavy lift, agrees Cynthia Hyslop. "It's been a huge undertaking in terms of man hours, and it's expensive in terms of platform." The Canadian sisters chose NitroSell, a U.S.-based platform, for their online shop, which integrates with their Microsoft point-of-sale system. Though they were able to pull the yarn from their database into the online store, each yarn entry required a written description plus photos for each color.

Some yarn companies have great product photography they allow yarn shops to use for their online shops. For exclusive lines and items for which photography might not be available, though, it's incumbent on the yarn shop to make sure the product is merchandised to best advantage in the digital realm.

This was the case with River City Yarns' Hat Trick, a range of hockey-team-inspired sock yarn dyed by Caroline Sommerfield of Ancient Arts Fibre Crafts and put up in bountiful 555-yard hanks. Working with their graphic artist and his photographer wife, Barone and Hyslop created a cool online look for Hat Trick with imagery and typography, all of which involves time and expenditures.

"Consumers have the idea that online stores should sell products for less money than a physical store, because you don't have to pay rent," Hyslop observes. "But you do. It's in the cost of platform subscription, the cost of putting it online and maintaining it."

Hitting the fiber trail

In addition to investing in their online shops, yarn shop owners are also meeting knitters and crocheters in their "natural" habitats at fiber and consumer shows. Lori Kirk, owner of Cowgirl Yarn in Laramie, is one of only a handful of yarn shops in Wyoming, a state with a population of just over 580,000. To reach higher-density populations of knitters and crocheters who might want to avail themselves of her wares, Kirk takes her show on the road.

"I am doing it to let people know that there is an awesome yarn store up the road," she says. "They learn who I am, who Cowgirl Yarn is, and I bring a tasting of the products I have in my store."

Sticking to regional shows such as the Laramie Fiber Festival, the Black Hills Fiber Arts Fair, KnitWear in Fort Collins and Yarn Fest in Love-

land, Colorado, Kirk says that while the shows are labor-intensive, they pay off in festival sales and in the relationships she develops that pay dividends days, weeks or months later. After participating in Interweave's inaugural Yarn Fest last spring, Kirk met traveling Yarn Fest attendees driving back east at Cowgirl Yarn that Sunday by appointment. "It was so worth it," Kirk enthused. "They spent a lot of money."

Vending at a show also allows Kirk to vet new products and see what knitters and crocheters are buying in the wild. That's how she discovered Lafayette, Colorado-based dyer Jonathan Berner of MJ Yarns, whose yarns she carries to this day.

"When I'm at a show, I can see what other products are out there," she says. "What that new indie dyer is selling, what people are buying. Maybe I want that?"



“It's hard to track a dollar amount, but I have so many customers who make a road trip with their friends after they've met me at a show. They've traveled out of their way to come to my shop to see me.”

—Lori Kirk, Cowgirl Yarn

In addition to being physically exhausting, she says, the shows are often only break-even endeavors. The payoff for her comes later: "It's hard to track a dollar amount, but I have so many customers who make a road trip after they've seen me at a show. They've told their friends and come up with their friends. They've traveled out of their way to come to my shop to see me."

ImagiKnit's Isaacs has taken an if-you-can't-beat-'em, join-'em approach to shows. Annoyed when customers mentioned they were saving their discretionary dollars for Stitches West, held annually in nearby Santa Clara, California, Isaacs decided to do the show herself. Every year, with the help of her mother, Isaacs and her employees load up their cars and SUVs ("we're like the Beverly Hillbillies," she says), toting a sampling of hand-dyed and on-trend yarns plus new patterns—things that might differentiate ImagiKnit from other vendors.

"We've been going to Stitches West for 12 years now," she says, indicating that this is the only show she attends. "I do it because it's here, and so I get some portion of that money people have saved for the event." Show proceeds and the marketing lift ImagiKnit gets from Stitches West make it worth the effort. "But the older I get, the harder it gets. As soon as my mom won't

help me anymore, that's it," she says.

The multi-channel approach pays off

Almost universally, yarn shop owners agree that the more sales "channels," the better. Just six months into their online selling experience, River City Yarns is hitting the break-even point on their website. The next goal? To have enough packages going out to qualify for preferred shipping rates.

"We want the online shop to be profitable," Hyslop says. "But we also want to provide the kind of shopping experience that people have come to know and expect from River City Yarns. We try to make it feel like you're in the store."

Since launching the newest iteration of ImagiKnit.com, online sales have increased, though Isaacs doesn't know whether it's because of the refresh or because online sales were trending upward anyway. "Right now," she says, "I don't need those sales. But I think there will be a time in the future that I do. The way things are moving with technology and with more and more purchasing happening online, I'm trying to look ahead and be prepared."



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— Marina King, *The Black Sheep*, Noblesville, Indiana

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— Victoria Rothenberg, *The Yarn Spot*, Silver Spring, Maryland

Putting the MOM in



How many yarn retailers do you know who refer to their shop community as a “family”? While it’s true that LYSOs strive to create a homey feel for their associates and customers, it’s likely just as true that the vast majority also have a family in the traditional sense of the word—spouse or partner, the proverbial 2.5 kids, maybe a cat or dog or hamster—to nurture.

Although there are no exact figures on how many retail shops, much less yarn shops, are owned by mothers, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that in 2014, some 9.1 million American women worked in the retail trade. Further BLS data from the same year states that 70 percent of women with children younger than 18 work outside the home.

MAKING THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

Balancing work and life is a challenge no matter the profession. But a public retail environment can be particularly tricky to sync up with personal parental duties. As an example, Medela, the Swiss breastfeeding-accessories company, has reported that surveyed mothers in the retail field are least likely of all working moms to continue to breastfeed after six months, due primarily to ever-changing schedules and the general lack of privacy most shops afford.

“Starting a business takes effort and vision. It’s very stressful. Ownership is a lot of work,” says Jennifer Owens, editorial director of Working Mother Media and mother of two. “Women have this dream that ‘I’m going to be my own boss and control my schedule,’ then end up working 80 hours a week to make it all happen—without a [guaranteed] paycheck.”

The biggest issue for working women of all stripes, she says, is child care, given that women are often seen as the primary caregiver by society: “It’s really hard to be fully parenting and fully working at the same time. Child care is something [retailers] have to figure out just as they would with a paycheck job. If they think their kids are going to nap in a Pack and Play in the shop every time they have an important call with a supplier, I would dissuade them of that.”

Despite the discrepancy between ideal vision and retail reality, putting the “mom” in “mom-and-pop shop” can certainly be preferable to career alternatives. “Corporate America is so unfriendly to working moms, women are making a new world for themselves” as entrepreneurs, says Owens. The yarn industry is dominated by stores owned by women, but navigating that balance seems as tricky as ever.

Distinct juggling challenges aside, Owens says that business-owning moms who get in touch with Working Mother are, on the whole,

pleased to be charting their own family/work course—as are the LYSO moms cited below, each on the opposite end of the parenting timeline. Read on for their how-I-do-it stories and best mom tips.

IN THE THICK OF IT

Sonia Rutys, owner of Stash, Corvallis, Oregon

Rutys’s daughter was almost 2 when Rutys opened Stash, in 2011. “It was a difficult transition going from stay-at-home mom to working mom,” she says. “Retail is a demanding field for so many reasons. The hours are extensive, the pace is fast and things are constantly changing. It took a few years for me to feel like I could manage both and not totally neglect myself in the process.” She has since had another baby; her kids are now 5 and almost a year old.

Her biggest work/family balance challenge: “I think the idea of mothers achieving balance is a myth. Something always has to give, and usually women sacrifice time for themselves to get everything else done. I find that what works for me is compartmentalizing work and family, keeping the two as separate as possible. Work time is for work; home time is for family. Keeping those boundaries intact helps me focus and be better in both areas.

“On the hard days, I feel like I’m not doing a very good job at mothering or running a business. Both can take so much care and attention that if you’re not careful, you get totally depleted. Not getting overwhelmed is also a challenge. To fight it, I try to stay organized and keep communications open with my staff and family. And I’ve gotten better over the years at making sure I take time to unwind and knit at the end of each day.”

Her child-care strategy: “One of the big benefits of working for yourself is having flexibility. I try to be a very understanding boss in general, giving my employees the time and flexibility to pursue the things that are important to them outside of work. The same is true for me. Having plenty of time with my kids is a priority. So for now, I’m taking advantage of that flexibility. I’m home with the baby two days a week, and he is with my partner or our babysitter the other three. When I’m at the shop, my daughter is either in school or at home with her brother. As much as possible, I try to work when my daughter is in school so that I can pick her up and spend the afternoons with her and my son. [However], working in retail means that I often need to work around the holidays, which isn’t the most compatible of schedules when you have excited kids at home.”

Does she bring the kids to the shop? “I’m pretty strict about keeping my work and personal lives separate. I don’t do a good job switching

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Mom & Pop Shop

How LYSOs balance retail ownership with parenthood.

By Cheryl Krementz

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Putting the MOM in Mom & Pop Shop

(continued from page 45)

back and forth. My kids do make the occasional guest appearances at the shop, but I never expect them to stay while I'm working. When they're there, I feel distracted, and they're too little to be put to work."

Her best tip for other LYSO moms: "Don't forget to make time in your schedule to take care of yourself and to knit. It's all too easy to give so much of yourself to your shops, customers, children. It's important to take care of yourself and make time to be creative so that you are refreshed and able to get back to work."

THE VIEW FROM THE EMPTY NEST

Janet Avila, owner of String Theory Yarn Company, Glen Ellyn, Illinois

"When my kids were little, I worked a corporate job and then in retail," Avila recounts. "Owning a store gave me a more flexible schedule, but I found it much harder to stop working when there was so much that I could have been doing." Avila's sons were 9 and 12 when she opened String Theory, in 2004. They're now 20 and 23, allowing her to reflect on the LYSO/motherhood tightrope.

Her biggest work/family balance challenge: "Running a store is not a 9-to-5 job. Sure, I could sneak away to watch a cross-country meet at 4 P.M., but I was also often working evenings or weekends or the day after Christmas, when I'd rather have been at home in my pajamas playing with toys!"

Her child-care strategy: "I had various college-age girls watch the kids during the summer and shuttle them around during the school year. My parents and husband provided great backup as well. The biggest challenge during the school year was picking them up on time at the end of the day. So many times, my best plans would get derailed, and I'd be late."

Does she bring the kids to the shop? "Both boys helped with inventory and outside duty during our sidewalk sales. The youngest designed a hat pattern for us when he was 10 that became a store favorite. Now he works in the store on Saturday afternoons and hears all the time, 'Oh, I made your hat!'"

Her best tip for other LYSO moms: "When I opened my store, I decided that I didn't want to miss summers with my kids. So every year I closed the store for three weeks in August so we could hang out together without a schedule or stress. Even though my kids are much older now, I still take this break from the store. Small kids have a way of insisting on work/life balance. Now that my sons don't need me as much, I find myself working too much and needing to consciously follow a balanced schedule."

How do you balance motherhood with yarn store ownership?
Post your best tips to Yarn Market News's Facebook page and share them with other readers.

.....
At various times, Cheryl Kremetz has been a stay-at-home, work-at-home, office and flex mom to her two teenage sons. Her best tip for family cohesion: No matter how busy you are, eating dinner as a family each night is a necessary constant and daily high point.



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Reading the Tea Leaves: Trendspotting for the LYS

By Carol J. Sulcoski

In the movie *Groundhog Day*, the main character relives a single day in his life over and over again until he finally gets it right. To a small business, endless do-overs sound endlessly appealing: If we could go back in time, knowing what lay ahead for the industry, we'd be better prepared shopkeepers, stocking products that are destined to fly off the shelves instead of staring

glumly at boxes of yarn that just won't sell.

We can't turn back time—at least not yet—but there are ways that we can try to predict which products will be popular. Whether you call it market research, trendspotting or plain old common sense, analyzing what's going on in the wider world can help you better prepare for each season and stock exactly what your customers are sure to want.

Go Big

Start your study by looking at the big picture: “macro” trends that cut across multiple industries. Trisha Malcolm, editorial director of *Vogue Knitting*, consistently consults Pantone’s biannual reports, which present a cohesive set of on-trend colors for the coming season. “I rely heavily on Pantone because I know those are the colors you will see in stores the following season,” she explains. “It’s important that hand-knit items work with what’s available in stores.” Shelley Brander, owner of Loops in Tulsa, Oklahoma, is also a regular reader of Pantone’s reports, checking frequently for updates and other information that might help her envision future trends. “I look at what designers are doing,” Brander says. “I check for monthly updates and figure out what fashion lines are hot.”

As Brander suggests, doing in-depth research into the fashion world is an essential part of trendspotting. Trisha Malcolm does her fashion “homework” by watching slide shows of fashions from the New York and Paris runways. “I watch almost every fashion show posted on Vogue.com. Then I watch again, pulling out the knitwear in particular. Seeing all the knitted pieces together helps me focus on certain common trends.” Currently Malcolm is seeing runway trends toward bulkier yarns, mesh and other cutout stitch patterns, and denim—trends we’re likely to see reflected in hand knitting in the near future. “What happens on the runway has an immediate impact [on our industry],” Malcolm notes, “although it often takes a year or two to filter down. That means that whatever is happening in fall 2015 will still be relevant in fall 2016.”

BACK TO THE FUTURE

When looking for trends, keep the cyclical nature of fashion in mind. Cirilia Rose, whose recent book *Magpies, Homebodies and Nomads* seeks to help readers develop an individual sense of style, explains her take on trendspotting: “It’s interesting to think about oppositional forces, and to seek out areas that have fallen out of fashion but can be resurrected. For example, intarsia is something that is seeing a resurgence, and I’m quite happy about that.” In the early oughts, knitters went crazy for novelty yarns and thicker yarn weights; that phase was followed by an interest in finer-gauge yarns and less-processed wools. Try to predict what might be next by looking at past fashion trends: If boxy sweaters from the 1980s are back in style now, think about what came after that in fashion (grunge? cropped tops?) and how that might play out in hand knitting (more relaxed fit, say, or shorter hemlines).

Continue your research by visiting some bricks-and-mortar shops. Brooke Nico, co-owner of the Kirkwood Knittery in Kirkwood, Missouri, goes to the local mall to get a feel for coming trends. “I wander through the department stores at the start of each season and take notes about what styles in knitwear are in fashion,” Nico explains. She agrees that trends often take a year or so to go from runway to mass market to the hand-knitting industry. “After I’m done looking around, I’ll find images of the styles I think will resonate with my customers, either on the Internet or in fashion magazines, and make a file for each season. In other words, in fall 2015 I created a file of tear sheets for my fall 2016 buying.” Shelley Brander agrees that immersing yourself in retail helps a shop owner stay current. “I become what I call a ‘cheap wanderer,’” she laughs. “I learn so much just by getting into a store

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TAPPING INTO TRENDS

Once you’ve identified what people are talking about, think about ways to get your customers excited.

- Use a bulletin board to post photos of inspiring knitwear from the runway or pop culture; hang a skein of yarn or pattern leaflet so customers can see how easy it is to get a similar look. It’s a real-life Pinterest board.
- Plan a knit- or crochet-along to harness a knitwear trend. Poll your customers to see what projects they’re most interested in making. Organize the event via your social media outlets.
- Sample, sample, sample. Knit or crochet on-trend examples as quickly as possible. Once customers can see the finished item—or better yet, try it on—they’re more likely to purchase the yarn to make it.
- Take a popular color from the Pantone report and make a tabletop or window display for your shop. Include an assortment of yarns in that color, some swatches, photographs of finished items in that color, and pattern suggestions. Says Trisha Malcolm, “Yarn shops are filled with color; sometimes it helps customers to isolate a single color they can focus on.”
- Keep your employees’ needles clicking. Shelley Brander notices that items her employees work on when they aren’t helping customers are a major source of inspiration for those customers.
- Host an event to get customers excited about a new project. Brander hosts a “Cardi Party,” offering a curated selection of cardigan designs for customers to cast on. Serve tea and crumpets at a *Downton Abbey*-themed knit-along, or offer small prizes for customers who wear kilts or other period dress for an *Outlander*-themed knit night.



and going shopping, even though I look more than buy. Visiting both big retailers and small boutiques helps me see what merchandise is out there—how it's being displayed and what is on trend."

Even trends that are not strictly fashion-oriented can be harbingers of future styles in the knitting world. Think about the larger trend of eco-consciousness, Trisha Malcolm observes. It's not a coincidence that less-processed yarns, organically produced yarns and yarns left in their natural "sheepy" color are so popular now. Malcolm's keen eye can glean information from seemingly unrelated consumer trends. "Think about something as simple as the color of new cell phones," she points out. "With so many companies showing metallic smartphones, it suggests to me that metallic shades will be coming back on a wider scale."

Exploring the Yarniverse

Of course, you'll want to look at the yarn industry in particular when trendspotting. Your job will be easier here, since you're probably already familiar with many resources for staying on top of knitting and crochet trends. Industry consultant Jocelyn Grayson starts with social media website Ravelry: "I look at the new patterns listed on Ravelry just about every day—not only at patterns knit in my yarn-company clients' yarns, but at all the new additions, to see what strikes me as fresh or interesting." Shelley Brander also uses Ravelry to curate patterns. "I sometimes look at the 'hot right now' list to see what people are making, and the lists of top ten patterns, but I do like to go deeper: I love finding a new pattern or a designer who hasn't been discovered yet and promoting his or her work if I think it's really good." Brander's shop features a bulletin board called the Hot Loops Wall; there she posts photographs of on-trend patterns and hangs skeins of the specific yarns her shop carries that would be suitable for each particular pattern.

Another easy way to tap into the knitting *Zeitgeist*: Plug into podcasts. Indeed, Jocelyn Grayson believes that yarny podcasters now play a pivotal role in defining what's hot. "People hear about yarns on their favorite podcasts and spread the word," opines Grayson. "For example, I know a woman with a hand-dyeing business who distributed a self-striping colorway to a group of podcasters, so they were all knitting with her yarn at around the same time. It really raised brand awareness. It works the same way with projects: Knitters hear that a podcaster is making a particular pattern, so they want to knit it, too."

Grayson also advises figuring out who the current stars of the knitosphere are. "A few designers are so popular that whenever they release a new pattern, everybody wants to knit it; I'm thinking of people like Joji Locatelli and Martina Behm. These designers just have a way of putting their finger on what people want to knit. 'Favorite' some of these designers on Ravelry so you can easily see what they are doing," Grayson advises. "Cast on one of these designs for yourself, and tell your customers what you're making."

To Thine Own Shop Be True

While trendspotting can be fun and inspiring, one piece of advice that

experts agree on: Make sure you understand your particular customer base. Jocelyn Grayson cautions, "Know your market niche. Get to know your customers and what they are making. When they come in to buy yarn, ask them what they plan to make with it, then look up the pattern on Ravelry." Grayson advises paying attention to the same sources that your customers find influential. "If you have a clientele very into Instagram, then you should make it your business to see what people are posting there. If your customers regularly listen to a podcast, listen yourself so you'll know what their favorite podcasters are making."

Shelley Brander keeps an ear out for what her customers are knitting so she can plan store events to capitalize on popular patterns. "Sometimes we'll hear that a lot of customers are knitting a particular pattern, so we'll schedule a knit-along," she says. "We also end up doing a lot of informal knit-alongs by using social media. We'll promote a project that one of our employees is knitting on social media, and then we end up all knitting the same thing." Likewise, Brander uses classes to create de facto knit-alongs. "We'll pick a project as a group in a specific yarn, and then the group gets help with knitting the pattern. Those kinds of free-form knit-alongs can spread."

TRENDSPOTTING HOT SPOTS

You can find consultants to advise you on coming trends, but their rates are often prohibitive for a small business owner. Instead, try these low-cost sources for cluing into trends.

- **Pinterest.** Helpful "pinners" have already done a lot of curating for you; search for boards by season and year or topic ("linen" or "knitted skirts"), or use general search-words like "knitwear."
- **Instagram.** Hashtags like "knittersofinstagram" can help you zoom in on what a critical mass of knitters are making.
- **Ravelry, Facebook and Twitter:** Follow your favorite designers and industry professionals, both knitwear and otherwise, to get frequent shots of inspiration.
- **Fashion magazine websites:** Surf the websites sponsored by popular fashion magazines for your daily dose of fashion (vogue.com, instyle.com, elle.com, wwd.com) and sign up for e-newsletters (Shelley Brander likes Rachel Zoe's *The Zoe Report*).
- **Catalogs and online stores:** Seeing what's for sale and what resonates with you can keep you from falling into a knitting fashion rut.

Don't forget to ask your customers where they look for ideas and inspiration. As Jocelyn Grayson says, "If they're looking at a magazine or website for pattern ideas, you should be looking at that magazine or website, too."



Finally, Brander suggests that yarn shop owners look to pop culture for inspiration. "People started talking about the show *Outlander*," she explains. "And then everyone was talking about big cowls [like the characters wear in the show]. I try to take yarns and patterns that we have in-house already and adapt them to the trend. So I'll look through our shop patterns for cowls to see if I can modify one to tap into the *Outlander* trend. By building from something we already have, we can respond to the trend faster."

Trendspotting isn't as tough as it seems—in fact, the "research" can be downright fun—so start taking notes about the knitwear you see, add a dash of creativity, and harness those trends to get your cash register ringing.

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A PASSION FOR FIBER



Jane Saffir (the similarity to her company's name, Jade Sapphire Exotic Fibres, is no coincidence) and her husband Ken Scheck have built a business selling luxury yarns to a wide range of customers. Erin Slonaker sat down with Saffir to find out more.

YMN: What inspired you to start a yarn company?

JS: I've always been a passionate fiberista. For 24 years, my focus has been on fiber and yarn, and when cashmere sweaters started to become more available, I realized there was not much cashmere yarn available for hand knitting. I really wanted to be able to knit with cashmere, and so I started Jade Sapphire as a way to do so. Starting and growing our business has been an incredible adventure. It's taken us to China, Inner Mongolia, Scotland, Germany and Italy, not to mention the many trips to California and Ohio for trade shows. People I always admired in the yarn world have become colleagues and friends.

YMN: How big is the company today? What about the size feels "right" to you?

JS: We started small—just me and my partner, Ken—and have remained small in terms of staff. Everyone who works for us loves yarn and knitting, and we still ooh and aah as the yarns pass through our fingers. Although our staff is small, our business has grown every year, and we sell our yarns to hundreds of yarn shops in the U.S. and abroad.

YMN: Where do you source your yarns?

JS: When we realized that Jade Sapphire was really going to be a business, we decided to source the yarn directly rather than buy from brokers. Much to the worry of our children, we set off for Inner Mongolia and China to visit mills and meet the people we were doing business with. We wanted to feel comfortable about where our yarns were coming from and the working conditions of the people who were producing them. Of course, we also wanted to see cashmere goats and follow the process from animal to yarn. In Italy we've seen gently used sweaters being reprocessed into our new recycled cashmere, and lots of other wonderful things.

YMN: How have your customers reacted to the yarn?

JS: We all know that cashmere is expensive. It comes from the animal's downy undercoat, and each animal produces only 4 to 6 ounces per year. Cashmere fiber is produced by a specific breed of goat, but the fiber cannot be called *cashmere* unless the fiber diameter is no more than 19 microns. The width of the fiber determines the softness, while the length of the fiber determines the strength. Since there is a dual coat, the fiber must go through an extra "de-hairing" process to separate out the precious soft fibers from the guard hairs. In recent years, the purity of cashmere yarn has come into question. To ensure the authenticity of our yarns, we routinely have them tested at certified labs both in the U.S. and abroad. We like to educate our customers about cashmere. When people balk about buying products that come from China, we inform them that almost all of the world's cashmere comes from there, so it is truly an indigenous product to China. While other countries, like Italy and Scotland, import the fiber to spin into yarn, their major sources are China and Mongolia.

YMN: How do you plan your amazing colorways?

JS: We started with 12 hand-dyed colorways, and we're now up to about 200. While most other companies discontinue colors, we don't—except for two of the original 12, which I really hated. I feel very attached to all of our colors. Also, I want to be sure that those who work with our yarns are always able to get the colors they want. When we create a new colorway, I knit a swatch with it, and that's when I really fall in love

// WE'VE HELD FOUR-DAY-OLD CASHMERE GOATS AND WATCHED SILK COCOONS BEING REELED INTO YARN. //

with the color. The subtle variations achieved with hand dyeing appear as I knit, which I love. I crochet a black border around each of the swatches and display them at shows so shop owners can see what our colors really look like

worked up. I plan to make a few afghans with the swatches one day.

YMN: Tell me about your unique color names.

JS: One of the many fun things about having a hand-dyed-yarn business is getting to name the colors. We introduce six or so new colors at a time, and the colors and names always have a theme. Our newest series was named for our brand-new granddaughter, Beatrice, and is called "The Baby Bea Series." She wore a sweater and hat knit in two of the colors on her way home from the hospital. We've based other color series on minerals, dinosaurs and celestial things, among others.

YMN: What are your favorite things to knit or crochet? Why those types of projects?

JS: I enjoy both knitting and crochet but tend to knit more. I love starting a new project and as a result have many unfinished projects. Working with lots of colors appeals to me; so does unusual construction. I love making blankets because they take a long time. I feel the same way about books and meals; I feel sad when they end.

YMN: Your company is a family business. Will future generations of the Saffir/Scheck family take over down the road?

JS: I started this business with Ken, and Jade Sapphire became the child we never had together. (It's a second relationship for both of us.) But my daughter Daisy has been working with us at the trade shows since we started. We hope that she will move closer to us next year, from Alaska, and work to carry on our legacy.

YMN: How have you seen the industry change over the years?

JS: There are many more hand-dyed-yarn companies now than there were 10 years ago. With the Internet and, of course, Ravelry, knitting has become more of a community. The downside of the Internet is that online sales make it harder for local yarn shops to be profitable.

YMN: When you're not in the office, what do you like to do?

JS: Knit, of course. And spin.

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