

SPECIAL BONUS! 6-PAGE NATURAL FIBER DIRECTORY

Winter 2010

Spin·off

it's about making yarn by hand

What would
Beatrix
Potter
spin? p.34

Try these fibers!

Qiviut

Angora bunny

Suri alpaca

Polypay (what's that??)

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Head band

Half gloves

Cozy cuffs

A sweet shawlette

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Is spinning a seasonal activity? Are we more likely to sit down at the wheel when the temperatures dip and the leaves start to change colors? There is definitely something appealing about pulling out baskets of wool and blending it with a bit of bunny fuzz on the fur drum of my drumcarder to then spin a warm yarn for a cute fuzzy cap for my baby when the cold winds make her cheeks rosy. But really, I'm just as likely to do that in the summer when I can sit on the back porch spinning as the kids play in the sandbox and the bees buzz around the lavender. Sure, in the summertime, my fiber time often involves laying locks of wool out to dry in the warm sun or dipping skeins of yarn into an indigo vat. In the winter, I'll spin while talking with family during one of our many gatherings—it helps keep my fingers away from the tempting sweets that pile up on plates everywhere. And usually, I'm hopeful about finishing one more small project to give as a special gift—spun with love and affection. Spinning helps me relax during what can be a very busy time and just enjoy the people around me. Often a child climbs up on my lap—wanting to help or learn. Sometimes I put my project aside to make a quick cape for a superhero or a bib for a doll. And after



Four ounces of Falkland wool dyed in the Hyacinth Days colorway from www.fatcatknits.etsy.com.



Singles at 20 wraps per inch . . .



. . . knitted into an entrelac cap (following Abby Franquemont's 4th Grade Hat pattern) for my oldest daughter, Hannah.

the holiday season, when the quiet and the routines are back in place, spinning adds rhythm, contentment, and color to what could be cold, gray days—waiting for the spring bulbs to poke up through the snow-covered earth. A lacy shawlette around my neck seems to radiate warmth.

Happy spinning!

Amy

Amy Clarke Moore
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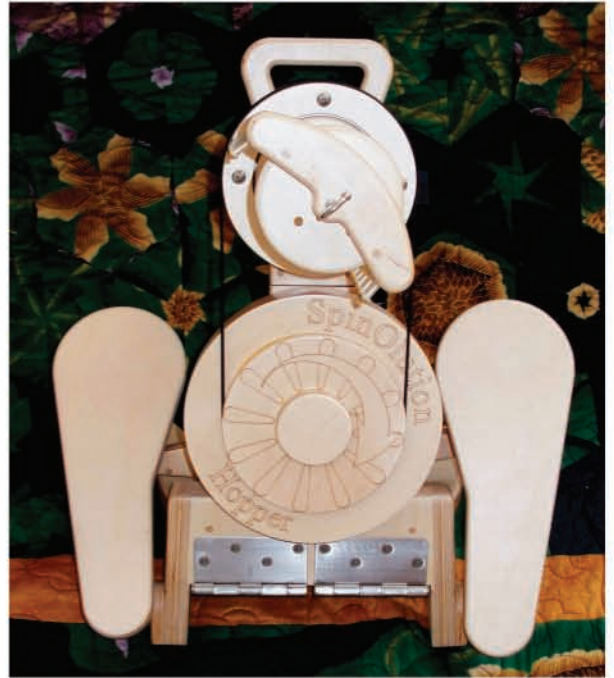
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Models

Our thanks to Tabitha Goring who modeled the half gloves on the cover and the shawlette on page 73 and to Maggie Casey pictured on page 36, who drove up to our photo studio in Fort Collins, Colorado, from Boulder to demonstrate the details of spinning top. And thanks to Kristin Childs who modeled the head band and gloves on page 58.

Props

The tahkli spindle on the cover came in an All About Cotton kit from Cotton Clouds, Safford, Arizona. The Schacht Matchless wheel on page 36 was made by Schacht Spindle Company in Boulder, Colorado. The inch gauge on page 68 was made by Rod Stevens of Woodchuck Products, Taos, New Mexico.

Calls for entries

The pages of *Spin-Off* are often populated by the things that you, our readers, make. Our community website and our weekly e-newsletter have made it even easier for us to reach out to you and ask you to submit ideas for articles, projects, and galleries.



For instance, we recently posted a call for entries for Stephenie Gaustad's Helix Scarf at spinoffmagazine.com/helixscarfcallforentries, which are due December 13, 2010, and the results of which will be showcased in the Spring 2011 issue of *Spin-Off*. All the details are available in a PDF posted at the Web address above.

If you don't have access to a computer, you can send a self-addressed stamped envelope (SASE) to *Spin-Off* Calls for Entries, Interweave, 201 East Fourth St., Loveland, CO 80537-5655, and we'll send you the current calls for entries that we've posted online.

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THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A TAHKLI AND A BEAD-WHORL SPINDLE

Editor's note: I recently received a note from Stephenie Gaustad gently pointing out that the spindle I had substituted for the tahkli for aesthetic purposes in her article "Tahkli Spindles: Beyond Cotton" in the Summer 2010 issue of Spin-Off is not actually a tahkli. Oh, dear. Not only is it incredibly embarrassing, but the potential for perpetuating misinformation is huge. Please accept my apologies. Stephenie was kind enough to explain the difference between a bead-whorl spindle and a tahkli spindle.



A tahkli spindle featured on the cover of this issue.



The bead-whorl spindle featured in the Summer 2010 issue.

Often the bead-whorl spindle is called a "tahkli." And the tahkli can be suspended and used like a drop spindle. Today innovation abounds. There are many new small spindles with and without metal shafts and with disk, spheroid, pear-shaped, or onion-shaped whorls. What is the distinction between the two spindles?

Bead-whorl describes a class of lightweight spindles on which, as the name suggests, the whorl is a bead. Shaft ends can be pointed or blunt, hooked or straight.

The shafts can be made from a variety of materials: wood, cane, or wire.

And, likewise, the beads can be as varied as the name implies: glass, ceramic, bone, horn, wood, ivory, plastic, or metal.

Tahkli is the name of a specific spindle, with both shaft and disk whorl made entirely of metal.* The ends of it are pointed to allow the spindle to spin at a high rate of speed and to be unwound at a speed like a charkha spindle. It is a supported spindle used with the sharp metal tip resting on a slick surface or in a smooth bowl. By its design, the tahkli is a fast, fine-yarn tool, and in the hands of a competent spinner, a tool that outproduces the treadled wheel.

*The original (U.S.) source for the tahkli was India. Bette Hochberg and Celia Quinn must have imported thousands of these.

Stephenie Gaustad
Jackson, California

IN PRAISE OF NATURAL DYES

I am grateful to Elizabeth Fahey for revealing that walnut hulls have to be fresh off the tree to be used as a dyestuff. I am a longtime proponent of natural dyeing and have been given bags of dry walnut hulls that I have dutifully soaked for months and used for dyeing with little effect.

I was disappointed with *Spin-Off* for displaying red cabbage on the cover of the recent issue. My efforts with red cabbage yielded a pale green, which was decidedly fugitive. And where were the dye materials from "my backyard?"

I have dyed successfully with locally grown weld, tansy (not tansy ragwort), and pearly everlasting. The latter two are weeds and grow in abundance here in the Northwest.

I have also been given wood chips from woodworkers. Apart from Osage orange, I produced no

And our survey says . . .

Does the change of seasons affect your spinning habits?

- Yes, I spin warm things on cool days and cool things on warm days
- Yes, I hate spinning with sweaty hands and work mostly in the winter
- No, I am a constant spinner at all times of the year

No, there isn't a noticeable change of seasons where I live

Click the link in the Winter 2010 Table of Contents (under the "Magazine" tab) at spinoffmagazine.com to give us your answers.

In the Fall 2010 issue, we asked how you prefer to see the calendar of events. Here are the results.

36.6% I prefer to read the calendar in the magazine

19.5% I would prefer to read the calendar online in a PDF or other fixed format

26.8% I would prefer the calendar to be online in an interactive format where I could add my own event or festival listing

17.1% I don't read the calendar or don't have an opinion about where it's located

strong colors until I tried extracting dye with alcohol and immediately using the extract. Padauk sawdust produced a lovely orange with alum mordant, and purple heart chips yielded a very dark green—almost black. I'm waiting hopefully for gifts of more sawdust or wood chips.

I'd be interested to learn what results other natural dyers get from wood chips and local weeds. I find very few spinners will take the trouble to mordant their wool. Painted roving and space-dyeing seem to be popular. I love the unpredictable colors I get with natural dyes.

Wendy Ferrier
Whidbey Island, Washington

Response from Amy Clarke Moore: I did a bit of online research before I experimented with the red cabbage dye on the cover of Spin-Off and found a couple of sources that explored the topic. Here is one: <http://resources.edb.gov.hk/~science/hkcho/2s/island.pdf>.

At the end, it summarizes by stating that while the color faded when the fabric was boiled, it didn't fade when exposed to sunlight. Since I don't plan on boiling my wool, I thought it'd be a fun, easy dye to play around with. So far, the samples that I dyed (and washed with wool-safe detergent) haven't faded, and they've been exposed to direct sunlight since early June.

If you have comments you'd like to share with Spin-Off, you can e-mail spinoff@interweave.com. Please be sure to include your full name and your city and state (and country if outside the United States) and let us know whether or not we may consider your comments for publication in future Letters departments.

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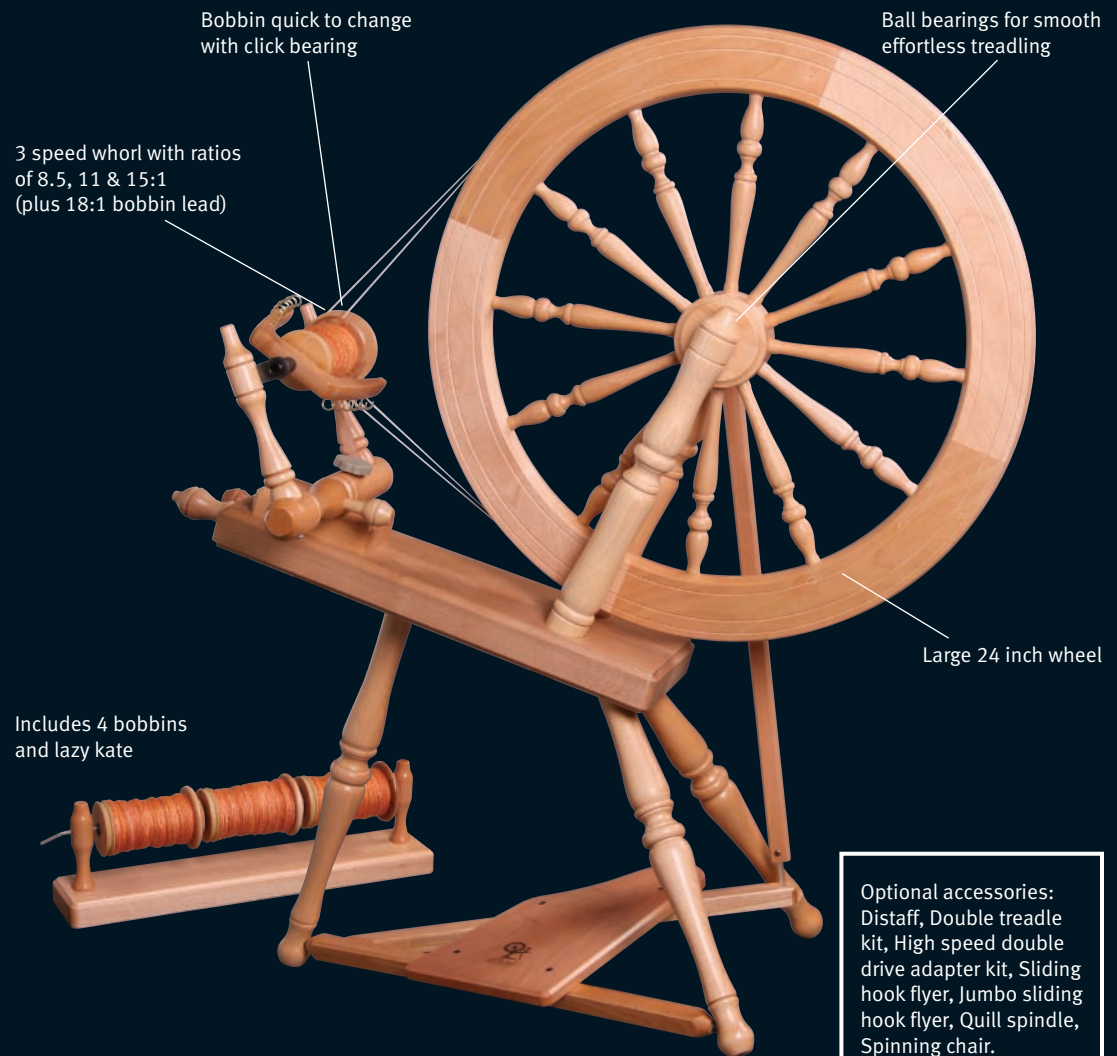
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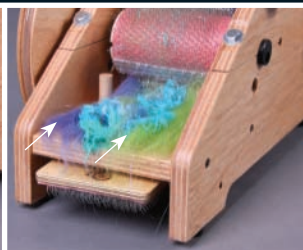
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ashford
WHEELS & LOOMS

BY LIZ GOOD

SHEEP IN THE STREET CAMPAIGN FOR WOOL

On October 11, sheep could be found grazing Savile Row, the street in central London synonymous with men's fine tailoring. Cars were removed to make space, turf was laid, and fences and a barn were built overnight in anticipation of the early morning arrival of the sheep. The organizers hoped to bring as much attention to the wool itself as to the products made from it.



Exmoor Horn sheep on Savile Row, London, October 11, 2010.



Bowmont Merino sheep on Savile Row, London, October 11, 2010.

The sheep kicked off Wool Week (October 11–17) in the United Kingdom, which aimed to highlight the natural advantages of wool. Over ninety apparel and interior retailers, representing four hundred stores, took part. Wool Week offered the public the opportunity to interact with wool and sheep with events from Meet the Sheep (highlighting different breeds) and sheep parades to in-store events and specially organized knitting workshops.

Wool Week marked the start of the five-year Campaign for Wool aimed at reconnecting people with the versatility of wool and supporting sheep farming and the international textile community. The campaign was convened by the Prince of Wales with the support of British, Australian, South African, Norwegian, and New Zealand woolgrowers. The campaign will extend globally in 2011 into Australia, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, and the United States.

You can see a video of the sheep on Savile Row at www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0LtQBwXW1s. **For more information, news updates, and events, visit www.campaignforwool.org.**



Elis Vermeulen's work, *Speak friend and enter*, was part of the first annual International Day of Felt.

FELTUNITED—THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FELT

October 2 marked the second International Day of Felt. Inspired by the designation of 2009 as the United Nation's International Year of Natural Fibres, artists Elis Vermeulen (of the Netherlands) and Cynthia Reynolds (of Norway) created FeltUnited. FeltUnited is a nonprofit group of artists from around the world that aims to connect feltmakers and to raise awareness of felt as both an art and a craft.

and submit them to be part of an online exhibit that is archived on the website. Preparations are underway for the 2011 International Day of Felt, and updates will be available on the website. **For more information, visit www.feltunited.com.**

For the International Day of Felt, FeltUnited asks felt artists around the globe to display their felt outside their homes and studios by wearing it, hanging it, or showing it in large installations. Participants are asked to take photographs



Knit Socks! 17 Classic Patterns for Cozy Feet

by Betsy Lee McCarthy

In this revised edition of the original 2004 publication, Betsy Lee McCarthy adds more patterns and material, resulting in a total of seventeen socks knitted from the top down with instruction on how to knit them using double-pointed needles, two circular needles, or the magic-loop method. I was impressed with the pages devoted to how to knit with these methods and how they relate to one another so that the sock knitter can choose the technique he or she likes best, no matter how the original pattern was written.

If you've never knitted socks before, this book is a good place to start, with skill levels addressed from beginner through intermediate and advanced. There are comprehensive directions including clear illustrations and photography. I always love a sock-knitting book that includes the sock pictured with all its anatomy: cuff, leg, instep, heel flap, heel turning, gusset, etc. McCarthy's sock clearly lays out all the parts so the knitter can refer to the picture and know where on the sock map he or she might be.

This is what I call a "plug-and-knit" type of book, wherein one set of directions is given, and numbers are inserted in those directions by the knitter depending on

the size sock you will be knitting. Sizes range from toddlers' through men's socks. Techniques range from simple stockinette stitch to cables, lace, stranded knitting, and slip-stitch patterns. There are tips on how to substitute stitch patterns you might like to incorporate into a sock, hence giving the knitter the chance to make personal design decisions.

I did find a few problems with the descriptions of techniques and accompanying illustrations—the most confusing to a new knitter could be in the section on weaving in ends. Happily, there are many choices provided if one method is confusing to the knitter.

There is no information regarding handspun yarns. An advanced-beginning spinner might be able to approximate the commercial yarn weights recommended if he or she had samples of such yarns to match while spinning.

All in all, this is a nice book to get you started on socks and help you move up the ranks to some more advanced patterns. Thumb through the entire book and you will happen upon tips strewn here and there. This could be a little treasure in your library to refer back to time and time again.

—Allison Judge

North Adams, Massachusetts: Storey Publishing, 2010. Paperbound, 175 pages, \$12.95.
ISBN 978-1-60342-549-0. www.storey.com.



Spin Dye Stitch: How to Create and Use Your Own Yarns

by Jennifer Claydon

Jennifer Claydon's new book, *Spin Dye Stitch*, introduces spinning and dyeing to the novice. The author assumes the reader will have no experience with these crafts and covers materials, tools, and methods for both activities.

The book begins with spinning. Claydon presents a variety of fibers by type and preparation, and there is a brief introduction to the spindle and spinning wheel. Claydon includes excellent labeled photos of two wheels, their parts, and how they work. Both are upright models; one is double drive, the other is flyer lead. There are photos and descriptions of optional fiber tools. Claydon presents how to spin on a spindle and wheel with encouraging text, excellent photos throughout, and troubleshooting suggestions.

Claydon then introduces tools and materials for the dyer. She describes several application techniques, again including excellent process photos. The variety of methods presented gives the potential dyer many choices, including dyeing fiber before or after it is spun and dyeing fiber and yarn on the stove top, in the microwave, or in a Crock-Pot.

Claydon includes a few simple projects using handspun yarns. She starts with knitting projects that prog-

ress from simple to more ambitious. Then there are weaving projects, followed by felting and craft ideas using handspun yarns.

The last portion of the book is a gallery of spun yarns showing a variety of fibers, colors, and the results of fiber preparation methods. Photos in this section are very helpful to the novice because Claydon includes photos of fiber with the yarn spun from it.

People new to spinning and dyeing will get a nice overview from an encouraging spinner-author. However, a greater variety of spinning wheels either photographed or diagrammed would have been welcome for potential spinners. There are a brief two paragraphs on fiber preparation; a little more depth here would have also been helpful. I would have liked some commentary in the dyeing chapter on weighing dyes for mixing, and I'm concerned that there was no mention of the dangers of inhaling dye powders, including food dyes such as powdered drink mixes, which perpetuates an unfortunate impression that drink-mix powders are inherently safe to use with children.

Readers will find much useful information: novices will find excellent techniques and positive suggestions, and the experienced spinner may also find a few useful

—continued on page 17

Make it your own, with

Julia

Victoria - OAK

Victoria - BEECH



Features of Victoria and Julia:

Ratios Julia - 6:1 - 8.5:1 - 12.5:1 - 19:1

Optional high speed set provides ratios of:

Julia - 6:1, 8.5:1, 19:1 and 27:1 - set includes 3 highspeed bobbins, driveband and highspeed flyer

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Victoria - 6:1, 8.5:1, 19:1 and 20:1

brake system - scotch tension

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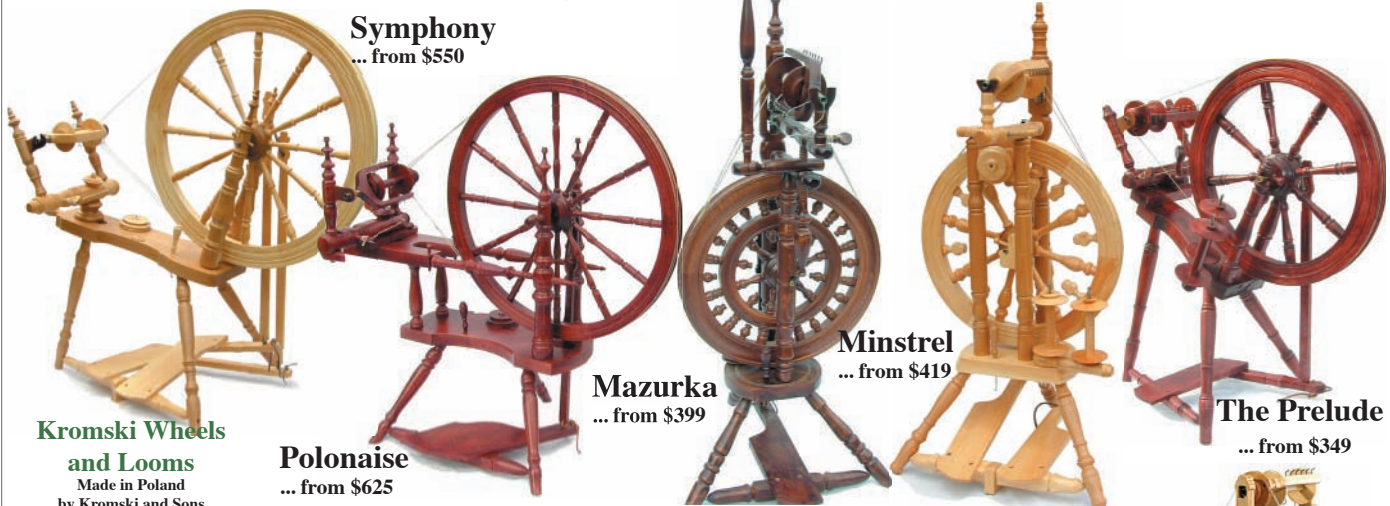
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REVIEWS (continued from page 12)

tips and tricks. I recommend this book to anyone interested in taking the first steps in spinning and dyeing and especially to guild libraries, where members at any stage of experience will have access to this encouraging and useful guide.

—Sara Lamb

Cincinnati, Ohio: North Light Books, 2009. Paperbound, 128 pages, \$24.99. ISBN 978-1-60061-155-1.



New Zealand Spinning Wheels and Their Makers

by Mary Knox

Over the years, I have had many inquiries about spinning wheels made in New Zealand and exported around the world in the 1970s and 1980s. Mary Knox's website, www.nzspinningwheels.info, has provided the answers to many of my questions. She describes the site as an “identification guide” by providing pictures of, and information about, many of these wheels and their builders. Now Knox has gone one step further by presenting much of the information from her website in a well-organized book.

Mary Knox and her co-researcher Lyndsay Fenwick have built on the work initiated by Heather Nicholson and developed by the Canterbury Area Creative Fibre group, part of the New Zealand Spinning, Weaving, and Woolcrafts Society. Knox begins with a historical survey. World War I brought out the inventiveness of wheel makers so wool could be spun and then knitted for the armed services. The depression and World War II again brought out the creativity of several men who made a variety of wheels by adapting materials and parts that were available at that time to the island nation. Interest in spinning wheels faded after the war. It wasn't revived until the mid-1960s when a reluctant Walter Ashford was persuaded to resume making spinning wheels. He redesigned the wheel his company made during the war, and the Ashford Traditional was born.

Dividing the spinning wheels into three structural categories, the Saxony or horizontal bobbin/flyer wheel, the upright or vertical wheel, and the double table or Norwegian-style wheel, Knox outlines which wheels by different makers fit into each category. Next she introduces the wheel makers about whom she and her colleagues have been able to find information. Fortunately, in some cases they were able to talk with the wheel makers themselves or members of their families. It is interesting to learn how the different models evolved.

Knox looks at the different components of a spinning wheel to see how the various makers solved the design and structural questions posed to them. She notes that some of the innovative changes introduced by the early wheel makers have been incorporated into the spinning wheels that are currently produced.

Although the book is printed in black and white, an accompanying CD-ROM with the photographs in color greatly enhances the reader's appreciation of the book's content. While Knox says that the book is “a tribute to the inventiveness and skill of New Zealand spinning-wheel makers and the astonishing variety of their wheels,” it is also a testimony to her hard work over the last five years. It should be on the bookshelf of anyone interested in twentieth-century spinning wheels.

—Florence Feldman-Wood

Carterton, New Zealand: Mary Knox, 2010. Spiralbound, 140 pages, NZ\$30 (~\$22) plus postage. ISBN 978-0-473-16335-8. To obtain a copy, contact Mary Knox, 23 Lincoln Rd., Carterton 5713, New Zealand, or e-mail mary@nzspinningwheels.info. For more information, go to www.nzspinningwheels.info and follow the links to How to Order. PayPal is an option.



The Ohio Knitting Mills Knitting Book: 26 Patterns Celebrating Four Decades of American Sweater Style

by Steven Tatar with Denise Grollmus

The Ohio Knitting Mills Knitting Book celebrates the garments, people, and factory that constituted the mill in Cleveland, Ohio. History segments alternate with patterns for garments, primarily sweaters, based on ones produced in the Ohio Knitting Mills from the 1940s through the 1970s. I was previously unaware of the Midwest's garment industry and found the factory and production histories fascinating.

Originally founded as the Stone Knitting Mills in 1927, the company reorganized twenty years later as the Ohio Knitting Mills, which lasted until 2004. The company produced machine-knitted garments (at first only men's but later for women and teens) that were sold under many labels, including Sears, J. C. Penney, Pendleton, and Bobbie Brooks. Specialized machinery allowed for complex patterns, and affordable fashion and knitwear became the basics of clothing for home, sports, and office wear for middle-class America.

The handknitting pattern collection includes six men's sweaters and seventeen women's garments, mostly sweaters but also a couple of dresses, a skirt, and a poncho. Accessories are limited to a "hippie stashbag" and a scarf/cap set. Garments are sized for women's 30- to 46-inch bust sizes and men's 34- to 46-inch chest sizes. Most knitters will find something at their skill level. Patterns range from garter stitch to intarsia and two-color stranded knitting. Many of the sweaters are simply stockinette stitch embellished with embroidery. Schematics show garment shapes and detail the measurements for each piece. Photos of the original garments accompany those of modeled new versions. In most cases, the new patterns are almost identical to the old in color and style.

If the colors and embellishments of these garments do not suit your taste, it is easy enough to change colors and to eliminate the extras. Almost everything in this book is basically a great comfy and classic American garment.

—Carol Huebscher Rhoades

New York: Artisan, 2010. Paperbound, 158 pages, \$17.95. ISBN 978-1-57965-399-6. www.workman.com/artisanbooks.

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Congratulations to Mary-Kay Tilden, a winner in our I Made It On My Schacht contest.



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BY LIZ GOOD

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Wild Orchids Fiber Arts, wildorchidsfiberarts@gmail.com; www.wildorchidsfiberarts.etsy.com; www.wildorchidsfiberarts.com.



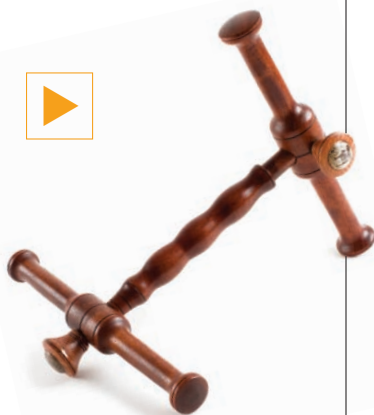
Golding Fiber Tools' new **Navajo-style spindles** feature handcarved and/or handpainted designs in Southwestern motifs. Some include vintage sterling silver insets with turquoise or coral accents handcrafted by Native American silversmiths. The whorls are 4½ inches in diameter and are handcrafted from cherry, linden, or walnut. \$247–\$397.

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What are natural fibers?

BY AMY CLARKE MOORE

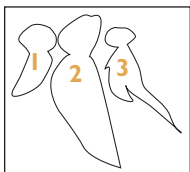
Natural fibers occur naturally in nature, naturally. (Sorry. Couldn't resist.) It seems obvious, but it actually can be confusing. There are manufactured fibers that originate with or incorporate natural materials, but they are made by human hands (as opposed to extruded through our skin—yes, human hair can be spun, and it happens accidentally quite a lot when a piece of your hair falls onto the fiber you're spinning). Regenerated or manufactured fibers that start with natural products such as bamboo, soy, or milk, for example, are

not usually included in the natural fiber category because of the processes that they have to go through to become fiber suitable for spinning. The term *natural fiber* refers to fibers that come *directly* from plants or animals.

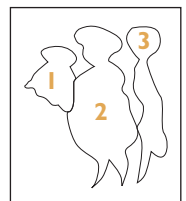
Plant fibers can grow off a seed (such as cotton), from the stem of a plant (such as flax or hemp), or even from the bark of a tree (such as the Western red cedar). Animal fibers come from the hair of animals such as sheep, dogs, llamas, bison (you get the idea—pretty much anything hairy is spinnable), but animal fibers also include the silk spun by worms and spiders—the most common is the silk from



Sheep wool:
 1. Masham,
 2. Merino,
 3. Black Welsh Mountain,
 4. Norwegian,
 5. Icelandic.



Camelids: 1. Camel,
 2. Alpaca, 3. Llama.



Silk: 1. Silk noil, 2. Tussah, 3. Bombyx.

Bombyx mori silkworms. (And yes, you can spin spiderwebs—it is just hard to cultivate spider silk.)

Plant fibers are composed of cellulose, while animal fibers are composed of protein. These chemical and structural differences mean that cellulose and protein fibers react differently when they are exposed to heat, water, soap, and dyes. Whereas extreme temperature changes can cause some protein structures to become permanently interlocked—as in felt—plant fibers can go through the same processes suffering no damage.

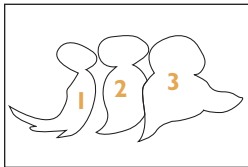
Plant and animal fibers also react differently to pH levels. Protein can be damaged by high pH levels (alkaline—think baking soda), but respond well to low pH levels (acid—think vinegar). Soda ash is alkaline and is a common water softener used in many laundry detergents. This is why, when washing wool and other protein fibers, most people encourage the use of wool-safe detergents and a vinegar rinse. Cellulose and protein fibers take dye differently. In most cases, fiber-reactive dyes are used to dye cellulose fibers, and acid dyes are used to dye protein fibers. ☞

Amy Clarke Moore is the editor of *Spin-Off* magazine. Years ago, when she was an art student at Cornell College, Mt. Vernon, Iowa, she spent quite a bit of time making sculptures using dryer lint—that was before she learned how to spin. Fortunately, they were lost to the dustbins of time.

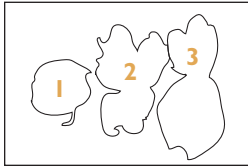
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McCuin, Judith MacKenzie. *The Intentional Spinner: A Holistic Approach to Making Yarn*. Loveland, Colorado: Interweave, 2009.

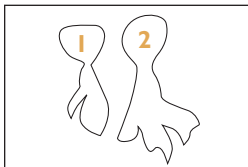
Goat: **1.** Cashgora, **2 and 3.** Cashmere,



Seed fibers: **1.** Cotton boll, **2.** Cotton, **3.** Colored cotton.



Bast fibers: **1.** Flax, **2.** Hemp.



We photographed some fibers we had on hand. The list is nowhere near exhaustive—it just provides an introduction to natural fibers.



5



6



7

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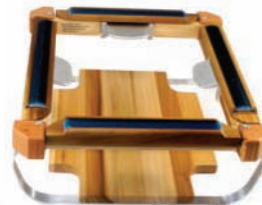
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At Cotton Clouds

BY LESLIE ORDAL

Irene Laughing Cloud Schmoller, founder and owner of Cotton Clouds surrounded by cotton in the Gila Valley of southeastern Arizona.



Interweave founder Linda Ligon calls Irene Schmoller the “Johnny Appleseed of cotton.” Spend a few minutes talking with Irene, who has spent over thirty years educating people about cotton and providing the best possible cotton materials to fiber artists, and it’s easy to see why this is an apt moniker. As owner and founder of Cotton Clouds, the largest seller of cotton yarns and spinning fiber in the world, Irene has built a reputation as an expert in working with cotton.

It all started with a single workshop at the Handweavers Guild of America’s Convergence conference in 1978, where Irene signed up for a class called Handspinning Cotton. The class instructors were legendary cotton specialists Harry and Olive Linder, and their enthusiasm for the fiber proved infectious. Although she had previously spun and woven with wool, Irene went home from the confer-

ence wanting to use cotton exclusively. “The Linders were so enthusiastic and knowledgeable about every aspect of cotton,” Irene says, “I knew immediately I wanted to spin cotton forever.” In the late 1970s, it wasn’t easy to find cotton weaving yarns or spinning fiber, as most fiber artists were working solely with wool. Irene mailed letters to over two hundred yarn manufacturers in search of supplies, coming up with half a dozen sources for cotton materials. She reasoned that if she couldn’t easily find cotton yarn, neither could others. Hence, her then small mail-order business, Cotton Clouds, was born. Cotton Clouds now offers an extensive range of yarns for weaving and knitting, tools, and a diverse selection of cotton spinning fiber. The latter is rare even today. Cotton Clouds’ ability to provide so much spinnable cotton has its roots in Irene’s move to Arizona.

While most people think of the southeastern United States when they picture cotton farms, Arizona has been a significant cotton-producing state since the turn of the twentieth century. An embargo on Egyptian cotton during World War I forced Goodyear and other military supply companies who used cotton in their tires to seek out a suitable domestic source for the fiber. Arizona's long-stapled Pima variety fit the bill and led to a rapid expansion of the cotton industry in the irrigated valleys near the town of Safford and across southern Arizona. While Arizona's cotton production may have peaked in the 1950s, it remains strong enough today that local farmers are able to provide fiber for Cotton Clouds along with many other clients. Irene strives to offer as wide a selection of cotton types and preparations as possible to meet the needs of her customers.

Cotton is found in the seed pods, called bolls, of the cotton plant. The cotton fiber itself must be removed from the seeds, a process called ginning, in order to be spun. Spinners who enjoy carding by hand often buy Cotton Clouds' long-stapled, ginned Pima cotton, or the shorter stapled but whiter Acala variety. Pima cotton fiber easily comes free of its seeds. Irene has an arrangement with the local cotton gin to get Pima cotton before it has been ginned. It can be spun right off the seed, yielding the longest staple possible (the ginning process can tear and therefore shorten fibers).

Every fall, Irene receives a batch of cotton plants from a local farmer and clips off the bolls by hand. This is a painstaking process, but one she enjoys because it provides her customers with cotton in its most natural form. At the opposite end of the

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spinning spectrum is Supima cotton sliver, obtained from a mill in the stage just before being spun into thread for high-end men's dress shirts. It is highly processed and thus free of all plant matter and easy to spin.

Before she started Cotton Clouds, Irene was an elementary school teacher. A large part of her reputation as a cotton expert no doubt stems from her efforts to educate people about spinning cotton. Even though there is much more cotton spinning fiber available today than there was thirty years ago, there is still a misconception among many spinners that cotton is difficult to work with or requires specialized skills or equipment. Irene rejects that notion outright. "So many times when I've spoken with a frustrated cotton spinner," she says, "I find that they are spinning an inferior fiber." This is why Cotton Clouds stocks the best-grade, cleanest cotton available, and why Irene put together several educational pamphlets about spinning cotton. She includes them with customers' orders and is available to answer questions about Cotton Clouds' products or about spinning cotton in general.

Irene says her best piece of advice for spinning cotton is "cotton needs a little bit of twist to become a yarn and then lots and lots of twist to hold itself together as that yarn." She recommends spinning cotton long draw and sitting farther back from the



Closeup of Pima cotton flower (*Gossypium barbadense*) that Irene grew in her garden.



Cotton bolls in the field.

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Jodi Ybarra, shown packaging All About Cotton spinning kits, has been a Cotton Clouds employee for more than twenty years.

wheel to allow more twist into the yarn before it is taken up onto the bobbin.

Cotton Clouds was one of the first companies to put together kits for spinning and weaving, including the All About Cotton spinning kit that is very popular with beginning cotton spinners. Containing a variety of cotton fibers, a tahkli spindle, and step-by-step instructions, the kit is one of Cotton Clouds' most popular products. Cotton Clouds expands its product offerings based largely on customer demand, which is how it came to carry fibers other than cotton such as sari silk and bamboo rayon.

Running a company as busy as Cotton Clouds doesn't leave Irene with much free time. Still, she enjoys spinning on her tahkli spindle once in a while, especially at public demonstrations. After thirty years in the mail-order business, Irene says she would consider selling Cotton Clouds if the right cotton enthusiast came along. For now, though, she is happy to keep providing fiber artists with high-quality cotton supplies and to continue



The All About Cotton spinning kit includes a 6 oz assortment of all Cotton Clouds' cotton fibers, step-by-step spinning instructions, and a brass supported-tahkli spindle.

encouraging others to give cotton spinning a try. "Like everything else you've done in your life," she says, "it takes patience, practice, and giving in to what the fiber wants to do. Breathe and relax. You'll eventually love cotton as much as I do (or almost)!" ❧

A writer in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, Leslie Ordal is a newcomer to cotton spinning. She's sure to blog about the experience at slipstreamfiberarts.wordpress.com.



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Beatrix Potter's English Lake District

BY DONNA DRUCHUNAS



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Wherever you go in the English Lake District of Cumbria, United Kingdom, one thing is certain: you will see sheep—on the fells, in the valleys, and even on the lakeshore. You may notice that many of these sheep are gray or black with white faces. They are Herdwicks, native to Cumbria. Miss Beatrix Potter (1866–1943), famous for her series of books about Peter Rabbit and his friends, is less well known as Mrs. Beatrix Heelis, farmer, needleworker, and conservationist. But it was after she married at age forty-seven, and her eyesight began to fail, that she spent all of her time in the Lake District, managing the farms she'd purchased with the profits from her books, breeding Herdwick sheep, and even serving as the first woman president of the Herdwick Sheep Breeders' Association in Cumbria. In the end, Beatrix Heelis, née Potter, left over 4,000 acres, fifteen farms in all, to the National Trust for the preservation of the rural landscape and lifestyle she had come to love.



1. Hill Top, near Sawrey
Hill Top was the first farm that Beatrix Potter purchased while still living in London with her parents. Because she couldn't live there full-time—as a spinster daughter, she was expected to care for her parents—she kept the tenant farmer on to care for the property and raise Herdwick sheep in her absence. Here, you can visit the house, still decorated as it

was when Potter owned it, take guided walks, stop at the local pub for a bite to eat, and experience the beauty that first inspired so many of Miss Potter's books. Young children will enjoy exploring the garden trail and discovering scenes from their favorite Peter Rabbit tales.

2. Yew Tree Farm at Coniston and other working sheep farms

Much of the movie *Miss Potter*, starring Renée Zellweger, was shot on location in Cumbria, with Yew Tree Farm standing in for Hill Top. If you stay at this working farm bed-and-breakfast, you will experience rural life in the Lake District firsthand. Breakfast is served in a room still filled with the furniture purchased by Beatrix Potter. The “spinning gallery,” a beautiful area along the front of the old barn, is actually where Herdwick wool was dried and has nothing to do with spinning, but it adds lovely ambience to the setting.



was when Potter owned it, take guided walks, stop at the local pub for a bite to eat, and experience the beauty that first inspired so many

1. Hill Top
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www.nationaltrust.org.uk

2. Yew Tree Farm
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Information about other working sheep farms with lodging: Herdwick Sheep Breeders' Association
Howe Cottage
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ILLUSTRATION BY ANN SWANSON



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3. The Wool Clip, Caldbeck

The Wool Clip is a cooperative owned and operated by about eighteen Cumbrian fiber artists, farmers, and crafters. The shop is housed in an eighteenth-century water mill in Caldbeck, a picturesque village about halfway between Penrith and Cockerthwaite. Whether you want to make something yourself or buy items made from local breeds (including Herdwick, Bluefaced Leicester, Shetland, Swaledale sheep, and Crookback Angora goats), you are sure to buy more than will fit in your suitcase. There are handspun and hand-dyed yarns, knitting and crochet kits, and books and magazines to entice crafters. For family members, there are many different styles of hand- and machine-made clothing and accessories, all made in Cumbria. Be sure to pick up a copy of the Woolen Ways map of other wool-related sites and shops in the Lake District.



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4. Woolfest, Cockerthwaite

If you find yourself in Cumbria the last weekend of June, you are in for a treat! On Friday and Saturday, an area near Cockerthwaite, normally used for swap meets, becomes a mecca for fiber fanatics from all over the United Kingdom and Europe. With workshops, hands-on exhibitions, animals, and over one hundred retail stalls, Woolfest can compete

with the most popular of the United States' fiber festivals. In fact, you'll discover many things here that you don't often see at festivals in the United States: wool rugs and carpet for sale, big knitting, United Kingdom book authors, products from British sheep breeds, and more. The exhibition area also features free demonstrations of fiber crafts from around the world. There's a *Ravelry* meet up, a spinning evening, and a barbecue, too!

5. Indigo, Penrith

This tiny shop tucked away in the Devonshire Arcade shopping mall in the center of Penrith is packed full of Herdwick wool, local hand-dyed yarns, and a collection of other supplies, books, and tools. It is a must-see for spinners, knitters, and crocheters visiting this area. Here, you will find kits and materials that are almost impossible to come by except in this small corner of the world. Stop in just to say "hello" or pick up some Herdwick wool to spin, a few skeins of the one-of-a-kind yarn, or a custom-designed kit.



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ALL PHOTOS BY DOMINIC COTIGNOLA UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED.

6. Ewe Close Rare Breed Farm, near Aspatria

Although not a Herdwick farm, this farm is definitely in the spirit of Beatrix Potter's desire to preserve the landscape, livestock, and heritage of the English Lake District. This is a great destination for families and anyone interested in agriculture and the preservation of rare breeds. Children (and adults) will be enthralled by the chance to pet and bottle-feed baby lambs, calves, piglets, and ponies, and you can even try your hand at milking a goat. If all that walking works up an appetite, stop in at the Tea Room before hitting the road and heading out to your next adventure.



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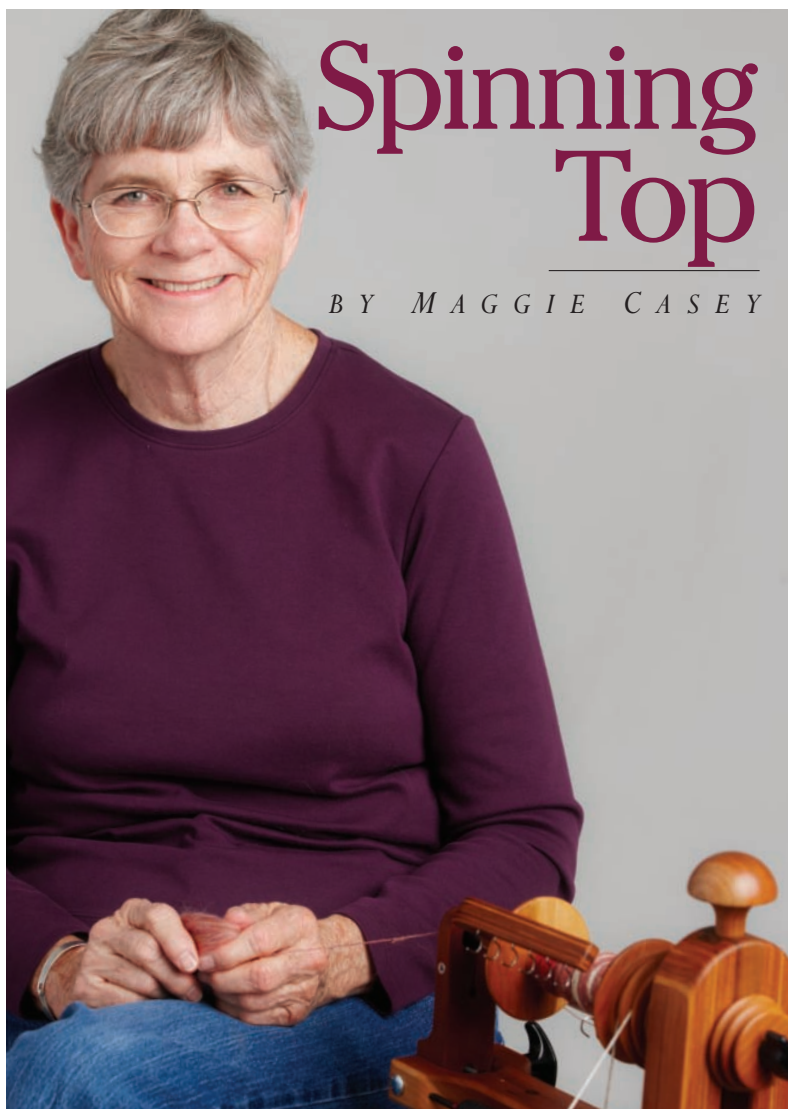
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Spinning Top

BY MAGGIE CASEY

Is there a spinner alive that hasn't fallen in love with a smooth, silky ball of combed top? I think not! But the fact remains that the more organized the fibers are, the faster twist can grab those fibers and lock them into place. Commercial top is always a combed preparation and is about as organized as it gets. Combing removes all the short, weak fibers, and the remaining long fibers are closely lined up in parallel order right next to each other. Think of top as a precision drill team—all the fibers are marching in step, close together, shoulder to shoulder, perfectly lined up, platoon after platoon moving as one unit. No wonder top is so sleek and smooth. Because these fibers are so well organized, they can become a beautiful, smooth yarn or a slubby, overtwisted tangle. It all has to do with how the twist meets the fibers and turns them into yarn. Here are some tips to make those fibers march the way you want them to.

KNOW WHAT YOU'RE WORKING WITH

Before you start spinning, check out your fiber (figs. 1–3). Grasp one end of the top and pull off just a staple length of the fibers to see how long they are. Long fibers require more space between your hands when you draft than short fibers. Did those fibers

pull out easily, or are they compacted (fig. 4)? See if the fibers pull out easier from the other end—it can make a difference (figs. 5–6). Then pull off a section 18 to 24 inches long and gently shake it out. Is it a wide ribbon of fibers or a narrow one (fig. 7)? Sometimes just opening up the top with a shake is all you





have to do to make spinning easier. Remember to keep the fibers organized so you can make a smooth yarn. The best way to accentuate the beauty of those combed fibers is to spin them with a worsted draw.

WORSTED DRAW

A worsted draw is a short forward draw with no twist between your hands, not even the tiniest bit (figs. 8–10). After you've joined your fiber to the leader, your front hand (drafting hand) pinches and pulls out a section of fiber, feeds it toward the wheel, slides back bringing the twist over those drawn-out fibers, and then pulls out another length of fiber and smooths back again. Keep the rhythm going: draft forward, smooth back, draft forward, smooth back. Keep your fingers closed on your

drafting hand; if you let twist sneak between your hands, it will lock the fibers together and you can't draft. Don't pinch so hard with your front hand that it hurts—pinch just enough to keep the twist at bay. The distance between your hands will depend on how long the fibers are; if your hands are farther apart than the staple length of the fiber, you won't have as much control over the size of the yarn. If your hands are too close, the fibers can't move out of your fiber hand easily and your yarn will get extra twist, making drafting difficult. Your drafting hand is doing most of the work, pulling and smoothing back, but the back hand (fiber hand) is busy, too. Keep it relaxed and cradle all the fibers using your entire hand and not just your index finger and thumb (fig. 11). If you are holding the fibers





too tightly, they can't move out, no matter how hard your front hand pulls. As you draft forward, your fiber hand can put a little pressure on the fiber to give the drafting hand something to pull against. Then as your drafting hand brings the twist into the fibers, relax your back hand so more fibers will be available for the next draft. Remember that spinning is not a contest of strength—finesse always wins!

Avoid using just your thumb and index finger to hold the fiber because it will cause a tangled mess, as in this photo where Maggie's thumb is inserted in the drafting zone (fig. 12).

Keep the twist out of the area between your hands or it will be hard to draft (fig. 13).

There are several ways to prepare top for spinning. You can spin the fiber just the way it is, vertically split the top into narrower sections so you are dealing with fewer fibers at a time, or spin across the web. You can also predraft or spin over the fold. Try all of these techniques and see which one works best for you and your project.

SPINNING ACROSS THE WEB

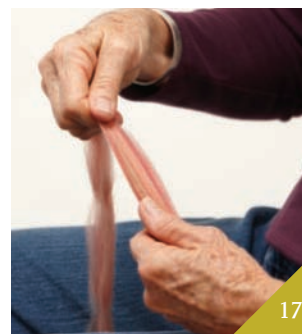
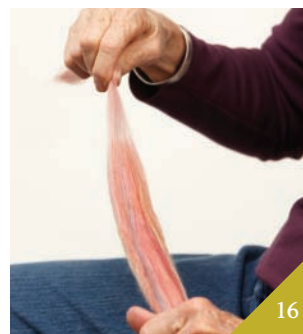
Do not strip or predraft the fiber. After joining the fiber to the leader, start spinning using a worsted draw and slowly move your drafting hand back and forth over the top, drawing out fibers as you go (fig. 14). Judith MacKenzie spun yarn for some amazing socks using this technique in her book *The Intentional Spinner* (Interweave, 2009).



PREDRAFTING

The goal of predrafting is to open the top so it isn't as dense and to stagger the fibers so they don't all draft out at the same time; the aim is not to reduce the fiber to its final spun size. If the fiber has been dyed after combing, predrafting may help open up slightly compressed areas.

The possibilities you'll encounter are hands too close together (fig. 15), too far apart (fig. 16), and just right (fig. 17). Hold an 18- to 24-inch section of top with your fiber hand about 6 inches away from



an end and with the other hand, start pulling out fibers from that end. If fibers don't pull out easily, increase the distance between your hands by moving the fiber hand away from the end. Don't have a death grip with

either hand! To keep the fibers organized, cradle them gently with your fiber hand and keep equal pressure on them as you pull them out with your other hand. The goal is to stagger the fibers without creating thin spots (fig. 18). If necessary, predraft a couple of times to create a smooth, narrow ribbon as organized as the original top (fig. 19). After you are done predrafting, wind the top into a little bird's nest (fig. 20). Spin the fibers worsted draw.



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Spin For Peace



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OVER THE FOLD

If you are getting frustrated fighting the twist, try spinning over the fold. After you spin over the fold for a while, it is easier to go back to spinning lengths of top.

Pull off a staple length of undrafted fiber and fold it over the index finger of your fiber hand so that one end of the fiber lies between your index finger and middle finger and the other end is between your index finger and thumb (fig. 21). Join by pressing the leader to the fiber with the thumb of your fiber hand, treadle, and watch the twist grab the fibers on your finger (fig. 22). Start drafting (pull forward, smooth back) (figs. 23–24). The twist can't lock up the fibers as easily because they are on both sides of your finger (fig. 25). Draft off the top of your finger so you are folding the fibers in half. This technique will not give you as smooth and strong a yarn as spinning from a length of top, but the yarn will still be smooth. Since you are spinning only one staple length at a time, you have lots of joins, and you will get very good at making joins. With these folded fibers you can also do a short forward draw with

twist between your hands or a long draw (fig. 26). Sara Lamb spins silk over the fold for her beautiful kimonos (see the Summer 2001 issue of *Spin-Off*).

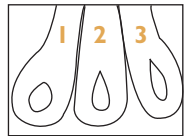
Twist loves combed fibers—it can run into them faster than the speed of light and leave equally fast. Twist can be deceiving; it goes into the fiber so easily you may think your yarn is stronger than it is. Stop and check your yarn to see if it has enough twist. Pull out a length of yarn and test it for strength by holding on to a section and tugging on each end to make sure it doesn't drift apart (fig. 27). If it passes the test, then take that yarn and let it twist back on itself to see how it looks as a plied yarn (fig. 28). If you have too little twist, treadle once or twice before the yarn gets on the wheel. If there is too little twist and the yarn drifts apart, the twist will escape and weaken the yarn around it, so add a little twist back into your yarn before you start drafting again. If it happens often, loosen the tension on your brake band to allow a little more twist into your yarn. If you have too much twist, tighten the tension slightly on your brake band and get the yarn onto the wheel more quickly. With a



27



Maggie spun an Ashland Bay multicolored Merino top in the Baltic colorway **1**) over the fold, **2**) predrafted short draw, and **3**) across the web to demonstrate the very subtle differences between the three techniques in the finished yarn.



28

little practice you can turn top into smooth, elegant yarns. Want some more ideas on worsted-style yarns? Check out the article by Carol Rhoades on lofty worsted-style yarns in the Summer 2010 issue of *Spin-Off*.

Maggie Casey, author of *Start Spinning* (Interweave, 2007) and *Start Spinning DVD* (Interweave, 2009), spends her days working and teaching at Shuttles, Spindles, and Skeins in Boulder, Colorado. She loves teaching spinning because she learns so much from her students.



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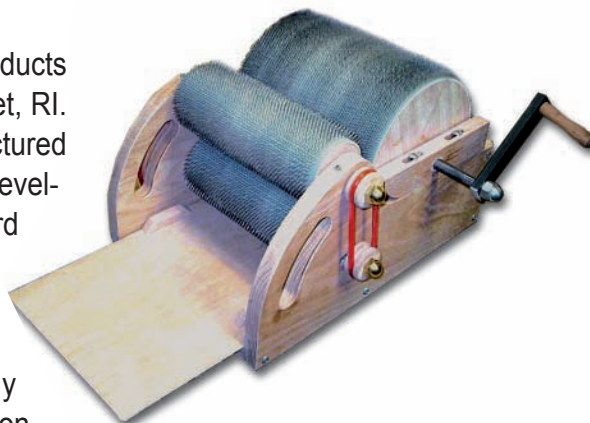
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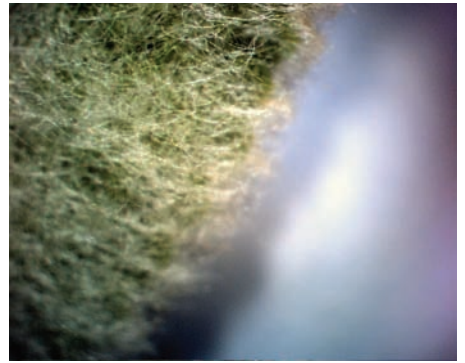
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Above left: Magnified silver poplar leaf (*Populus alba* spp.). **Above center and right:** Magnified lambs' ear (*Stachys byzantina*).

Fine as Frog Hair: Spinning indumentum

BY LINDA LIGON

Some of the most intriguing journeys never arrive at a destination. Such a journey for me began when my son, Ethan, sent a few photographs he took while traveling among the Miao in rural areas of Yunnan Province in southwestern China. You can see them on the next page.

What is this woman doing? Making some kind of thread, it would appear. From what? How? The leaves she's handling appear to be some kind of rhododendron. That's been confirmed by the head of the American Rhododendron Society, as well as several horticulturalist friends. Rhododendrons are native to Yunnan Province. The leaves of many are smooth on back and front, but some have hairy backs. Quite hairy, in some cases.

The technical name for this hair is *indumentum*, and it can apply to hairs or scales of all kinds on both plants and insects. It even applies to the scales on a butterfly's wings. Indumentum can be spiky, silky, fuzzy; it can consist of a mass of single strands, or a small forest of branched fibers. It can be so short as to present itself as a smooth matte surface, or so long you want to pet it. It can be dangerous, like the irritating indumentum on stinging nettles, or fragrant, like the indumentum on the leaves of common sage.

As a spinner, I've often cast an eye on milkweed fluff, cattail fuzz, dandelion puffs, and other fine fibers floating around my yard. It never occurred to me, though, to think of the hairy surfaces of my lambs' ears (*Stachys byzantina*) or silver poplar (*Populus alba* spp.) as the stuff of potential thread. Having seen this evidence of thread from rhododendrons, though, I've tried every fuzzy thing I could get my hands on. With no luck at all. Either the leaves tear when rubbed, or the fiber is so very fine and short as to be useless, no matter how tightly I twist it. The indumentum on some species of rhododendrons, however, is described as *detersile*—that is, coming away from the leaf in a mat. That sounds like something you might be able to spin! But I don't have any!

These photos pose many questions. Why does the thread appear to have kinks or knots in it? At first I thought it was because it was made of leaf veins, not indumentum. Closer examination

shows otherwise. Why has the spinner created notches in the leaf margins? What is the thread actually good for?

Ethan mentions a pile of fabrics next to the woman that were purportedly spun and woven from this very stuff. I find it hard to believe. Surely there were errors in translation. And why didn't he purchase some for me? I must not have raised him right. I leave it to you, dear reader, to take this journey forward. Maybe you can find more information on the Internet than I was able to. Maybe you've actually seen this done on your world travels. Maybe you have a stash of rhododendron-fuzz fabric in a drawer somewhere.

Please share your knowledge and insights. It would be wonderful to bring this journey home. ☘

Linda Ligon is the founder of Interweave and *Spin-Off*'s creative director. Ethan Ligon is a professor of developmental economics at University of California, Berkeley.



PHOTOS BY ETHAN LIGON

A Miao woman in Yunnan Province, China, makes thread—somehow.

Did Priscilla Mullins Spin?

BY JILL M. HALL

*Then, as he opened the door, he beheld the form of the maiden
Seated beside her wheel, and the carded wool like a snow-drift
Piled at her knee, her white hands feeding the ravenous spindle,
While with her foot on the treadle she guided the wheel in its motion.*

“The Courtship of Miles Standish,” Henry Wadsworth Longfellow



When Longfellow imagined the John Alden/Priscilla Mullins/Miles Standish love triangle, he depicted Priscilla spinning as Alden arrived to offer Standish's marriage proposal. The image of a spinning maiden is an old one, and both in the time of the Pilgrims (early 1600s) and in Longfellow's day (mid-1800s), this image was shorthand for female industry and piety as well as domestic tranquility. Longfellow was undoubtedly invoking that symbolism when he chose spinning as Priscilla's activity, but do the historical facts support that choice?

When Priscilla and the rest of the *Mayflower* Pilgrims sailed in 1620, spinning was a common daily activity for many women and children both in England, the Pilgrims' homeland, and Holland, the land of their religious exile. It was poorly paid work, but provided the extra income many working-class families needed to make ends meet through the lean times of year. Dutch portraits from the 1500s and early 1600s often

show women spinning on a wheel, usually in a well-appointed interior, demonstrating that spinning was common enough to be immediately understood by the viewer not only for what it was but for what it meant—that the subject of the portrait was a well-to-do paragon of domestic virtue. Genre paintings from the same period show poor women spinning, often in a doorway or courtyard with an unsupported spindle, demonstrating that the activity was ubiquitous and necessary.

The reality the *Mayflower's* passengers found upon arrival at Plymouth in December, however, was completely alien to them. To their eyes, they were in a wilderness, and everything had to be done and made from scratch. They saw no houses, no tilled fields, no grist mill, not to mention no neighboring village with a helpful weekly market day.

To secure start-up funding for the colony, the colonists agreed to work six days per week for seven years to procure goods to send back to England (lumber, salted fish, furs) and to produce their own food. All other necessities would be supplied by the financial backers (hopefully out of the colony's profits). This is the classic colonial economic system we all learned about in grade school: the colony supplies the raw materials for the established industries back home and also becomes a market for the mother country's finished goods.

Records from the early years of Plymouth Colony show that the necessities sent from England included cloth, ready-made clothing, and shoes, as well as sugar, oil, and tools. Knitted stockings, a small article we might reason-

*So as she sat at her wheel one afternoon in the Autumn,
Alden, who opposite sat, and was watching her dexterous fingers,
As if the thread she was spinning were that of his life and his fortune,
After a pause in their talk, thus spake to the sound of the spindle.
"Truly, Priscilla," he said, "when I see you spinning and spinning,
Never idle a moment, but thrifty and thoughtful of others,
Suddenly you are transformed, are visibly changed in a moment;
You are no longer Priscilla, but Bertha the Beautiful Spinner."*

"The Courtship of Miles Standish," Henry Wadsworth Longfellow



"Why don't you speak for yourself, John?"
Blue and white transfer-ware plate, British
Anchor Pottery Co., Ltd., Staffordshire,
England, circa 1950.

IMAGE PROVIDED BY PLIMOTH PLANTATION,
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ably expect housewives to make at home, also show up among the imported goods. The fact was that by the 1620s, knitted stockings were so cheap and readily available that it was more economical to import wool hose ready-made than to ship over the yarn to knit them. The colonists' heavy responsibilities to their financial backers plus the ability to import clothing and textiles even if, as was often the case, in insufficient quantities, are two counts against the likelihood of spinning or any other fiber-processing activity in these early years.

Another strike against spinning is the lack of sheep in the colony. The primary-source records frequently mention cows, goats, pigs, and chickens in Plymouth but no sheep. The first reference to sheep is found in a court record from January 1628 (1627 in the original, or Old Style, calendar in which the New Year began on March 25). Miles Standish buys Abraham Pierce's two shares in a



ILLUSTRATION BY BENJAMIN S. CLARKE

*Here the light foot on the treadle grew swifter and swifter; the spindle
Uttered an angry snarl, and the thread snapped short in her fingers;
While the impetuous speaker, not heeding the mischief, continued:
"You are the beautiful Bertha, the spinner, the queen of Helvetia;
She whose story I read at a stall in the streets of Southampton,
Who, as she rode on her palfrey, o'er valley and meadow and mountain,
Ever was spinning her thread from a distaff fixed to her saddle.
She was so thrifty and good, that her name passed into a proverb.
So shall it be with your own, when the spinning-wheel shall no longer
Hum in the house of the farmer, and fill its chambers with music.
Then shall the mothers, reproving, relate how it was in their childhood,
Praising the good old times, and the days of Priscilla the spinner!"*

"The Courtship of Miles Standish," Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

cow and pays him in ewe lambs, one to be delivered presently, the next the following spring. A man who can promise a ewe lamb must have more than one expecting ewe plus, of course, the ram. Standish in 1627 likely had at least two and possibly three or more ewes of lambing age. These sheep do not appear in the list of colony-owned cattle that was made up in 1627, and Standish was independently disposing of their offspring, so they must have belonged solely to him. No record survives to show when these sheep were brought over, although Standish had traveled to England on the colony's business in 1625 and may have acquired them then. More to our point, a small, privately owned flock was not supplying the colony with large quantities of wool to be processed.

The persistent picture of the self-sufficient colonial housewife who provided food and clothing for her family through her own skill and effort does have some basis in fact. But as Laurel Thatcher Ulrich showed in *The Age of Hometown and A Midwife's Tale*, it was not universally true in all places throughout the almost three hundred years of colonial history. The evidence thus far adds up to a complete lack of spinning, fiber processing, or cloth production in the first years of Plymouth. But in the New England the colonists were trying to make, how long was it before spindles, wheels, and looms began to appear?

The best resource we have for answering that question is the probate inventories. These lists of possessions, assets, and debts were made after the death, usually of a man and sometimes of a woman, and entered into the colony's records. The earliest probate inventories that survive from Plymouth Colony are dated 1632 to 1633 when a sickness swept the town. None of these inventories list any fiber processing tools or raw fiber. A spindle could possibly be just a stick, or a stick and a weight; a niddy-noddy isn't much more. These might not be valuable enough to be included in an inventory, especially if only the husband died and those tools

were inherited by the wife. In one case, both a husband and wife died leaving two underage daughters and a son; this sad event leaves us with the rare and valuable inventory of a family's entire goods. No fiber tools, no raw fiber.

Fiber tools, including small and great wheels, cards, "loom furniture," and raw fiber (hemp, flax, and wool) begin to appear in the probate inventories of the late 1630s, sparsely at first and then more and more frequently. In the late 1620s, the colony discharged the original debt, freeing the majority of the colonists from the burden of working for the financiers. Families received their payoff of acreage and moved away from the original little village to begin fashioning the better life they had envisioned. In the 1630s, more and more colonists flooded what is now New England. New colonies were established along the coast north and south of Plymouth, beyond what is now Boston, and throughout Cape Cod.

The proliferation of new colonists meant new markets, especially for the relatively established residents of Plymouth who were now able to take advantage of their head start by selling livestock to the newcomers. Soon enough the colonists began to compensate for the high-priced and irregular imports from the Old Country (political and social unrest in England disrupted trade for decades) by supplying their own needs, textile and otherwise. By the 1640s, spinning was back in the lives of the colonists, and the New England textile industry was born.

Priscilla may well have been pious, diligent, virtuous, and docile, as Longfellow (a descendant of John and Priscilla)

*Straight uprose from her wheel the beautiful Puritan maiden,
Pleased with the praise of her thrift from him whose praise was the sweetest,
Drew from the reel on the table a snowy skein of her spinning,
Thus making answer, meanwhile, to the flattering phrases of Alden:
"Come, you must not be idle; if I am a pattern for housewives,
Show yourself equally worthy of being the model of husbands.
Hold this skein on your hands, while I wind it, ready for knitting;
Then who knows but hereafter, when fashions have changed and the manners,
Fathers may talk to their sons of the good old times of John Alden!"
Thus, with a jest and a laugh, the skein on his hands she adjusted,
He sitting awkwardly there, with his arms extended before him,
She standing graceful, erect, and winding the thread from his fingers,
Sometimes chiding a little his clumsy manner of holding,
Sometimes touching his hands, as she disentangled expertly
Twist or knot in the yarn, unawares—for how could she help it?—
Sending electrical thrills through every nerve in his body.*

"The Courtship of Miles Standish," Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

cilla) suggested by his imagery. She and John Alden were certainly married (circa 1622 or 1623) for over fifty years, producing at least ten children. She may even have been a skilled spinner. But whether John Alden visited Priscilla Mullins to plead Standish's case or his own, he couldn't possibly have found her spinning. ❧

Jill M. Hall is an independent scholar of costume and textiles history. She spent twenty years researching and re-creating the dress of the Pilgrims at Plimoth Plantation before becoming reconciled to the complete lack of evidence for handspinning in the first decades of the colony. She lives in Massachusetts with too much fiber and not enough time.

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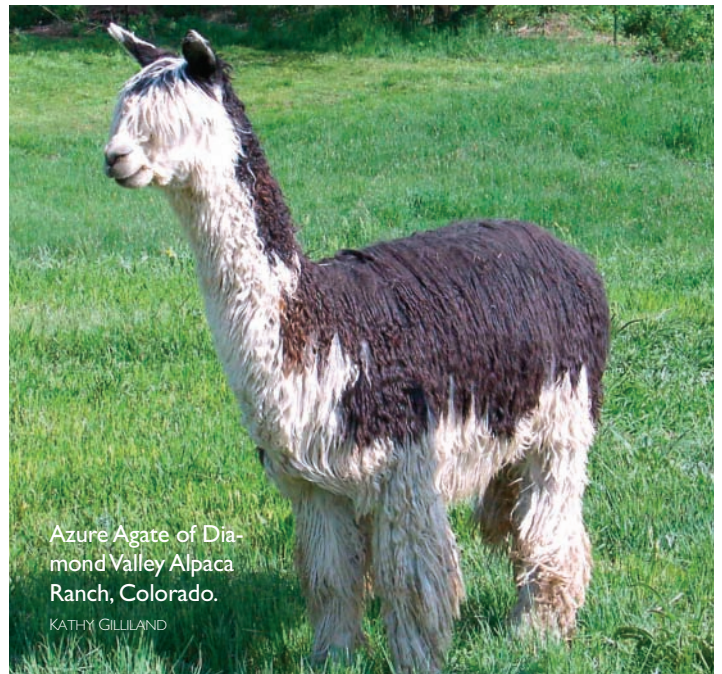
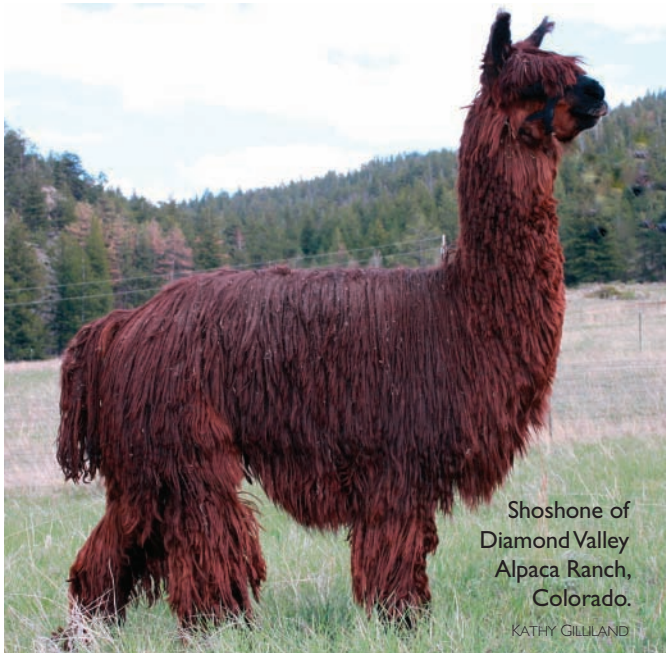
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Simply Suri

BY KAYE D. COLLINS



Suri and huacaya are two breeds of alpaca descended from the family Camelidae and have been domesticated for over 6,000 years. Huacayas and suris are different in body type and have very different fleece characteristics. The huacaya has a crimped, fluffy fleece that is soft, smooth, and warm to the touch. Suri have smooth distinct locks that are curly, twisted, or straight; the fiber feels cool to the touch and exhibits a brilliant sheen. Both alpaca types have up to twenty-two natural shades of color, including bright white, fawn, lovely warm browns, grays, and rich, deep black. Suri account for only 1 percent of the alpaca population worldwide, making them rare and unique. In the early 1990s, suri alpacas were imported from South America to the

United States. Currently 38,000 suri are registered in the United States.

SMOOTHNESS

An electron micrograph shows that the outside scales of an individual animal fiber vary in length and height, like bark on a tree. For instance, sheep's wool has short, elevated scales that allow the fibers in a lock to adhere together. Beginning spinners often find that the scales make drafting during spinning a bit easier as the fibers slightly cling together. The suri alpaca fiber has longer scales that are nearly flat to the fiber, making it feel slick and cool. The smoothness of the scales promotes fluid drafting and reflects light, giving the fiber and yarn a brilliant sheen. The smoothness of suri makes it feel and look like silk. Because of its ability to drape well, I find it ideal for lace shawls and scarves.

SHEEN

One distinct characteristic of suri fiber is the brilliant luster. Light is reflected from the straight and smooth outer surface. Dyers find that suri takes color excellently while maintaining the luster.

SLEEKNESS

Alpaca breeders describe the wonderful sleek, smooth feel of alpaca fiber as good handle. A garment made from alpaca, especially fine suri alpaca, feels comfortable against your skin, and some say it feels silky or pleasantly sensual.

SOFTNESS

The fineness of a fleece is measured in microns (a micron is 1/25,000 of an inch). Fibers in suri fleeces can measure less than 20 microns in diameter, as soft as cashmere, with an average fleece having fibers that measure between 24 and 28 microns. The smoothness of



Kaye chose nine colors of suri alpaca from her stash to illustrate the natural color variety ranging from white to shiny black. The yarns she spun for the shawl average 22.5 microns in the fiber, 21 wraps per inch, and 1,575 yards per pound.

suri fiber also makes it feel softer to the touch, as your hand interprets smoothness as softness. If you are planning to spin a next-to-the-skin garment, it is best to work with a fleece or roving that measures between 20 and 24 microns.

STRENGTH

Suri fleece grows quickly and can measure 6 to 7 inches in one year. This long staple allows the yarn to have fewer twists per inch and still remain strong. However, when spun with a light twist, the fibers can slip more

easily and actually make a yarn longer after finishing. This may contribute to the “growing” or sagging of a heavy garment.

SPINNING SURI

Some spinners are reluctant to spin alpaca having been warned that it can be difficult or that the fibers require extra twist. On the contrary, I find it very enjoyable and will share some information and a few helpful hints so you can be the judge.

When spinning suri yarn, it is impor-

tant to stop and check your yarn to see if you have adequate twist for your project. Checking is easily done by pulling a section at least 20 to 30 inches long of freshly spun yarn out of the orifice of the spinning wheel and allowing it to twist back on itself, illustrating what it will look and feel like when it is plied. If there isn't enough twist for the yarn's size and your purpose, spin the yarn tighter by using a smaller whorl (higher speed), treadle faster, or hold the yarn longer before allowing it to go into the orifice and wrap around the bobbin.



Bella Donna of Salt River Alpacas, Missouri, after being shorn.

LIZVAHLKAMP

Tips **Note** that suri fibers lack a hollow center (or medulla), making them more dense than other fibers such as wool. Spin suri fine to avoid sagging in a garment.

When I am spinning, my hands intuitively feed the yarn into the wheel when it feels like it is ready, mostly because the fibers begin to resist the growing twist. This sense of having acquired adequate twist varies with the fibers being spun. The strength of suri and ease of drafting may fool you into feeding your yarn into the orifice too soon. Check the yarn frequently to determine if you have enough twist.

Combing a fine alpaca fleece can leave a significant amount of long but usable fibers as waste on the stationary comb. Drumcarding the fibers can gently open the locks and align fibers, leaving less waste when followed by combing. However, sometimes the fibers can knot or make neps while they are being carded. I have found that a combination of first carding and then combing makes the smoothest roving with the least amount of wasted fibers.

Regardless of whether you card, comb, or both, I find the lovely sheen of suri alpaca is enhanced when spun worsted-style.

In order to keep the suri alpaca yarn smooth and straight, I wet the yarn and block it on a niddy-noddy made from PVC pipe, removing the skein after the yarn is completely dry.

I check my freshly spun yarn often, two to three times in the first minutes of spinning for a new project and every 5 to 10 minutes thereafter and always after an interruption or break.

SHADES OF SURI SHAWL

Suri alpaca is ideal for fine spinning and drapes well in a knitted lace garment. From my stash of suri fiber, I chose nine colors to illustrate the natural variety ranging from white to shiny black. The yarns I spun for the shawl average 22.5 microns in the fiber, 21 wraps per inch, and 1,575 yards per pound.

The fleeces for the first two knitted stripes and the lace edge trim are white and light fawn coming from Salt River Alpacas. Lillianna and Bella Donna have fiber that is very fine and soft, less than 20 microns. I washed and gently drumcarded the fibers on my Pat Green drumcarder with fur cloth, but I found a few broken neps and knots. To spin a smooth, fine yarn, I decided to continue the preparation by using my one-row Louet minicombs. The resulting sliver was incredibly easy to spin.

The third stripe, dark fawn, came from Goldilocks, born at Switzer Land Alpacas. The locks were 6 to 10 inches long, so I cut them in half and found that drumcarding alone was sufficient preparation.

The fourth stripe, light brown, came from Mary Jane at Finney's Fiber Farm. At 5 inches, the staple of this fleece was well suited for carding.

The fifth stripe, dark red brown, came from Shoshone at Diamond Valley Alpacas. A staple length of 5 inches made it easy to drumcard.

The sixth stripe, true black, came from Marcos at Switzer Land Alpacas. Marcos had an 8- to 10-inch staple, and I cut each lock in half before drumcarding.

The last three gray stripes came from Azure Agate at Diamond Valley Alpacas. Azure Agate is a multicolored suri alpaca with predominantly white and black patches of fiber. I used 25 percent, 50 percent, and 75 percent

Kaye wove a small blanket of handspun alpaca yarns illustrating a variety of natural huacaya alpaca colors when she was working on her Certificate of Excellence from the Handweavers Guild of America. Ever since then, she has wanted to make something using the many natural colors of suri alpaca. These pillows and the shawl are the result.



white with the black for the three gray yarns. I drumcarded each preparation a total of five times to thoroughly blend the colors. ❧

Kaye D. Collins lives in the Rocky Mountains north of Fort Collins, Colorado. She owns and operates Fiber to Fabric, a custom spinning and design studio, and offers fine fibers for sale. She enjoys teaching spinning and knitting at local guilds and national conferences. Contact Kaye at (970) 214-6476 or kaye@ancientarts.us.

RESOURCES

- Clark, Evelyn, with Kaye Collins and Judith MacKenzie McCuin. "Spun 2 Ways: Old Shale Lace Triangle Shawl." *Spin-Off* 32, 2 (Summer 2008), 46–51.
- Collins, Kaye. "Spinning Alpaca for Knitting: Huacaya." *Spin-Off* 32, 2 (Summer 1999), 60–69.
- . "Spinning Suri Alpaca." *Spin-Off* 24, 3 (Fall 2000), 40–49.
- Judd, Suvia, and Deborah Berman. "Electron Microscopy as a Window on Fiber Quality." *PurelySuri* (Summer 2003), 18–20.
- www.surinetnetwork.org
www.weavespindy.org

Suri Alpaca Sources

Diamond Valley Alpaca Ranch
 Dale & Kathy Gilliland
 247 Sloan Rd.
 Livermore, CO 80536
 (970) 493-7783
www.alpacanation.com

Salt River Alpacas
 Liz Vahlkamp
 18890 MC 455
 Paris, MO 65275
 (314) 440-1627
www.saltriveralpacas.com

Switzer Land Alpacas
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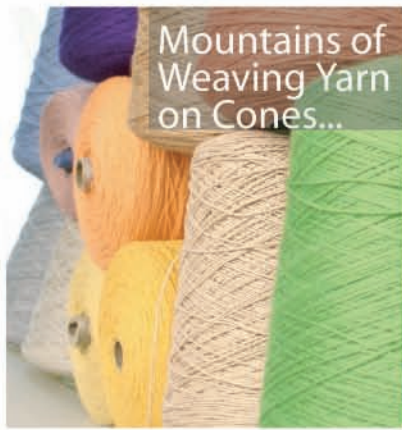
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SLIDE SHOW | INFO | PATTERN PDF

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materials

SOCKUPIED

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▶ Visit the manufacturers' websites—click on each name to open the site in your default browser.

PAGEWOOD FARM Alyeska A firm twist gives this yarn durability, but it has a soft hand when knitted.
▶ Skewer here: Plum
▶ 80% superwash Merino, 10% cashmere, 10% nylon
▶ 360 yds (129 m) of 113 g
▶ Recommended gauge: 7-8 sts = 1" (2.5 cm)
▶ Recommended needle size: U.S. 1-3 (2.25-2.75 mm)

A VERB FOR KEEPING WARM Annapurna Natural dyes create the vivid colors of this yarn.
▶ Skewer here: Abalone
▶ 80% superwash Merino, 10% cashmere, 10% nylon
▶ 385 yds (139 m) of 113 g
▶ No recommended gauge or needle size

HANDMAIDEN Casbah This yarn comes in Handmaiden's signature beautiful range of colors.
▶ Skewer here: Pumpkin
▶ 81% superwash Merino, 10% nylon, 9% cashmere
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▶ Recommended gauge: 6-8 sts = 1" (2.5 cm)
▶ Recommended needle size: U.S. 2½ (3 mm)

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Natural Fiber

A Spin-Off Directory!

Spin-off
it's about making yarn by hand



RICHARD REGNER, WHITEFISH BAY FARM

Last year when we were all celebrating the International Year of Natural Fiber, we thought what could be more natural to include in *Spin-Off* magazine than natural fiber? But since nearly every issue deals with the amazing, magical qualities of natural fiber—we had to stretch a bit to figure out how to celebrate it even more. The Natural Fiber Directory was born, and here it is in its second year in the middle of another issue chock-full of natural fiber.

This is a one-stop, easy-to-take-with-you listing of fiber resources from around the world. These listings are important, not only for you, as you're searching for the perfect fleece for your next project, but also, for the spinning community as a whole. Supporting the shepherds, farmers, and horticulturists who preserve the rare breeds of sheep, cultivate shades of natural-colored cotton, and nurture the silkworms means that we will continue to have choices when it comes time to select a fiber for a project—and that is what spinning is all about, isn't it? Choices. We choose the fiber we want for the texture of the yarn, we choose how we prepare it, what color it will be, and when it will be done. So, enjoy your ability to choose your fiber, enjoy poring over these listings and fantasizing about your next foray into the land of natural fiber.

Amy

—Amy Clarke Moore
Editor of *Spin-Off* magazine



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Tundra Lace Shawlette, p. 72

Left side of shawl

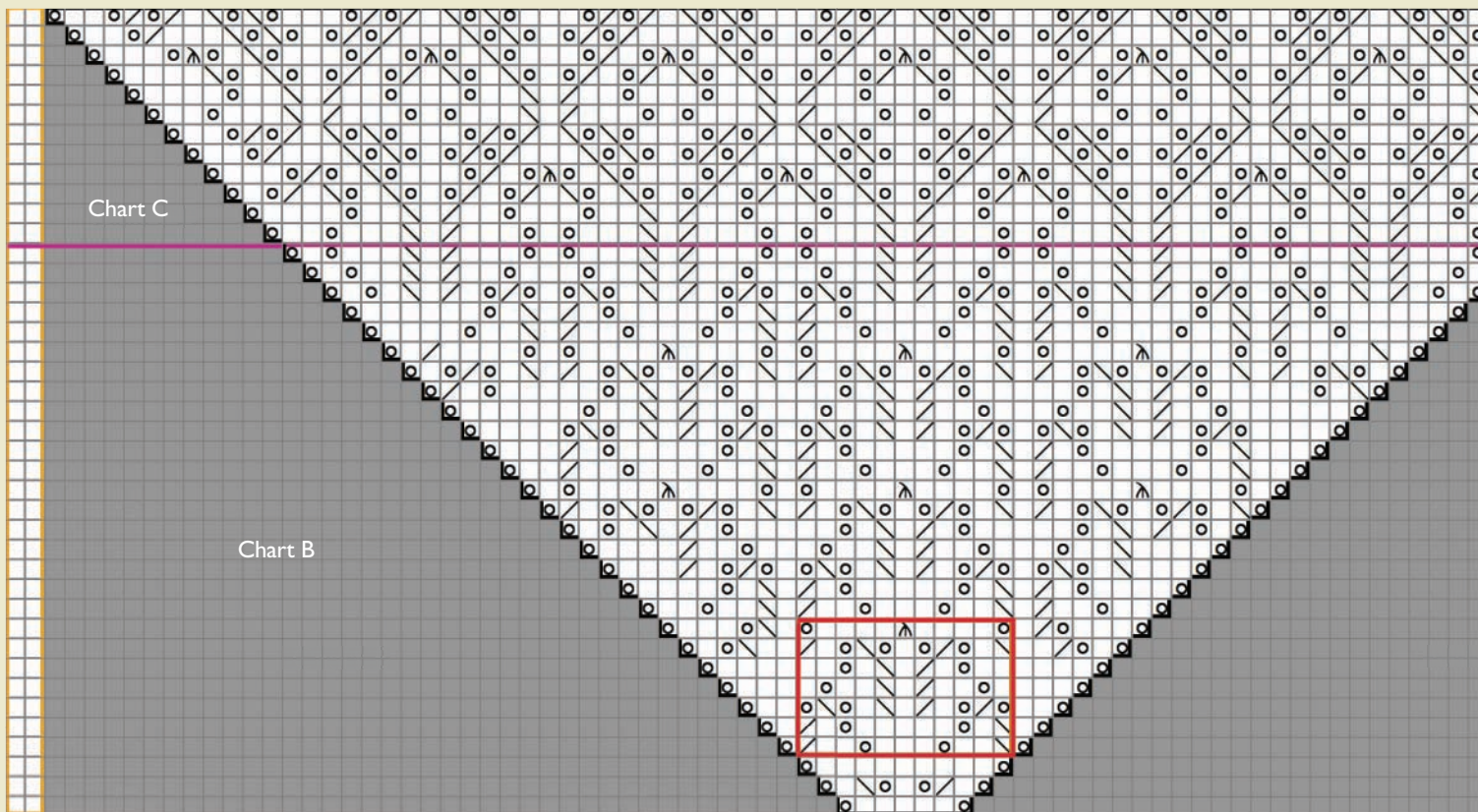


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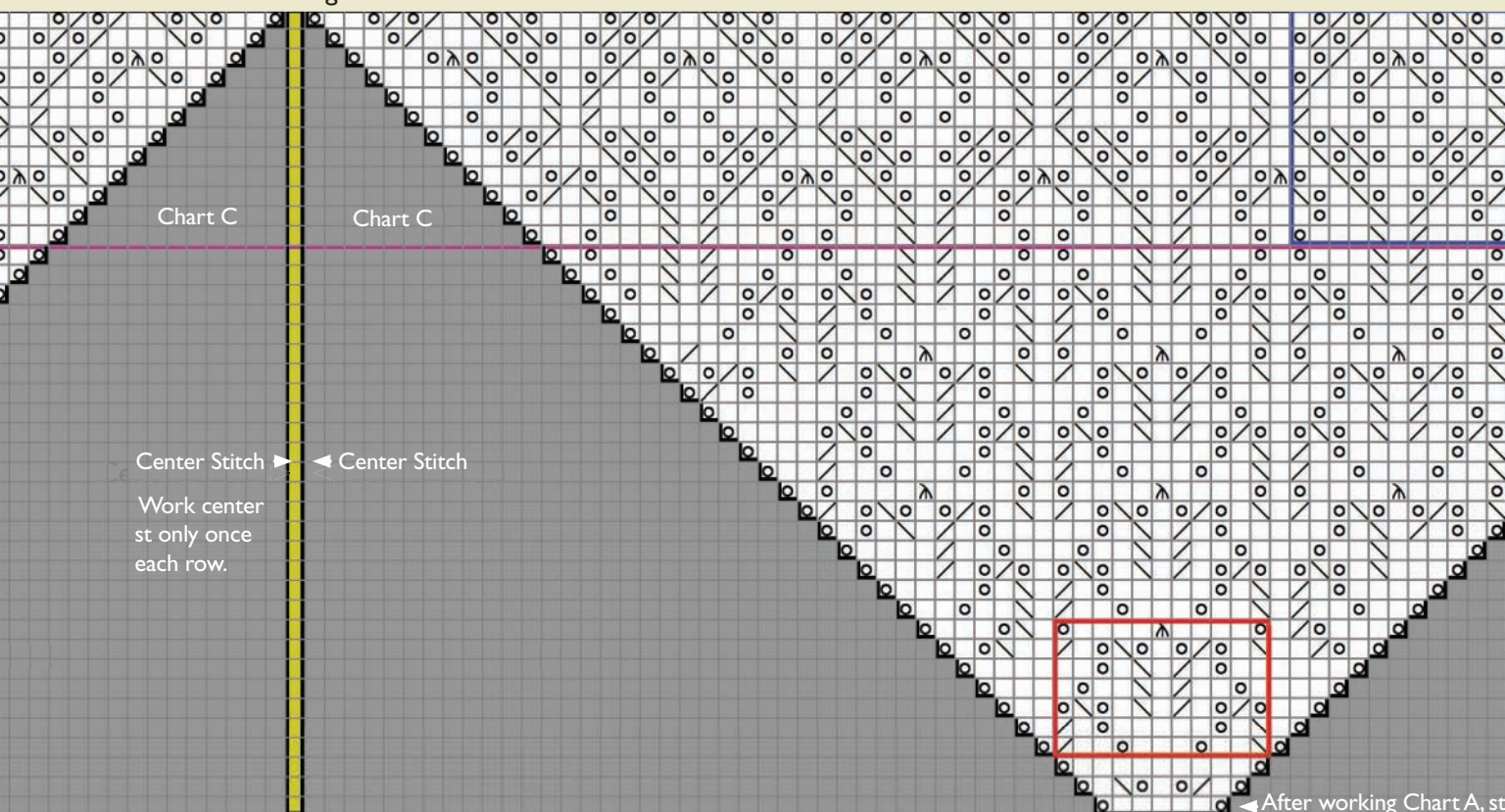
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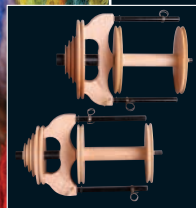
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Project Notes Headband

Fiber: 3 oz Corriedale wool.

Preparation: Washed, teased, spun, plied, and dyed 1 oz pink, 1 oz brown, ½ oz blue, and ½ oz purple.

Drafting method: Woolen.

Wheel: Norwegian double-breasted wheel.

Wheel system: Double drive.

Singles direction spun: Z.

Number of plies: 2.

Plied direction spun: S.

Plied twists per inch: 5½.

Plied wraps per inch: 14.

Total yardage: 206.

Yards per pound: 1,100.

Yarn classification: Worsted weight.

Yardage used: 130.

Needles: U.S. size 5 circular, 16" or 24".

Gauge: 6 sts and 7 rows = 1".

Finished size: 4" x 10½" (21" circumference).

Notions: Sewing thread (to match brown) and sewing needle.

Note: When working with two colors at a time, occasionally twist the yarns together on the wrong side so that the floats on the back aren't too long. Take care not to pull the floats too tightly or your knitting will be distorted.

Norwegian-Inspired Headband and Gloves

BY ERDA KAPPELER



Erda Kappeler found a well-worn Norwegian ski glove among her mother's things and was inspired to recreate it with her handspun, hand-dyed yarns.



Among my mother's things, I found an old, well-worn Norwegian ski glove. I thought I should preserve the pattern. I had already spun some local Corriedale wool, so I dyed it for this project. It is almost double thickness because of the yarn floats with the colorwork. The gloves are a little bulky but are nice and warm. I decided to make a matching headband with the left-over yarn.

SPINNING DETAILS

The wool came from a class. Someone brought a Corriedale fleece so that we could learn how to sort it—we all shared it. I took some from the underside of the sheep to demonstrate that it, too, can be used if one has the patience to carefully soak, wash, dry, tease, and then card the wool. After all that work, I spun and plied the yarn. What was left was a small amount—perfect for both the gloves and headband. I ply my yarns

from balls in coffee cans as I have trouble with tension when I use a lazy kate. I finish most of my yarns by soaking the skeins or washing them and letting

them dry before beginning knitting.

HEADBAND

Picot edging

Project Notes Gloves

Fiber: 5 oz Corriedale wool.

Preparation: Washed, teased, spun, plied, and dyed 1½ oz pink, 2 oz blue, 1 oz brown, and ½ oz purple.

Drafting method: Woolen.

Wheel: Norwegian double-breasted wheel.

Wheel system: Double drive.

Singles direction spun: Z.

Number of plies: 2.

Plied direction spun: S.

Plied twists per inch: 5½.

Plied wraps per inch: 14.

Total yardage: 344.

Yards per pound: 1,100.

Yarn classification: Worsted weight.

Yardage used: 258.

Needles: U.S. size 5 set of dpn.

Gauge: 5½ sts and 7 rows = 1".

Finished size: Women's medium (8½" hand circumference).

Notions: Sewing thread (to match brown) and sewing needle.

Note: When working with two colors at a time, occasionally twist the yarns together so that the floats on the back aren't too long. Take care not to pull the floats too tightly or your knitting will be distorted.



With brown, cast on 126 sts; join, taking care not to twist the cast-on row.

Rnds 1–2: Knit.

Rnds 3–5 (with pink): Knit.

Rnd 6: K2tog around (63 sts).

Rnd 7: Knit.

Rnd 8: *K1, M1; rep from * around (126 sts).

Rnds 9–11: Knit.

With brown as background color, work 5 rnds of Chart 1 in St st.

With purple as background color, work 11 rnds of Chart 2 in St st. Pattern is repeated 7 times around.

With brown as background color, work 5 rnds of Chart 1 in St st.

Work Rnds 3–11 of picot edging.

With brown, knit 2 rnds. BO and sew in ends on WS.

Fold the picot edge so that the holes created by the k2tog and M1 sts are along each edge and whip st the cast-on and bound-off edges to the inside of the headband with matching sewing thread.

GLOVES

Left Hand Cuff

With brown, CO 46 sts, distribute sts evenly over 4 dpns and join, taking care not to twist cast-on row. PM at beg of rnd. Work Rnds 1–11 of picot edging.

With brown as background color, work 5 rnds of Chart 1 in St st.

With purple as background color, work 11 rnds of Chart 2 in St st. Note that 2 complete repeats (36 sts) and a partial repeat (10 sts) are worked.

With blue as background color, work 4 rnds of Chart 1 in St st (use blue in place of brown, brown in place of blue, and purple in place of pink). Begin hand on last rnd of Chart 1.

Hand and thumb gusset

Rnd 1: With blue, k21, pm, k1, pm, k to end of rnd.

Rnd 2: On first 21 sts of palm, work Chart 3. Between markers (thumb gusset), work Chart 6 and *at the same time* M1, k1, M1. For back of hand, begin Chart 4 = 24 sts.

Rnds 3–8: Cont by working palm and thumb gusset (when you reach the marker, slip marker, M1, knit to marker, M1, slip marker, following color guide for Chart 6) and then work Chart 3 over palm of hand and Chart 4 for back of hand.

Rnd 9: Place the 15 sts of the thumb gusset on a holder, M1 over the gap, and cont working palm and back of hand in pattern for 11 more rnds. Work the st added over thumbhole with blue for these 11 rnds.

Fingers

Little finger

On 21st rnd (last rnd of Chart 4), stop 5 sts before marker at beg of rnd, change to pink and brown, and following Chart 5, begin little finger by knitting 5 sts.

With pink and brown, k5 sts following Chart 5, distribute these 10 sts over 3 dpn, and CO 6 sts over gap; join, taking care not to twist sts = 16 sts. (Place rem sts on a holder while you work each finger.) Work in Chart 5 pattern until little finger measures 2".

Tip decreases

Rnd 1: Using only pink, *k2tog, k4* around, ending with k2tog, k2 (13 sts).

Rnd 2: *K2tog, k3* around, ending with k2tog, k1 (10 sts).

Rnd 3: *K2tog, k2* around, ending with

k2tog (7 sts).

Rnd 4: *K2tog, k1* around, ending with k1 (5 sts).

Rnd 5: *K2tog* twice and end with k1 (3 sts). Cut thread and pull through rem sts; secure and weave in end on WS.

Ring finger

With pink and brown and following color pattern on Chart 5, work 7 sts on holder from palm, CO 2 sts over gap, work 5 sts from back of hand sts on holder, and pick up and knit 4 sts from base of little finger = 18 sts. Join and work in the round until ring finger measures 2½". Work tip decreases as for little finger (with no extra sts at end of rnd).

Middle finger

Work as for ring finger, but begin dec when middle finger measures 3".

Index finger

With pink and brown following color

pattern from Chart 5, work rem 12 sts, and pick up and knit 6 sts from base of middle finger = 18 sts. Work until index finger measures 2½". Work tip decreases as for ring finger.

Thumb

Work in pattern on Chart 7 with brown and blue. Distribute the 15 sts from holder evenly over 3 dpn and pick up and knit 5 sts from palm; join and work in the rnd following Chart 7 until thumb measures 3". Work tip decreases as for little finger with blue.

Weave in ends on WS.

Right Hand

Work right hand as for left hand, placing thumb gusset as follows.

Rnd 1: With blue, pm, k1, pm, k21, pm, k to end of rnd.

Rnd 2: Between markers (thumb gusset), beg Chart 6 and *at the same time* M1, k1, M1. Begin Chart 3 over 21 sts over palm of hand beginning at

left side of chart to mirror image patterning on left-hand palm; on back of hand, begin Chart 4.

Rnds 3–8: Cont by working thumb gusset (when you reach the marker, slip marker, M1, knit to marker, M1, slip marker and *at the same time* follow color guide for Chart 6), then work Chart 3 for palm and Chart 4 for back of hand.

When it is time to work the little finger, work across 17 sts of hand until 5 sts rem and then begin little finger with 5 sts from palm and 5 sts from back of hand.

FINISHING DETAILS

Finish by steam-pressing between towels. ☘

Erda Kappeler of Ukiah, California, learned to spin and weave in 1962, and her childhood love of fibers found an outlet. Over the years, she's met the nicest people through her fiber passions and reports that it has truly changed her life. Her work has appeared in *All New Homespun*, *Handknit* (Interweave, 2009) and past issues of *Spin-Off*.

Key

- P Pink
- B Blue
- MC
- no st
- X Contrast color

Chart 1

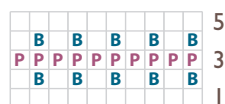
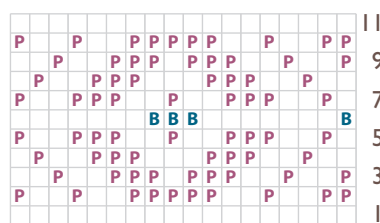
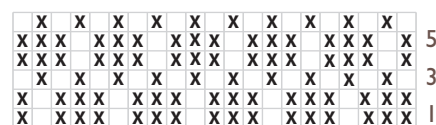


Chart 2



Rep—18 sts + 11 rows

Chart 3



Rep—4 sts + 6 rows

Chart 4

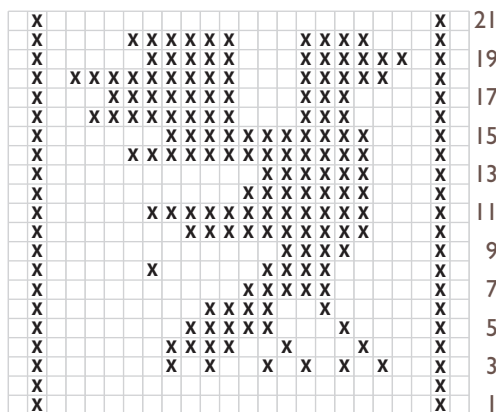


Chart 5

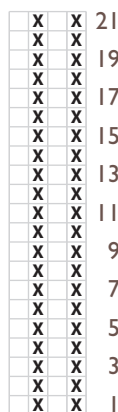
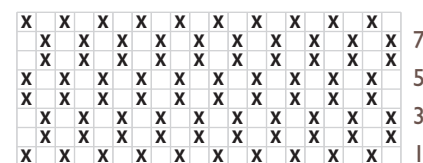


Chart 6



Chart 7





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BY BOBBI DANIELS

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ANGORA BREEDS

The American Rabbit Breeders Association recognizes four Angora breeds as well as Jersey Woolies. The breeds differ in size, appearance, and fiber characteristics. English Angoras are the most common. They are small (up to 7½ pounds as adults) and the most heavily furnished. A properly groomed English Angora looks like a puffball. It is the only Angora breed with heavy furnishings on its ears and face. English Angoras are generally considered to have the softest angora fiber as they have the fewest guard hairs. The French Angora is a larger breed (up to 10½ pounds) and does not grow long hair on its face, ears, or feet. French Angoras produce more fiber than the English Angora, and their coats have the most guard hair, a feature that contributes to the halo effect of yarn spun from French Angora fiber. Satin Angoras are slightly smaller than the French (up to 9½ pounds). The “satin” effect occurs because the shaft of their guard hair is translucent, producing a noticeable sheen to their coats that is only found in the Satins. Germans and Giants are two separate breeds but are generally grouped together because of their similarities. The largest of the Angoras (with a minimum weight of 9½

pounds), they also have the densest coats and produce significantly more fiber per rabbit than any of the other breeds. Of the two, Giants are the only breed recognized by the American Rabbit Breeders Association and are only shown as ruby-eyed white. Germans may be white, but other colors are available as well. German/Giant coats have three types of hair, including a secondary guard hair called the *awn* hair. This contributes to the amount of fiber they produce and helps reduce matting. Jersey Woolies are technically miniature Angoras and, as would be expected, are the smallest (up to 3½ pounds). They produce a coat with a slightly shorter staple, but it is still suitable for handspinning.

CHOOSING A RABBIT

Although many breeders speak of one breed being friendlier than another, that has not been my experience. Angora rabbits as a group are among the friendliest of all rabbit breeds. Unlike most other breeds that were originally developed as meat/pelt animals, Angora rabbits were bred to be friendly, because even those raised as livestock must be handled often. They are, however, very much individuals and can have quite strong personalities. This makes it imperative that you meet any rabbit you are considering purchasing if you can. On the other hand, I routinely purchase rabbits sight unseen from trusted breeders, and I have never had a bad experience.

FIBER

The fiber characteristics of the different breeds are critically important for a spinner. English Angoras produce the least fiber of all the breeds (with the exception of Jersey Woolies) and are generally not used by commercial angora fiber operations. They produce the softest fiber with the fewest guard hairs. The soft fiber has an unbelievable hand to it, but it will mat on the animal at the slightest provocation. English Angoras require much more grooming than the other breeds, and the heavily furnished face, feet, and ears must also be maintained, even though that fiber is not considered prime spinning



The face color is the most intense color on the rabbit, and the body color always progresses from its most intense level at the outer edge to a much lighter shade next to the skin. A black Angora has a black face and produces black-tipped gray fiber.

ANN SABIN SWANSON

fiber. The fiber is downy and when spun by itself or blended, creates a luxurious, supersoft yarn that is fuzzy with a subdued halo effect. If you have the time and desire to keep up with the grooming, these cuties are truly adorable and are the most popular of all the Angora breeds.

French Angoras produce much more fiber, and it contains the highest percentage of guard hair of all the breeds. The high guard-hair count reduces matting and makes the need for grooming minimal between fiber harvests. Yarn spun from French Angora is known for its prominent fuzzy halo as it is the stiffer guard hairs that produce the effect.

Satin Angoras are similar to the French, although their hair is softer, and their coats require more care. The sheen of the guard hairs produces a haloed yarn that could almost be described as sparkly and can be quite stunning.

German/Giant Angoras were developed for commercial angora fiber production, and it shows. They produce copious amounts of fiber compared to the other breeds due both to their size and the increased density of their coats. The awn hairs help prevent matting. They are the only Angora breed that does not release its coat and must be sheared. German/Giant fiber produces a yarn with a substantial halo.

Jersey Woolies are easy to keep groomed and produce a fiber that is somewhere between the English and French, although it has a shorter staple.



BOBBI DANIELS

DO YOU WANT A BUCK OR A DOE?

Does are slightly larger and tend to take life a little more seriously because in the rabbit world, all the responsibility falls to them. They are generally calmer, sweet, and loving. Bucks tend to have a more carefree view of life and can be quite the clowns. However they can also be quite hormonally driven, spraying to mark their territories and acting aggressively. Unless you are planning to breed rabbits, does should be spayed to prevent uterine cancer, and bucks should be neutered to help prevent spraying and calm them down.

Four-month-old French Angora babies. The blue one is "Muffin" (as in Blueberry Muffin) and the black one is Bat Girl.



ANN SABIN SWANSON



1. A white angora singles and Merino singles spun from a Raven Frog hand-dyed roving in the Field of Lupines colorway, plied together. 2. Bobbi affectionately calls this yarn “50% Merino/50% trash.” Many Angora owners don’t realize that the combings from grooming their rabbits are also wonderful fiber to spin. This yarn is 50 percent natural white Merino, 25 percent natural gray Angora combings and 25 percent silk noil dyed gun-metal blue with Jacquard acid dyes. The fibers were blended with light handcarding before spinning.

COLOR

The last major consideration in choosing a rabbit is color. There are too many to go into specifics here. The best bet is to discuss with the breeder your color preferences and the color options available and go from there. One basic Angora color rule to know is that even the so-called solid-color Angoras are not a solid color, except for white. The color name is based on the color of the rabbit’s face, which will usually match the color of the tips of the guard hairs. The face color is the most intense color on the rabbit, and the body color always progresses from its most intense level at the outer edge to a much lighter shade next to the skin. A black Angora has a black face and produces black-tipped gray fiber.

CARING FOR ANGORAS

There are countless great sources of information on housing and caring for rabbits, and most of it applies to Angoras. There are a few differences to consider when caring for Angoras and they are important. In a nutshell, all of the differences stem from all that hair. Housing for Angoras must have clean, dry flooring with no loose bedding like sawdust to get trapped in their coats and cause mats. Wire-floor rabbit cages are ideal. If rabbits are to live outside they must be kept dry, sheltered from the wind, and protected from excessive heat. Angoras can be quite comfortable in temperatures to -40° Fahrenheit but will literally cook in their own coats if they are too hot.

Angoras are subject to all the ailments of any rabbit breed, as well as wool block. Rabbit digestive systems are complex and completely unable to process ingested hair. The passages are quite narrow and are easily blocked by balls of hair, shutting down the digestive process. If the condition is caught soon enough, the blockage can be surgically

removed. Otherwise, it is a slow death for the rabbit. The best prevention for wool block is a high-fiber diet based on hay with substantial fibrous vegetables and good coat maintenance to reduce the amount of loose hair that the rabbit ingests as it grooms itself. The first symptom of a rabbit suffering from wool block is a loss of appetite. Rabbits should always be excited about their food. Apathy at feeding time is a red flag. It may be due to overfeeding, wool block, or something else altogether, but it should always be taken very seriously.

GROOMING AND FIBER HARVESTING

The basic tools needed to keep a coat in good shape are a metal comb and/or a dog slicker brush. Coats should be combed and/or brushed regularly to keep them free from mats and loose hair. “Regularly” means whatever is required. It can be every other day for an English Angora in full coat or every several weeks for a recently plucked French. Combing produce usable fiber that should be saved. Pack the fiber lightly in a paper bag or shoe box to keep it from compacting. Toenails should be clipped as needed, and sometimes the scent glands on either side of the tail need to be emptied. Some owners keep the hair around the tail area clipped short to keep it from becoming stained and smelly.

Harvesting angora fiber is done by shearing or plucking. All Angoras except the Germans/Giants release their coats. The entire coat sheds out and a new one starts. Most rabbits do not release all at once. The hair along their backs and shoulders releases first, with the sides following a week or so later. Some rabbits will have started a new coat before the old one releases; others will be bald if plucked. The release of the coat is only significant if you pluck. If you choose to pluck, it should be done as soon as the coat releases to prevent the rabbit from ingesting the loose hair. Plucked fiber can only be



Most angora rabbits learn to enjoy being groomed. Bobbi plucks released hair from the chin and belly of Muffin, a French angora buck. He is not restrained in any way and is comfortable reposing on her lap as she works.

harvested on the rabbit's time schedule. Released hair comes out very easily with no discomfort to the rabbit. Other indications are clouds of fiber in the corners of your bunny's cage and on colored rabbits, a lighter look to the rabbit as the lighter undercoat shows more.

If you shear, which can be done with electric clippers or scissors, shear the hair close to the skin when it reaches the desired length. Germans/Giants must be sheared. Second cuts in sheared fiber produce both shedding and pilling in finished garments and should be avoided. In the spinning world, guard hair is generally something to be avoided, too. It is important to note here that angora guard hair is not scratchy and is not removed from the fiber before spinning. In fact, it is the angora guard hair that is largely responsible for producing the dramatic halo effect associated with fine angora yarns.

SPINNING ANGORA YARNS

Once you are familiar with the characteristics of angora fiber, the range of options for producing yarn is enormous. Angora fiber is extremely fine and generally has very little crimp. It tends to be slippery to spin alone. It can be easily broken by processing and has no meaningful elasticity. It has a reputation for being difficult to work with, along with shedding and pilling, so many spinners have never spent much time with it. However, understanding its characteristics and working it to its best advantage produces amazing results.

Angora can be spun short or long draw, and there are spinners who swear by each. Given its delicate nature, the less processing, the better. Angora is harvested ready to spin, and there is no need to wash or card it. When spinning, remember that angora yarn is going to bloom and become many times larger than it is on your bobbin. That famous halo results from the stiffer guard-hair ends working out of the

yarn itself. With that in mind, draw the fiber much finer than the thickness you want the final yarn to have. In contrast to spinning fine wools, use a lighter take-up and a high ratio to ensure a tight twist to keep the yarn together and prevent shedding. When using plucked fiber spun short draw, the greatest halo is achieved by feeding the fibers plucked end first, creating a solid anchoring of the plucked end



and allowing the twist to always progress toward the outer end of the hair. Plucked fiber can easily be spun long draw from the fold, laying the tufts over the top of your index finger and drafting from the center of the tuft.

When blending angora with other fibers, card it gently and no more than necessary. Generally speaking, the fine-gauge draw and the high twist ratio will also apply to blends. Personally, I spin all my prime fiber (2½-inch staple or longer) as 100 percent angora singles, which I ply with non-angora singles,

This adult-sized hat weighs in at just 1 ounce and was knitted on U.S. size 8 needles for the hat and U.S. size 6 needles for the brim. The yarn is a 2-ply yarn with one ply spun from angora and one from Merino wool at 10 wraps per inch.



ANN SABIN SWANSON

Left to Right: I experimented with synthetic angora for the first time while writing this article and found that spinning synthetic angora is comparable to natural angora, however, the synthetic is noticeably slicker. Side by side the end products are different but very similar, and the synthetic has a delightful hand. The development of the synthetic fiber gives angora options to those with allergy sensitivities. **1.** Short draw, angora, fulled. **2.** Short draw, synthetic, unfulled. **3.** Long draw, synthetic, unfulled. **4.** Short draw, angora, unfulled.



ANN SABIN SWANSON

Left to Right: **1.** Short draw, synthetic, fulled. **2.** Long draw, angora, unfulled. **3.** Long draw, synthetic, fulled. **4.** Long draw, angora, fulled.

and all the subprime fiber and combings I blend with various other fibers before spinning. A little angora goes a long way. Even a 20 percent blend of angora into a mix of fibers can make a dramatic difference in warmth, softness, and halo.

Fulling the yarn develops the bloom of the halo and helps anchor the ends to prevent shedding. However, when spun as noted above, the unfulled yarn will not shed. Many spinners shock the skein of yarn by transferring it back and forth between hot and cold water baths several times and then whack it against a hard surface to develop the halo. Generally I prefer to use unfulled yarn and full the finished piece by gently washing it. Good swatching is essential if you are going to approach a project with unfulled yarn.

USING ANGORA TO ITS BEST ADVANTAGE

There is very little use for 100 percent angora yarn. I like to think of it as the vanilla extract of fibers—it makes everything better, but you don't want to drink it straight. A 100 percent angora sweater is too hot to wear and will sag out of shape, never to return. You typically will be blending angora with other fibers to increase its elasticity and temper its extreme insulating properties. My favorite go-to yarn is a 100 percent angora singles plied with a fine wool singles. I usually use Merino because, characteristically, it is a perfect complement to angora fiber and doesn't sacrifice softness. The angora ply supplies the halo, and most people assume that the yarn is actually 100 percent angora. An adult-size hat or a pair of mittens can be knitted with 1 ounce of yarn. The halo presence hampers the definition of many stitch patterns, and so a carded angora blend can be just the answer to achieve the same warmth and softness and still allow your beautiful cables to shine through.

The bottom line is that choosing the appropriate project for angora (and there are a lot of them) ensures you will be thrilled with the end result. Simply remember that angora is delicate, very lightweight, and warm, warm, warm. If you can imagine your finished piece light as a feather and toasty warm, chances are you have a winner. And you don't have to be afraid to experiment because all the time you are spinning, designing, knitting, and weaving, your bunny is happily growing out a new coat to give you plenty of raw material to spin.

Possibly the best-kept secret in the fiber world, Angora rabbits require very little special accommodation, are a delight to keep, adapt to almost any situation, and produce one of the world's most luxurious fibers. Of course there is a downside: they are addictive, highly addictive. Consider yourself warned. ❧

Bobbi Daniels has kept Angora rabbits and has spun, knitted, and woven their fiber for seventeen years. She owns Raven Frog Fibers in Sitka, Alaska, which wholesales handspun and hand-dyed yarns and fibers, and she teaches spinning and knitting workshops in schools and shops in Alaska and the lower forty-eight.



MITCHELL RUSK

RESOURCES

The American Rabbit Breeders Association
www.arba.net
 National Angora Rabbit Breeders Club
www.nationalangorarabbitbreeders.com

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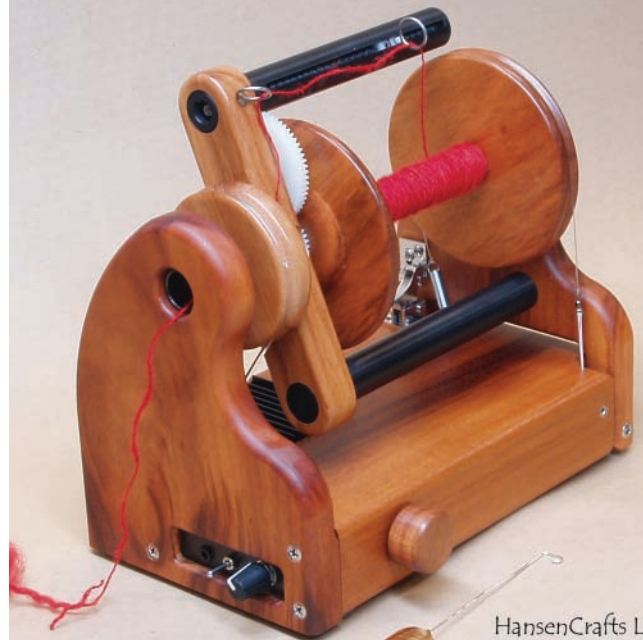
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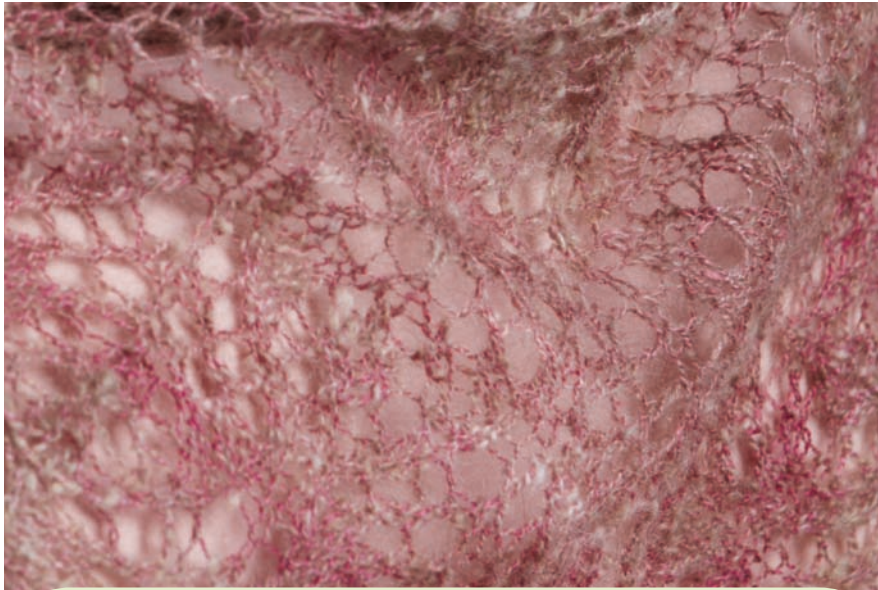
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A Qiviut Shawlette

Gift from the tundra

BY SANDI WISEHEART



Project Notes

Fiber: ¾ oz qiviut (musk ox); ½ oz hand-dyed tussah silk from Shuttles, Spindles & Skeins in Boulder, Colorado.

Preparation: Qiviut—handteased and combed with fine dog comb; silk—combed top.

Drafting method: Qiviut—point-of-twist, semiwoolen; silk—worsted.

Spindle and weight: Qiviut—Lily (11 grams); silk—Greensleeves Ethan Jakob (12 grams).

Wheel (plying): Lendrum double treadle.

Wheel system: Scotch tension.

Ratio (plying): 10:1.

Singles direction spun: Z.

Singles wraps per inch: Qiviut—40; silk—64.

Twist angle: 30°.

Plied direction spun: S.

Plied twists per inch: 5.

Plied wraps per inch: 30–36.

Yards per pound: 3,280.

Total yardage: 206.

Yarn classification: Laceweight.

Shawl weight: 0.9 oz.

Silk used in shawl: About ½ oz.

Qiviut used in shawl: About ¾ oz.

Yardage used: 205.

Needles: U.S. size 4.

Gauge: 6 sts and 8 rows = 1" in St st, blocked and stretched.

Finished size: 40" wide across top, 19½" tall along centerline, 28" diagonal along each side edge.

Materials: Stitch markers, tapestry needle, blocking board, and pins.

Some days life hands you lemons, and some days, out of the blue, life hands you . . . qiviut. A couple of handfuls of it, in fact. Fresh off the bushes of the tundra, collected by a friend of a friend of a friend, way up on the far northern prairies where the musk oxen live. The musk oxen, cow-sized beasts with shaggy pelts and downward-turning horns framing their faces, rub up against bushes and leave clumps of their pelts behind tangled in amongst the stems and leaves. People come along and collect these clumps, and that's how a ziplock baggie of it ended up with me.


What I held in my hands that day didn't look a bit like the costly, soft, warm fleece you see spun up into luxury yarns. What I held looked more like something one might pull out of the vacuum cleaner after hoovering a dog park. This fleece was hairy, dirty, and full of sticks and leaves and other things I really didn't want to think too much about. It was, in truth, pretty nasty stuff.

But I was fresh from taking Robin Russo's three-day exotic fibers workshop at *Spin-Off* Autumn Retreat (SOAR) 2009 and was feeling a bit cocky. I thought, "Let's see if I can use what I've learned in Robin's class to turn this pile of filthy, hairy tundra trash into a spinner's treasure."

So it was that I embarked upon a six-month fiber adventure.

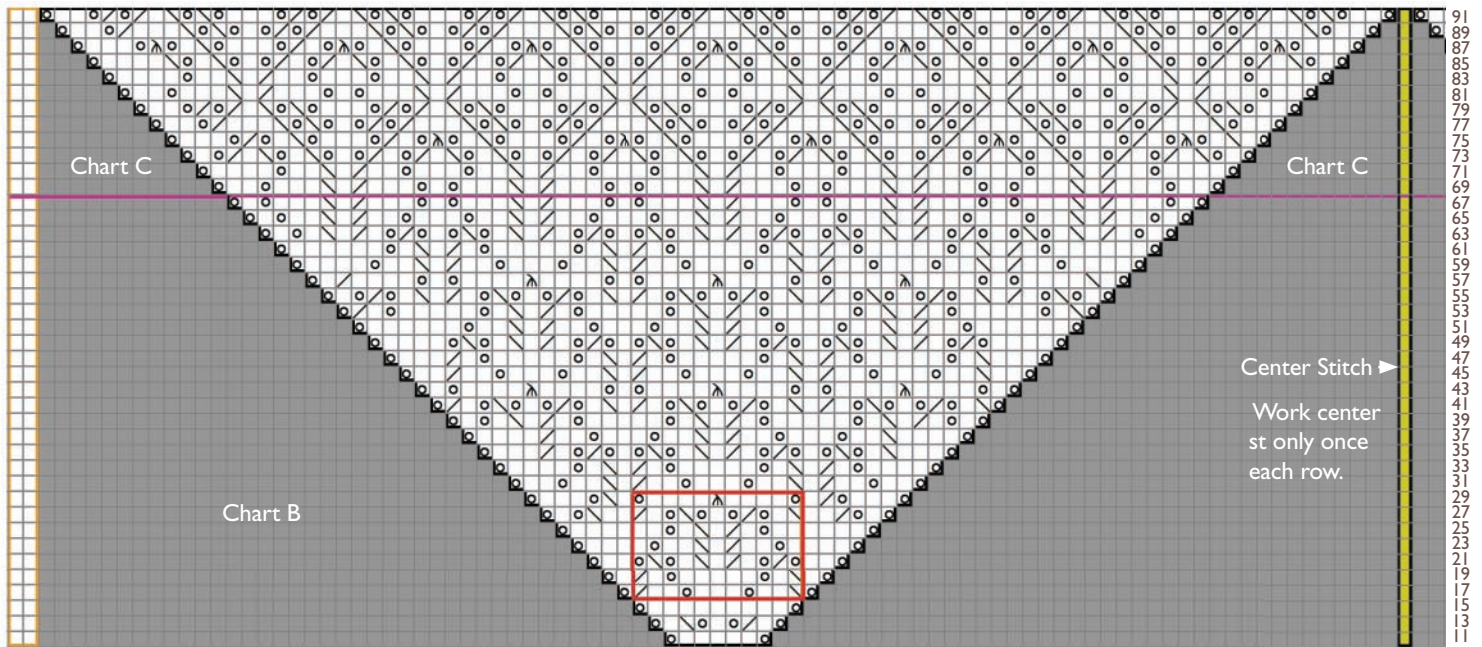
CLEANING AND SORTING

First task: Get some of the vegetable matter (VM) out. I spread white (to help me see better) tissue paper over my



Sandi's Tundra Lace Shawlette started with qiviut collected from the Alaska tundra from which she painstakingly picked out the guard hairs and vegetable matter with tweezers—a true labor of love.

Left side of shawl



dining table and began teasing apart the matted clumps, letting dirt—and what-not—fall onto the tissue. I gently pulled fibers free of every sort of soil and plant matter imaginable—including, to my delight, the tiniest pinecone I had ever seen. Not all the trash was quite so delightful, however; I was careful to wash my hands thoroughly when I was done.

I sorted the fibers by length and color, wanting to study the raw musk-ox fiber more closely. To my surprise, I discovered a wide range of staple lengths, fiber diameters, and colors. Somehow, I had pictured musk-ox fiber as being made up of only two components: long, dark, thick guard hairs, and downy, soft, pale qiviut undercoat fibers. It wasn't that simple. Guard hairs varied in length from dark, thick, 8-inch monsters to pale, but still prickly curls about 1½ inches long. To make culling out the guard hairs more difficult, the hairs came in nearly the same range of colors as the downy undercoat. I had imagined that the two would be easily distinguished and tweezing out the few (and the obvious) guard hairs would be a trivial task. In reality, it looked as though I'd be sorting individual fibers, one by one. What a nightmare!

In disbelief, I did what any sensible spinner would do: I set aside the fiber for a while and read everything I could get my hands on about processing and spinning short, fine down fibers such as

cashmere, angora, paco-vicuña, guanaco, and qiviut. Pretty much all the sources recommend inserting a high amount of twist to lock in the short fibers and then lightly fulling the yarn after washing to bring out the soft halo for which these yarns are famous. There was less agreement about aligning the fibers prior to spinning. My options included combing with minicombs or dog combs, flicking with a fine-toothed pet brush, or gently carding with cotton cards.

I was most dismayed to find no clear guidance about separating out the guard hairs. I was hoping for some sort of magic Guard Hair Magnet that would suck away anything that wasn't softer than kitten's fur. No such luck. In desperation one day, I searched through my beading tools and found a very sharp, very pointy pair of physician's tweezers that had once belonged to my late surgeon grandpa. Perfect.

I sat for hours, and then days, and then weeks with the tweezers, a large Ott-Lite, and a table covered with an old white T-shirt, picking and tweezing out scruff, guard hairs, and endless VM.

SCOURING

To prevent matting the fibers, I improvised a scouring method based on techniques learned from Judith MacKenzie and Maggie Casey. I cut a piece of undyed cotton muslin into

8-by-10-inch rectangles. I placed a handful of qiviut in the center, then folded the cloth around the fiber so that it formed a little packet, pinning the packets closed with rustproof pins.

I filled a plastic bin with warm water and Dawn detergent, swished the detergent around and added six packets of fiber. I pressed them down gently to remove the air and then let them soak for 15 minutes. I removed the packets, dumped out the water without rinsing the bin, and added more warm water. I swished the water to mix in the detergent residue and then added the packets for another 15-minute soak. To rinse, I added clean water and a quick glug of white vinegar and let the packets soak in that for about 10 minutes. Another change of water (no vinegar), another 10 minutes, and the packets were done with their bath.

I let the packets sit on a rack for a day until nearly dry, and then I carefully unwrapped the cloth, placing the puffs of fiber into clean cardboard box tops.

FINAL PROCESSING

I examined the washed qiviut and discovered that it (argh!) still had VM and guard hairs in it. So prior to spinning, I had to yet again pick and tweeze and tease every handful. I had spun about half the fiber directly from the cloud by the time I found a very fine-toothed dog comb and used that to try

hairs I had missed, thus making for slightly itchy yarn. The real problem was that I had so little qiviut that a pure two-ply would not yield enough yarn to make anything larger than a hanky. I realized I needed to ply it with something else in order to maximize yardage.

WHAT TO PLY WITH?

After much thought and a certain amount of mad pawing through my stash, I decided to ply a sample of one qiviut singles with one singles of handspun tussah silk. The silk was a lovely semisolid rose color; it had been a cheer-up gift from a special friend, so I deemed it worthy of the qiviut. These samples came out beautifully; the deep rose of the silk and the variegated creams and browns of the qiviut blended together to become a dusky rose-beige that is truly lovely.

SILK SINGLES

I spun the silk on my Greensleeves Ethan Jakob spindle using a worsted inchworm technique. I found that letting any twist at all into the drafting triangle resulted in an overtwisted mess, so I was careful to pinch off the apex of the triangle the second I let more fiber draft through. I spun somewhere between 4 and 6 hours a day, until both the silk and the qiviut were gone.

I had never spun so many hours in such a short time, especially not on my spindles. The result (after my muscles

adjusted) was that I improved my spindle skills immensely and found ways to spin more quickly and more efficiently.

PLYING PREPARATION

For both fibers, I kept the cops from growing too large, as the added weight made spinning such fine singles more of a challenge. Once I noticed wobbling or increased breakage, I wound the cop off onto plastic weaver's bobbins using a manual bobbin winder. I let the singles rest, as both the silk and the qiviut were a bit overspun, and then put the bobbins directly onto my lazy kate.

PLYING

I decided to spin both singles on spindles because I personally feel more confident on a spindle, and I like the (illusion of) greater control that spindle spinning gives me, particularly with short exotic fibers. However, for plying, I chose to use my trusty Lendrum wheel because I knew I could get more consistent plying results that way.

To enhance control of the singles during plying, I placed the lazy kate on a small table about 6 feet away from the wheel so the threads came off the bobbins at orifice height.

FINISHING THE YARN

After plying, I skeined the yarn, tied it loosely in four places, and washed it in warm water and no-rinse wool wash. I thwacked the yarn against the tile wall

a few times and then hung the yarn to dry. The next day, when it was dry, I noticed a huge amount of kink still in the finished yarn. Upon closer examination, I found that the silk singles appeared to be "pulling in" the qiviut singles, indicating that the silk singles had a disproportionate amount of twist energy still in it. I posted a question about this on Ravelry.com and within hours had many responses. The general consensus was to give the yarn another bath, this time in really warm water, almost hot, and then apply more thwacking to release the overenthusiastic twist energy. I did both, and the result was some of the most beautifully spun and plied yarn I've ever made.

KNITTING

I wanted to knit something lacy from my new yarn. Sampling told me that a pure qiviut yarn was too fuzzy to show an intricate lace pattern well, which was one reason (besides yardage) that I chose to ply it with silk. The resulting two-ply was a good, if unusual, knitting yarn: firmly plied, not splitty, with interesting slubs and texture and with fascinating color variations due to the many colors in the original musk-ox fiber.

I decided to make a lace shawl-ette using two stitch patterns (162 and 163) from *The Essential Stitch Collection* (Reader's Digest, 2010), both of which I heavily adapted—the first to resemble leaves and twigs in the original fiber, the second to look like the face of a musk ox, complete with horns.

TUNDRA LACE SHAWLETTE

The shawl begins at center back neck. It is worked in stockinette st lace with two garter sts edging each side.

CO 5 sts.

Chart A (setup rows)

Work Chart A as follows:

Row 2 (WS): Knit.

Row 3 (RS): K2, yo, k1, yo, k2 (7 sts).

All even-numbered (WS) rows: K2, p to last 2 sts, k2.

Row 5: K2, pm, yo, k3, yo, pm, k2 (9 sts).

Row 7: K2, sl m, yo, k2, yo, pm, k1, pm,



Sandi spun the qiviut (top) on her Lily spindle (11 grams) and the silk (bottom) on her Greensleeves Ethan Jakob spindle (12 grams).



Sandi spun 206 yards of a fine laceweight yarn (3,280 yards per pound, 30 to 36 wraps per inch) for her delicate Tundra Lace Shawlette.

yo, k2, yo, sl m, k2 (13 sts).
 Row 9: K2, sl m, yo, k to last 2 sts, yo, sl m, k2 (15 sts).
 Row 10: K2, p to last 2 sts, k2.

Chart B (Musk-Ox Lace)

Work Chart B Rows 1–56 as follows (full pattern repeats are 11 sts wide):
 For each RS row: K2, sl m, work corresponding row of Chart B, sl m, k1 (center st), sl m, work same row on Chart B for left side of shawl, sl m, k2.
 For each WS row (not shown on chart): K2, p to last 2 sts, k2.

Transition rows

Work Rows 67 and 68 for transition between lace motifs.

Chart C (Flower and Stem Lace)

Work Chart C. During Row 1 only, move markers at beginning of each pattern repeat one stitch to the right; repeats are now 12 sts wide.
 Thus, Row 1 of Chart C would be:
 K2, *(begin chart) yo, k1, pm, *k1, yo, k3, k2tog, k1, ssk, k3, yo, pm for beg of next repeat; rep from * four times**, k to m before center st, yo, k1

(center st), rep from ** to **, k to last m, yo, k2.
 Continue to work WS rows as k2, p to last 2 sts, k2.

Note: Incorporate new sts at edges and on either side of center stitch into lace pattern, maintaining increase/decrease pairs, working k2tog instead of s2kpo if there are not enough sts to complete the double decrease.

EDGING

Note: The marker at the beginning of each repeat moves one stitch to the right at the beginning of each RS row. Because my stitches were fairly loose, I simply slid the marker under the stitch to the right to move it. You may prefer to use a small locking-type marker and clip it to the centerline of the double decrease instead.

Work Edging Chart as follows:

Row 1 (RS): K2, yo, **k to beg of repeat (after marker is moved), *s2kpo (see abbreviations page 104), k4, yo, k1, yo, k4; rep from * until there are not enough sts left for a full repeat of the edging, then knit to m, yo**, k1, yo, work from ** to ** once more, k2.

Row 2 (WS): K2, p to last 2 sts, k2. Continue working charted repeats within garter st and yarnover border at each side.

BIND-OFF

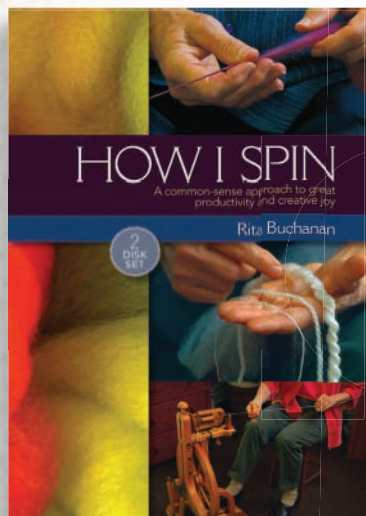
After completing Row 16 of charted pattern, work BO as follows:
 (RS) K1, *k next st, insert left needle into front of 2 sts just worked, work k2tog tbl, rep from * to end. Break yarn and draw through last loop.

FINISHING

Weave in ends. Soak in warm water and no-rinse wool wash for 20 minutes; remove from water, roll in towel and push on towel roll to remove excess water. Lay shawl flat on blocking board, foam mats, or bed; beginning at center and working outward and from top downward, pin out points and block to shape. Let dry completely. Trim ends. ☘

Sandi Wiseheart writes about and designs with yarn, fiber, and beads from her home north of Toronto, Canada. She blogs at <http://sandiwisheart.wordpress.com>. (P.S. There are no musk oxen in her backyard.)

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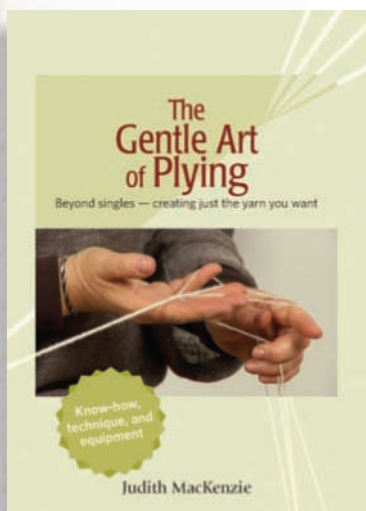
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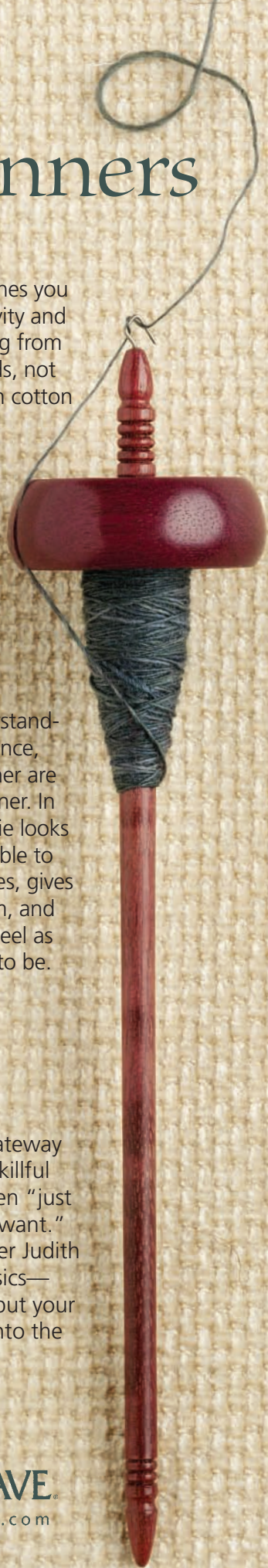
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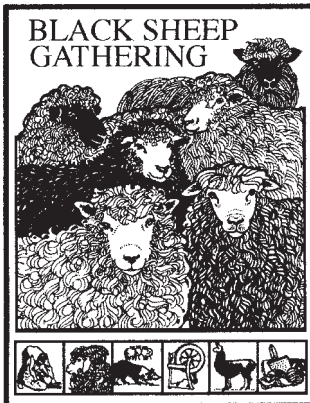
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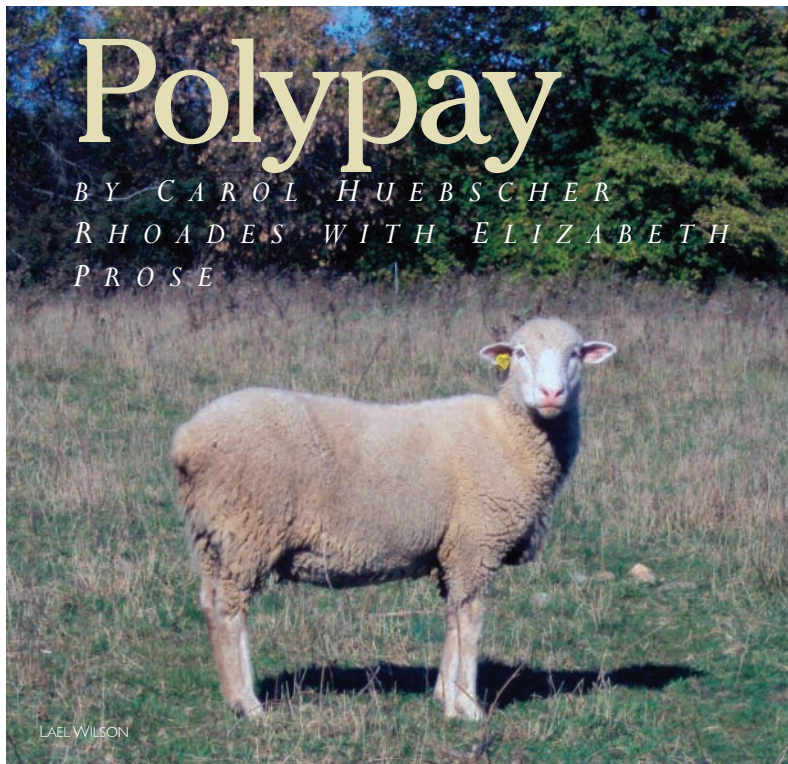
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A Polypay ewe from Maplewood North farm.

Polypay is an American sheep breed that is a newcomer to the sheep world. I'd bet that not many handspinners have even heard of it, much less spun the wool. That's a shame, because, as the name implies, Polypay has much to offer. First developed in the late 1960s at the U.S. Sheep Experiment Station in Dubois, Idaho, Polypay draws its heritage from Finnsheep/Rambouillet and Targhee/Dorset crossbred sheep. The goal was a breed with five desirable characteristics: high prolificacy, multiple lambs from ewes one year and older, lambing more than once a year, rapid growth rate of lambs, and good meat quality. The four-breed composite was named Polypay in 1975, and the American Polypay Sheep Association was formed in 1980. While most of the flocks are in the United States, there are also some in Canada and Mexico. The purpose of the breed is to use a composite genetic background (poly-) to produce a sheep that offers a good return on investment (-pay).

The sheep are medium-sized with ewes averaging 150 to 200 pounds and mature rams weighing 240 to 300 pounds. They have white faces clear of wool with pink noses, and they are polled (hornless). The breed association standards specify distinctly mas-

culine rams and feminine ewes, both with strong, level backs. Because of the diverse genetic background and breeder selection, individual sheep may vary more from an absolute standard than is usual with other breeds.

For the same reasons, Polypay fleeces do not have one distinct quality. Generally the wool is creamy white, consistent in quality over the sheep, medium to fine (28 to 22 microns), with staples averaging 3 to 4 inches. Both fleeces I worked with had rather crisp locks that still felt soft. A lock held flat had 8 to 9 crimps per inch; released, the crimp took on a lively three-dimensional character. That accounts for the wonderful loft and bounce of Polypay wool. However, depending on breeding and selection, Polypay fleeces can be silkier. A silky Polypay fleece for the warp and a crimpier one for the weft would make a lovely blanket. The same pairing would make durable sock feet and cushy legs.

CHOOSING AND PREPARING POLYPAY

When I checked online sources for Polypay, there weren't many breeders who advertised fleeces in their product lines. I am lucky enough to have a breeder in my area who spins and who sells good quality wool. The American Polypay Sheep Association lists breeders in several states, mostly in the Midwest. If there are sheep shows, university or state sheep stations, or 4-H groups in your area, contact or visit them for possible leads to some Polypay fleece. You may not be able to get a fleece right away so ask about reserving one from the next shearing. Since show sheep are often shorn before each exhibit, make it clear that you want a year's growth. You might also be able to get the fleece from an animal that doesn't have a show-quality body but still has good wool. If the animals are not raised primarily for wool (and many commercial sheep breeds





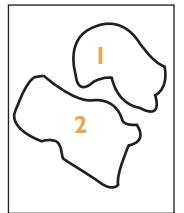
are not), decide on how much you are willing to pay for a fleece that could take more work to clean and prepare. Also decide on the quality of Polypay you want for a project and choose a suitable fleece. Because Polypay has the genetics from several types of sheep, the fleece qualities can vary within the breed.

The fleeces donated by Maplewood North in Wisconsin were clean and easy to work with. I placed about ½ pound of fleece into a nylon net bag and soaked it with about 3 tablespoons Orvus Paste in hot water for 5 minutes, before rinsing it twice in hot water only. I gently squeezed water out and then let the bag straddle the double-sink divider for

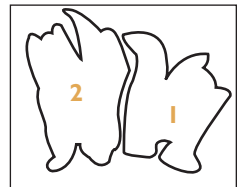
about 30 minutes so that more water could drip out. Next, outdoors, I twirled the bag vigorously for a few turns before removing the fleece and placing it on a rack so it could dry in the sunshine. The locks were a creamy white with some yellowing.

Once the wool is dry, you should sample to see what preparation method works best for the fleece you have. I asked my friend Elizabeth Prose to help me with the sampling for this article. It's always good to get a different perspective on a subject, and it was fun to compare notes after we each worked alone to sample the Polypay. Elizabeth and I tried combing, handcarding, and drumcarding.

Polypay lamb, **1)** washed; **2)** unwashed.



Polypay adult ewe, **1)** washed; **2)** unwashed.



Polypay ewe from Maplewood North farm.

Polypay lambs from Maplewood North farm.

Fleeces from Maplewood North farm.





Sample 1a



Sample 1b

The handcarding took the most experimentation to get just the right amount of wool on the cards for smooth and efficient carding—with Polypay fleece, less is definitely more. For combing, sort the fleece for the longest fibers. With Polypay’s short staple, two-pitch combs will probably work better than combs with more rows of tines. If you want to spin from the locks, either open them by hand or flick card very carefully so you don’t nick your hands. Rather than flicking, try drawing narrow locks through the teeth on a carder board (fixed board with carding cloth) or a handcard.

SPINNING POLYPAY

As Elizabeth noticed, Polypay certainly craves air. You can spin it worsted- or woollen-style but, in either case, spin from a drafting triangle that allows air space around the fibers. Compacted Polypay fibers trapped in a dense rolag or top can be hard to draft and spin, and yield an uneven yarn. Loosen your grip on the fibers as you work to ease drafting. I like to think “light, airy, bouncy” throughout the process to get the most from a Polypay fleece. If you need a stronger yarn for some socks or a durable sweater, work from a lofty rolag or roving and either spin a light singles and ply with more twist or add more twist to the singles but ply somewhat more loosely. To really emphasize the loft of Polypay, drumcard airy batts, divide the batt into narrow strips, and spin with Paula Simmons’s palm-up, short backward drafting method (see Resources).

Sample 1 (Elizabeth Prose)

A few weeks ago, when Carol and her hus-

band, Steve, met my husband and me for dinner, she brought a bag of Polypay fiber from Maplewood North farm outside of Johnson Creek, Wisconsin. Being a relatively new spinner, I was thrilled by the opportunity to experiment with an unfamiliar breed of sheep.

The first thing I did was open up the bag to examine the fleece. The locks were short to medium in length, dense with a high crimp, and creamy white with yellow tips. I teased open the locks with my fingers, and the crisp, springy fibers bloomed in my hands. I began to spin straight from the locks on my Schacht Matchless in double drive with a ratio of 9:1. However, I noticed right away that the singles would require more twist, so I changed to a ratio of 13:1. Adding twist produced a much more stable singles, yet the Polypay fibers seemed to need more air as the drafting was not smooth. I flick carded a few locks, and the fibers responded by ballooning up into fluffy clouds that were much easier to draft.

For my samples, I chose to produce three diverse yarns using three different preparations for the fiber. I washed all of the yarns with Orvus Paste in warm water with a cool rinse and hung them to dry on a clothing rack. I knitted swatches from each of the sample yarns on U.S. size 4 needles using Mrs. Hunter’s Pattern from *A Treasury of Knitting Patterns* by Barbara G. Walker (Schoolhouse, 1998), page 150. I chose this stitch pattern to show off the different qualities of the three yarns and because it has elements of both cable and lace knitting.

Swatch 1a

In the bag of Polypay fiber was a sample of com-

mercially prepared roving. I began my sample yarn by pre-drafting the roving into four narrower strips and spinning a fine singles at a ratio of 13:1 with a short forward draw. I then Navajo-plied the yarn at a ratio of 9:1. The result was 68 yards (1,554 yards per pound) of a dense, smooth sportweight yarn that weighed 0.7 ounce and measured 14 wraps per inch. The knitted fabric has crisp stitch definition and a firm hand.

Swatch 1b

Next, I handcarded the Polypay fiber into rolags. My first attempt yielded unsatisfying results. I used too much fiber, and the rolags were too dense, and the drafting was sticky and uneven. I recarded the rolags with less fiber. I also pulled out the noils from the first carding. The new rolags were light and airy and produced a more even singles at a ratio of 13:1 using American long draw. I plied the singles at a ratio of 13:1 for 1 ounce of two-ply woolen sportweight yarn at 113 yards (1,808 yards per pound) and 13 wraps per inch. This yarn produced a knitted swatch with a light, lofty feel and a slight halo.

Swatch 1c

For the third swatch, I sorted the fiber and selected the best intact locks. I used my St. Blaise combs to comb and separate the longer and shorter fibers. This produced a fair amount of waste, but the re-



maining fibers were organized and airy. I used a diz to draw the fiber off the combs. I spun the singles at a ratio of 13:1 with an almost effortless short forward draw. I also plied at a ratio of 13:1. The 0.45 ounce of finished two-ply semiworsted sportweight yarn measured 45 yards (1,600 yards per pound) and 13 wraps per inch. The final knitted fabric is more lustrous than the other two samples. It has good stitch definition and yet remains soft and springy.

Polypay fiber is a fine wool that created a crisp, springy yarn that was a pleasure to work with.

Mrs. Hunter's Pattern from *A Treasury of Knitting Patterns* by Barbara G. Walker (Pittsville, Wisconsin: Schoolhouse, 1998, p. 150); reprinted with permission from Schoolhouse Press. The pattern is a multiple of 4 + 2.

With U.S. size 4 needles, cast on 32 sts.

Knit 6 rows.

Keeping first and last 5 sts in garter stitch, work center stitches (multiple of 4 plus 2) in pattern.

Row 1 (RS): Knit.

Row 2: Purl.

Row 3: K1, *sl 1, k3, pass the slipped st over the 3 knit sts; rep from * and end k1.

Row 4: P1, *p3, yo; rep from * and end p1.

Repeat rows 1–4 seven times more.

Knit 6 rows and then bind off.

Sample 2 (Carol Huebscher Rhoades)

Ever since translating Tone Takle's *Knitted Teddy Bears Dressed with Handknits* (Books by Tone Takle, 2010, www.tonetakle.com), I've wanted to knit a bear with this sweater-coat. I'd like a similar sweat-





er for myself, so this was a good opportunity to see how the original is constructed. The resilient Polypay fleece was an excellent choice—soft enough for comfort but sturdy enough to maintain the pattern and shaping well. The fiber was easy to comb on St. Blaise two-pitch combs. A total of 1½ ounces of fiber yielded 1 ounce of roving for 0.9 ounce finished yarn. I pulled the fiber off the combs without a diz and then drafted the top to about a ¾-inch width. To keep some bounce in the fiber, I spun with a short backward draw and wide drafting triangle on my Schacht Matchless at 9:1 before plying at 11:1. The two-ply yarn was elastic and slightly lustrous, with 85 yards in 0.9 ounce (1,511 yards per pound and 18 wraps per inch). I knitted the sweater on U.S. size 2 needles following the instructions in the book. Only 70 yards were needed for size small. The Polypay yarn was lovely to knit with, and it performed just as I expected. It is always exciting when the actual yarn matches the imagined one. As I knitted, I thought about how perfect the same yarn would be for socks.

Sample 3

Elizabeth and I both noticed right away when preparing Polypay that it resisted compacting. To emphasize its loft, I drumcarded some wool with two passes on my Pat Green Supercard. I stripped each of the two batts into six lengthwise strips and attenuated them before spinning on a Louet S90 at a 6:1 ratio. I barely drafted as my fiber hand went back slightly and then forward to feed the yarn in as soon as there was enough twist to hold it together. The singles were 15 wraps per inch and the three-ply very bulky yarn measured 5 to 6 wraps per inch and 31 yards per ounce, or 496 yards per pound. It was really fun to see how the yarn bloomed when it hit the water. I could hardly wait for the skein to

dry. Of course, I had to knit this yarn into a cable and chose the Tight Braid Cable pattern from *The Harmony Guides: Cables and Arans*, edited by Erika Knight (Interweave, 2007), page 86. I knitted the sample cuff on U.S. size 11 needles with 28 stitches around. If I were making an actual pair of wrist warmers, I would make the palm side ribbing instead of stockinette for a better fit.

TIGHT BRAID CABLE

Panel of 10 stitches on a background of reverse stockinette stitch (I had 2 purl stitches on each side of the cable and 14 stockinette stitches for the palm side of wrist).

Rnds 1 and 3: Knit.

Rnd 2: K2, C4F twice.

Rnd 4: C4B twice, k2.

Repeat these 4 rounds.

C4F—Place next 2 sts on cable needle and hold in front of work; k2 and then k2 from cable needle.

C4B—Place next 2 sts on cable needle and hold in back of work; k2 and then k2 from cable needle.

It was quite obvious from our sampling that Polypay is a very rewarding wool to work with. A variety of yarns are possible from just one fleece. Just imagine the range you can obtain from two or more different styles of Polypay fleece. ☘

Elizabeth Prose is a knitter who has been spinning since her friends converted her in 2007. She would like to thank them for enabling her. She lives in Madison, Wisconsin.

Carol Huebscher Rhoades, also of Madison, Wisconsin, is one of Elizabeth's enablers. She enjoys encouraging spinners to experiment and play with fibers.

RESOURCES

American Polypay Sheep Association. www.countrylovin.com/polypay/index.html.

American Wool Council. "Wool Grades and the Sheep that Grow the Wool." Brochure from the American Sheep Industry Association, Englewood, Colorado.

Fournier, Nola, and Jane Fournier. *In Sheep's Clothing: A Handspinner's Guide to Wool*. Loveland, Colorado: Interweave, 1995.

Simmons, Paula. *Spinning for Softness and Speed*. Chilliwack, British Columbia, Canada: Sunrise Printing, 1982.

www.ansi.okstate.edu/breeds/sheep.

Many thanks to Lael Wilson of Maplewood North who generously donated fleece and roving for this article.

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Project Notes

Fiber: Polypay fleece, 1 oz ewe's wool and 0.65 oz lambswool from www.maplewoodnorth.com. The ewe's wool was blended 87%/13% with dyed tussah silk (Lagoon Reflections colorway) from www.lambspun.com.

Preparation: Handcarded rolags.

Drafting method: Traditional woolen long draw.

Wheel: Lendrum double treadle (lamb); Schacht Matchless (ewe).

Wheel system: Double drive.

Ratio (singles/plying): lamb—1/2:1 (both); ewe—9:1 (singles), 1/1:1 (plying).

Singles direction spun: Z.

Singles twists per inch: 14 (lamb), 12 (ewe).

Singles wraps per inch: 30 (lamb), 25 (ewe).

Twist angle: 35° (lamb), 20° (ewe).

Number of plies: 2.

Plied direction spun: S.

Plied twists per inch: 8 (lamb), 5 (ewe).

Plied wraps per inch: 23 (lamb), 18 (ewe).

Total yardage: lamb—83 (0.60 oz); ewe—106 (1.15 oz).

Yards per pound: 2,210 (lamb), 1,472 (ewe).

Yarn classification: Fingering (lamb), sportweight (ewe).

Yardage used: 25 (lamb), 60 (ewe).

Needles: Set of 4 dpn U.S. size 2. (Needles with pointy tips are highly recommended.)

Gauge: 6 sts and 9½ rows in stockinette = 1".

Finished size: 8" circumference, 4" long.

Polypay “Water Bearer” Cuffs

BY CAROL
HUEBSCHER
RHOADES

When I took classes at a knitting symposium in Sweden this summer, I noticed a woman in the dorm knitting some yarn-lined mittens. She had just taken the “Water Bearer Mitten” class, and she quickly showed me how to catch the loop yarn. Unfortunately, she explained the technique in Danish, and I didn’t understand much. The motions seemed simple when she showed them to me, but when I tried to reproduce them later, they didn’t quite work. When I told someone about my experience, she mentioned that the pattern was originally in a mitten booklet published many years ago, and I realized that I had the book at home. I looked it up as soon as I got back. It used a somewhat different technique for the stranding than that taught in the class or for the loop stitch in *A Treasury of Knitting Patterns* by Barbara G. Walker (Schoolhouse, 1998), page 135. The explanation for the loops in *100 Landskapsvan-tar* [100 Landscape Mittens] ICA, 1981) lacked some details that I had to work out. After quite a bit of experimenting, I finally came up with a method that worked well.



Carol cards rolags in proportion to fiber length and desired yarn size to minimize drafting movements. The short lambswool was carded into $\frac{3}{4}$ " diameter rolags, while the longer ewe's wool rolags are about $1\frac{3}{8}$ " wide.



A Polypay ewe from Maplewood North ranch.

The resilient Polypay fleece is an excellent choice for these cuffs. The ewe's wool was fairly soft and slightly crisp. If you can't find any Polypay, card some Targhee with Dorset wool for a similar type of yarn. The lambswool was very short (1¾ to 2 inches long) and soft. To help it form the loops well, I spun it with extra twist.

For the loop yarn, I handcarded 0.65 ounces (40 small rolags) of lambswool and then spun and plied the wool on my Lendrum double-treadle wheel at 12:1. I also handcarded the longer (3½ to 4 inches) ewe's wool, blending it with a small amount of tussah silk. Carding the wool was very quick and easy, although I did a few more strokes than usual to blend in the silk. I spun those rolags on the Schacht Matchless, drafting with a traditional woolen long draw for a light, soft yarn.

Traditionally, this patterning was used for mittens that needed to be extra warm and to have some cushioning. The person whose chore it was to fetch the water would definitely appreciate this style of mittens. You could also add loops inside caps or socks. I've found a number of ways to add cushioning:

short strands of yarn or fleece knitted in individually, held and knitted into a stitch with the working yarn; as well as several looping stitches (either the working yarn or a supplementary yarn is wrapped around a finger or dowel as a stitch is worked; loops almost always form on the wrong side of the knitting); and methods for stitching rows of loops to finished pieces. These cuffs make a good practice project for learning how to add the loops and to get some proficiency and speed before making a larger project. At first, the looping is very slow, but with practice, it gets faster and easier. This winter you'll be glad you persevered.

The loop pattern is a multiple of 4 stitches and rows, but you can vary this. It looks and works best if the loops are evenly distributed and not more than 5 stitches, or about an inch, apart. You can also stack the loops vertically instead of staggering them. Unlike most strand/fleece methods of lining mittens that make a stitch shape on the right side with the loop yarn, this technique leaves two horizontal bars across a stitch wherever there is a loop on the wrong side.

MAKING THE LOOPS

Wrap loop yarn around tip of left needle counterclockwise (from back to front over needle and then to back); now hold left index finger behind tip of left needle and wrap counterclockwise again (over finger and needle). Use left hand little and ring fingers to hold loop yarn at left on WS. Keeping index finger in large loop, slip the two loops on left needle and then next MC stitch (all slipped purlwise) to right needle and, inserting tip of left needle into the loops, pass the two strands of loop yarn over the slipped MC stitch. Release finger from large loop. Make sure that the loops don't pull out as you work and that the strand between the loops doesn't pull in.

With MC (ewe's yarn) and dpn, CO 49 sts (I used long-tail cast-on). Slip first stitch to right needle and pass last st cast on over it and then slide stitch back to left needle = 48 stitches around and joined. Work 5 rnds of k2, p2 ribbing and then knit 2 rounds.

Now begin loop pattern:

Rnd 1: *Sl 3 purlwise, loop before next st (see above); rep from * around.

Rnds 2–4: Knit with MC. Catch the loop yarn at beginning of every other round to position it for next loop round.

Rnd 5: *Sl 1 purlwise, loop before next st, sl 2 purlwise; rep from * around.

Rnds 6–8: Knit with MC (catching loop yarn at beginning of alternate rounds).

Repeat these 8 rounds to desired length, ending last repeat on Rnd 3. Work 5 rnds k2, p2 ribbing and then bind off loosely. Weave in all yarn tails on WS.

Make both cuffs alike. ☿

Carol Rhoades won't be hauling water to her home in Madison, Wisconsin, but she will keep her wrists warm with these cuffs when she shovels snow this winter.

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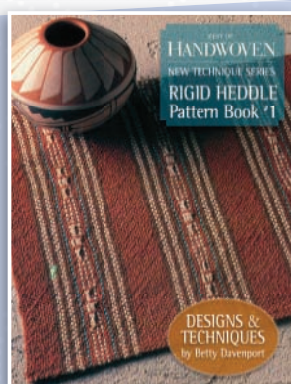
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HANDSPUN GALLERY OF Jane's Half Gloves

The contributors to this gallery project all live in or near Madison, Wisconsin, and meet occasionally to compare knitting projects. One evening, Jane Dymond was knitting some half gloves that they admired because of the simple but effective stitch technique. They suggested that she submit the design to a knitting magazine, and then Carol Huebscher Rhoades, *Spin-Off's* technical editor, said, "What a good *Spin-Off* project." Jane is just learning to spin, Elizabeth Prose has been spinning for three years, Eileen Pierce and Carol are longtime spinners, while Ann Nelson and Libby Becker are focusing on honing their knitting skills. The project was an incentive to develop spinning skills for two of the knitters, a chance for the more experienced spinners to experiment, and an enticement for the nonspinners to try handspun yarn.



Fingerless Gloves

(PATTERN BY JANE DYMOND)

Wind yarn into a ball so that you can pull one end from the center and one from the outside. The gloves are knitted in the round with alternating strands held as for Fair Isle, not as for two-end knitting (the yarns do not twist around each other). There are several possible ways to control the yarns. Everyone except Carol knitted with one strand in each hand, alternating throwing with the right and left hands; Carol held both yarns in the left hand and worked in Continental-style two-color stranded knitting.

Cast on an even number of stitches over one double-pointed needle (dpn), beginning with a slipknot with both strands of yarn. Insert thumb and index finger between the strands as for long-tail cast-on and then cast on with one strand over the thumb and the other over the index finger. Decide about fit—loose over cuff to fit hand or fitted cuff and a little tight over bottom of hand—and adjust the number of sts accordingly. This pattern is easily adjustable for variability in sizing, yarn, and needles.

CO 72 (adjust the CO for gauge and desired fit). After casting on desired number of sts, slide slipknot off, divide sts over three or four double-pointed needles and join, being careful not to twist cast-on row. Knit around, alternating strands, until mitt is desired length to thumbhole.

Thumbhole: For right hand, place first 16 sts (or about 22 percent of total stitch count) of round on a holder (for left hand, place the last 16 sts, or 22 percent, of the round), CO the same number of sts over the gap, and continue until mitt reaches base of fingers or desired length. Bind off. Weave in yarn tails, including those from original slipknot.

JANE DYMOND

Jane Dymond has knitted several of these fingerless gloves, usually in sportweight yarn in one color. For this pair, she decided to try a heavier yarn that included mohair. She wanted to try out a horizontal design feature to contrast with the vertical lines. She cast on 44 stitches with long-tail cast-on, using both strands of yarn held together for each stitch, and then knitted two rows in garter stitch using only one strand of yarn before joining and dividing onto three double-pointed needles. She knitted 16 rounds in the Fair Isle technique, then knitted one round using both strands held together, purled one round with both strands, and then knitted a round with both strands together. She then knitted 5 rounds in pattern using only one strand in each hand. She followed this with knitting 1 round holding both strands together. On the following round, she bound off 8 stitches for the thumbhole using both strands, then continued the round, purling with both strands. She knitted the next round with both strands and cast on 8 stitches where she had bound them off the round before. She then knitted 16 rounds in pattern (using one



Project Notes

Fiber: 4 oz 80% Merino/20% kid mohair top (Castile, purchased from www.huacayamoon.com).

Preparation: Top separated into staple-length segments.

Drafting method: Short backward draw from the fold.

Wheel: Schacht Matchless.

Wheel system: Double drive.

Ratio (singles/plying): 9:1 singles; 11:1 plying.

Singles direction spun: Z.

Singles twists per inch: 10–11.

Singles wraps per inch: 22.

Twist angle: 21°.

Number of plies: 2.

Plied direction spun: S.

Plied twists per inch: 4–5.

Plied wraps per inch: 16.

Total yardage: 267.

Yards per pound: 1,068.

Yarn classification: Worsted.

Yardage used: 140.

Needles: U.S. size 7 set of 4 dpn.

Gauge: 6 sts and 6 rows = 1" (gauge in stockinette before finishing: 5½ sts = 1").

Finished size: 8" circumference, 7½" long.

strand in each hand), followed by one knit round using both strands, and finished with a purled bind-off using both strands.

While the double-stranded bind-off and cast-on for the thumb are helpful, the yarn is too soft to show off the vertical pattern.

Jane Dymond has been knitting since she was five, following in her mother's footsteps. She loves knitting with and being inspired by friends. She is now learning to spin, kindly coached by Carol, Eileen, and Elizabeth.

LIBBY BECKER

Libby Becker is a relatively new knitter and a nonspinner. This project was an opportunity to learn a new knitting technique as well as to use handspun yarn. Carol spun a luxurious blend of cashmere, silk, and Merino, which Libby found to be extraordinary to knit with. Smooth, incredibly soft, with a lovely sheen, it was a real pleasure to touch and knit. She will definitely seek out handspun for another project.

The two-handed stranded knitting technique proved to be a struggle. Libby held one strand in each hand and

found that the lack of coordination and inability to maintain yarn tension, demonstrated by the limp drape of yarn over the left forefinger, was frustrating in the extreme. With encouragement and advice from experienced friends to be patient and keep trying, she found that within an inch or so, the technique was indeed possible, and by the time she reached the thumbhole, it was much easier. By the end of the first mitt, she felt competent.

Libby cast on 48 stitches with a single strand and knitted back and forth in stockinette stitch for 7 rows using the

smallest size needles, then joined to work in the round, switching to a 32" U.S. size 6 circular needle for the magic-loop method, joining in the second strand of yarn at the same time. She did paired increases up to 60 stitches over the next 10 rounds and then switched to U.S. size 7 needles for the remainder of the mitt. The result was a wider hand over a fitted wrist. The thumbhole was done with a 10-stitch slip-stitch bind-off and a long-tail cast-on over the gap.

Project Notes

Fiber: 1.85 oz Lambspun roving, www.lambspun.com, Suede colorway, 33% each cashmere, silk, Merino wool. Yarn spun by Carol.

Preparation: None.

Drafting method: Short backward draw.

Wheel: Schacht Matchless.

Wheel system: Double drive.

Ratio (singles/plying): 9:1 singles; 11:1 plying.

Singles direction spun: Z.

Singles twists per inch: 10–11.

Singles wraps per inch: 20.

Twist angle singles: 10°.

Number of plies: 2.

Plied direction spun: S.

Plied twists per inch: 6–7.

Plied wraps per inch: 14–15.

Total yardage: 185.

Yards per pound: 1,600.

Yarn classification: Sportweight.

Yardage used: 128.

Needles: U.S. size 4 for the cast-on and the seven stockinette rows; 32" circulars, U.S. size 6 for the wrist and size 7 for remainder of mitt.

Gauge: 6½ sts and 6½ rows in pattern = 1".

Finished size: 7½" circumference, 7" long.



Project Notes

Fiber: 7.35 oz Coopworth (purchased from Hidden Valley Farm and Woolen Mill, www.hiddenvalleyfarmwoolenmill.com). Yarn spun by Eileen.

Preparation: Roving.

Drafting method: American long draw.

Wheel: Louet S10.

Wheel system: Bobbin drive.

Singles direction spun: Z.

Singles twists per inch: 6.

Singles wraps per inch: 22.

Twist angle plied yarn: 15°.

Number of plies: 2.

Plied direction spun: S.

Plied twists per inch: 3.

Plied wraps per inch: 14.

Total yardage: 468.

Yards per pound: 1,020.

Yarn classification: Worsted.

Yardage used: 83.

Needles: U.S. sizes 4 and 6, sets of 4 dpn.

Gauge: 7 sts and 7 rows = 1".

Finished size: 6½" circumference, 6" long.

ANN NELSON

Ann Nelson purchased the Coopworth wool roving at the Wisconsin Sheep and Wool Festival from Carol Wagner, festival organizer and co-owner of Hidden Valley Farm and Woolen Mill in Valders, Wisconsin. Eileen Pierce spun the fiber into a delicate yarn. Ann wanted a snug fit and a dressy look for indoor wear during Wisconsin winters. She used U.S. size 4 needles for the first 1½ inches and then switched to U.S. size 6 needles for the remaining 4½ inches. A relatively new knitter, Ann used an elegant picot bind-off, demonstrated by knitting instructor Elizabeth Prose, to complete her mitts.





EILEEN PIERCE

Eileen Pierce is the girl with the spinning wheel tattoo! An Ashford Traditional on her right ankle, to be specific. But nowadays she spins on a single-treadle Schacht Matchless. The warm red/brown of this alpaca/Shetland wool pin-drafted roving from BrambleWool Farm caught her eye at the Door County Shepherd's Market. The semiworsted handspinner's roving was a joy to spin, requiring a mere flick of the wrist beforehand to loosen it up. Z-twist singles spun long draw were gently plied S-twist resulting in a puffy, round two-ply yarn. Eileen soaked the skeins with Orvus Paste, rinsed with a touch of lavender essential oil, and then twirled the skeins overhead to release the excess water before setting them on a wooden rack to dry.

After casting on 42 stitches and knitting 4 rounds, Eileen placed Czech glass beads size 2° on every third stitch using a "hook" of beading wire. The elastic rib-textured fabric resulting from knitting stockinette two-handed was a lovely surprise. To stabilize the thumbholes, Eileen added a round of single crochet. After soaking the mitts in lavender water, she set them on a towel to air-dry. Inspired by the two-handed knitting practice these mitts provided, Eileen is ready to launch a new Fair Isle project.

Project Notes

Fiber: 7 oz 78% red alpaca/22% moorit Shetland wool pin-drafted roving (purchased from BrambleWool Farm, www.sawmat.com).

Preparation: Quick opening of roving with flick of wrist.

Drafting method: American long draw.

Wheel: Schacht Matchless.

Wheel system: Double drive.

Ratio (singles/plying): 9:1 (both).

Singles direction spun: Z.

Singles twists per inch: 10.

Singles wraps per inch: 19.

Twist angle: 20°.

Number of plies: 2.

Plied direction spun: S.

Plied twists per inch: 4–5.

Plied wraps per inch: 13.

Total yardage: 348.

Yards per pound: 795.

Yarn classification: Worsted.

Yardage used: 105.

Needles: U.S. size 5 set of 4 dpn.

Notions: 14 size 2° glass beads.

Gauge: 6 sts and 6 rows = 1".

Finished size: 6½" circumference, 7½" long.



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ELIZABETH PROSE

Elizabeth was very excited when Ann offered this lovely Lorna's Laces hand-dyed fiber to be used for the fingerless glove project. As soon as she held this fiber, she knew it would make a gorgeous self-striping thick-and-thin singles.

A relatively new spinner, Elizabeth had been practicing spinning thinner and more even yarns for the last couple of years. She had been warned by spinning friends and instructors that once you learn how to spin fine and even yarns, it is harder to go back to spinning the thick-and-thin yarns you spun when first learning to spin. So her challenge was to consciously spin a softly spun thick-and-thin yarn like some of the millspun yarn she favors as a hand-knitter.

Elizabeth wanted to maintain the integrity of the long color sequences of the fiber, so she did not predraft, but rather hand-fluffed and spun directly from the top. She was surprised at how mindful she needed to be while spinning to preserve the uneven quality of the yarn. She noticed that if she let her thoughts drift, her yarn became more even. After spinning the singles, she set the twist in a warm, soapy bath and very gently hand-agitated the water to help the fibers lock together.

Elizabeth used the magic-loop method, held one yarn in each hand, and adjusted the pattern to suit her yarn and gauge. She cast on 44 stitches and worked in pattern for 2 inches. When she reached the wrist, she increased 4 stitches (2 stitches on either side of the last stitch of the round), maintaining the pattern as set.



Project Notes

Fiber: 4.8 oz Lorna's Laces Wool Top, www.lornalaces.net, #64 Gold Hill.

Preparation: Combed wool top.

Drafting method: Short forward draw.

Wheel: Schacht Matchless double treadle.

Wheel system: Double drive.

Ratio: 9:1.

Singles direction spun: Z.

Singles twists per inch: Varies.

Singles wraps per inch: 9.

Twist angle: Varies.

Total yardage: 234.

Yards per pound: 780.

Yarn classification: Light worsted.

Yardage used: 110.

Needles: U.S. size 5 circular, 32".

Gauge: 6¾ sts and 6¾ rows = 1" in stitch pattern (unstretched).

Finished size: 7¼" circumference, 7¾" long.



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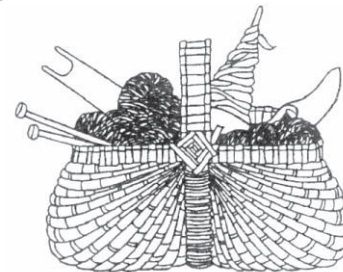
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Project Notes

CAROL HUEBSCHER RHOADES

After considering several strategies for a striped pattern, Carol settled on an idea with a little spinning challenge. She spun the solid blue for a fine two-ply and then spun an S-twist singles with the space-dyed fiber. Sampling revealed that a singles about two-thirds the diameter of the plied yarn worked well. When knitting, Carol held the singles as the dominant yarn, which made it look thicker. To keep the singles fine enough without too much twist, she predrafted very well and barely drafted while spinning. The singles retained the intense colors while the knitting structure allowed the two-ply to suppress the natural biasing of the singles.

Carol cast on 72 sts with three-strand German twisted cast-on (blue over the thumb and alternating the two yarns over the forefinger for the loops). When she realized that the cuff fit her wrist but would be tight over her hand, she added a thumb gusset. On every third

Fiber: Bluefaced Leicester top, 1 oz indigo-dyed blue (www.averbforkeepingwarm.com) and 0.8 oz space-dyed greens and blues (www.dyespot.com).

Preparation: Blue—stripped top into $\frac{3}{8}$ " wide strands; greens/blues—split $\frac{1}{4}$ of top width lengthwise and predrafted well.

Drafting method: Short forward draw with open drafting triangle.

Wheel: Schacht Matchless.

Wheel system: Double drive.

Ratio (singles/plying): 9:1 singles; 11:1 plying.

Singles direction spun: Z for 2-ply yarn, S for singles.

Singles twists per inch: Blue—9; greens/blues—8.

Singles wraps per inch: Blue—30; greens/blues—22.

Twist angle: Blue—20°; greens/blues—15°.

Plied direction spun: S.

Plied twists per inch: 7.

Plied wraps per inch: 16.

Total yardage: Blue—112; greens/blues—116.

Yards per pound: Blue—1,792; greens/blues—2,320.

Yarn classification: 2-ply sportweight; singles fingering weight.

Yardage used: Blue—99; greens/blues—91.

Needles: U.S. size 1.5; U.S. size B or C crochet hook.

Gauge: 10½ sts and 8½ rows = 1".

Finished size: 7" circumference, 8" long.

round, she added a stripe of each color by knitting into the side of each stitch below the 2 center sts of the gusset. After binding off the cuffs, Carol tight-

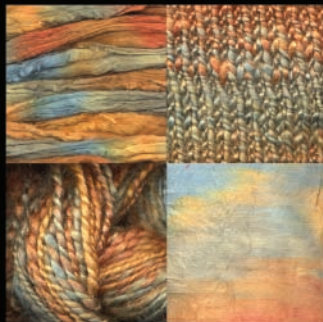
ened the edge with 1 round single crochet and 2 rounds slip stitch. The color matching of the cuffs was totally serendipitous.



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Call for entries

In the **Handspun Gallery** of the Spring 2011 issue of *Spin-Off*, we'd like to showcase your version of Stephenie Gaustad's Helix Scarf, a free pattern that we've

posted on our website at spinoffmagazine.com/helixscarf, and invite you to submit your entries.

Submissions must arrive in our office by Monday, December 13, 2010.

Entries must be made from 100% of your handspun yarn. Keep track of your spinning details by filling out the spinning details form included in the Helix Scarf Call for Entries, posted on our website at spinoffmagazine.com/helixscarfcallforentries. If you alter the knitted pattern, please keep track of the altered details with the Helix Scarf pattern details form (also included in the call for entries).

Please download the Helix Scarf Call for Entries for all the details, including the mailing address, spinning details form, and the Helix Scarf pattern details. If you're not able to access the guidelines or pattern online, please send an SASE to:

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Knitting Abbreviations

* *—repeat all instructions between *
 beg—begin(ning)
 BO—bind off
 cn—cable needle
 CO—cast on
 dec—decrease
 dpn—double-pointed needles
 inc—increase
 k—knit
 k1f&b—knit 1 into front and back of st
 k1fb—knit 1 into front and back and front of st
 k2tog—knit 2 together
 M1—make 1 by picking up loop between 2 sts, place on left needle and k into back of loop
 M1L—work same as M1
 M1R—make 1 by picking up loop between 2 sts, place on left needle and k into front of loop
 p—purl

pm—place marker
 pso—pass slipped stitch over
 p2tog—purl 2 together
 rem—remain(ing)
 rep—repeat
 rnd(s)—round(s)
 RS—right side
 sl—slip
 sl 1, k2tog, pso—slip 1 st, knit 2 together, pass slipped st over the knitted decrease still on right-hand needle
 S2kpo—Sl 2 sts kwise, k1, pass both slipped sts over the st just worked (double-decrease worked)
 ssk—slip 1 kwise (twice), place on left needle and knit together through back loops
 st(s)—stitch(es)
 tbl—through the back loop
 WS—wrong side
 wyb—with yarn in back
 wyf—with yarn in front
 yo—yarnover

Crochet Abbreviations

ch—chain
 dc—double crochet
 dc 2 tog—*yarn over hook, hook under loop of next st, wrap yarn and draw through, yarn over hook and draw through first 2 loops on hook; rep from *, end with yarn over hook, and draw it through all 3 loops on hook
 dtr—double treble crochet
 rep—repeat
 sc—single crochet
 sl st—slip stitch
 sp—space
 st(s)—stitch(es)
 tr—treble crochet

Spinning Abbreviations

bpi—bumps per inch
 tpi—twists per inch
 wpi—wraps per inch
 ypp—yards per pound

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ROC DAY CELEBRATION—Ithaca, NY. Black Sheep Handspinners' Guild. www.blacksheephandspinnersguild.org; (607) 564-7178. January 8, 2011, 10 a.m.–4 p.m. All Saints Parish Hall, 347 Ridge Rd. (Rt. 34B) Lansing, NY 14882. Old-fashioned fun, Spin-in, Vendors, Workshops, Silent Auction.

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Spinning Memories

B Y A . M . B A K E R

When I spin in public, I consider myself an ambassador of the fiber world. I only spin if I'm in the frame of mind to field questions and ignore stares. Most reactions I've had to my spinning in public are positive, and often the wheel is a conversation piece that begins with the question, "What is that thing?" and ends with shared bits of personal histories.

Today, I notice a woman staring at me shyly while I spin in the coffee shop/bookstore near my house. I am glad when she approaches me and asks if what I'm spinning is synthetic.

I tell her the pink fiber is virgin lambswool. With an accent I don't recognize, she says, "How excellent—may I touch it?"

When I hand her a tuft of wool she holds it gently, fingering the fiber with respect. I watch her watching me spin; she holds the fiber as if it is antique and breakable. After a moment, she hands the fiber back to me and asks me to stay put. "I must find my husband and grandson and show you to them," she says.

I keep spinning, flattered by the woman's enthusiasm; she is beautiful. Tall and slender and dressed in a black suit with ebony hair showing gray that hangs straight and just past her chin, the woman is impeccably polished. My wheel moves clockwise, and my bobbin gathers the pink singles obediently. When the woman returns, her husband and grandson both look embarrassed as she tells them, "This is wonderful. This is like my memory . . ."

I don't know what she means by "memory." Am I a figment from some strange spinning dream she recently had? Doubtful. I never stop treadling;

my hands feed the fiber, tension twisting the soft fluff into string. Even after two years spinning, this, to me, is a miraculous thing.

The woman is talking quickly to her husband, and I can't decipher her words—I don't think they are English. Then she begins telling me a story.

"I remember," she begins, "as a young girl in my native village, how the older girls would spin outside—like



ILLUSTRATION BY BENJAMIN S. CLARKE

you are now—and they would sing and tell stories to stay awake." I nod. Now I am the curious one. She is brimming with words—vivid descriptions of these memories.

"There were no televisions, of course; we didn't have even electricity," she says. "The girls had to stay awake—this was not for fun—they were spinning to feed their families."

The woman is standing over me, her eyes moving from my face to my hands to the ceiling where, I assume, her

memory is. "For money, you know," she adds—and she tells me more. "They used cotton—not your lambswool. It was very hard on their hands, and it would hurt after spinning a long time. The girls, they told their stories and sang and it was dark. I would watch them for hours. It was . . ." She pauses, searching for the word. It is a word she knows in her own language that escapes her in English. I fill in for her and say, "It sounds magical."

And I mean it.

She told me how the circles lasted long hours, until the darkness drove them to their beds, and then she said, "We must go, but tell me your name."

"Angi," I say. "Please tell me yours."

"Riffi," she says. I repeat it twice, committing it to memory and trying to properly roll the "r" and accent the last "ee" syllable. It is beautiful the way she says it. It sounds like a marble clinking to the floor when I say it.

"Riffi," I say. "Where are you from?"

"I am from Pakistan," she says.

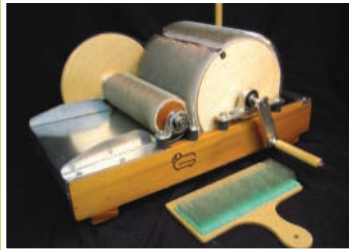
I commit these things to memory and let the story spin into a stronger fiber in my mind. Before she leaves, she says, "Thank you for this, because you are keeping alive something I thought was old and dead." ❧

A. M. Baker of Florida, is a twenty-five-year-old knitter and spinner living in a too-warm climate. She braves the humidity and can be found in nooks and crannies of coffee shops knitting or spinning when not writing or mothering her three-year-old. In 2011, she will graduate with an MFA in creative writing from Goddard College, at which point she plans to write about fiber and people—two of her favorite things.



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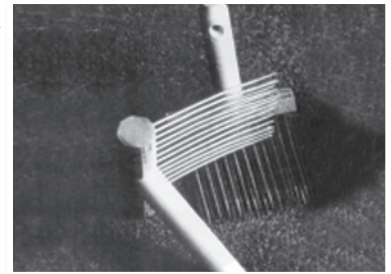


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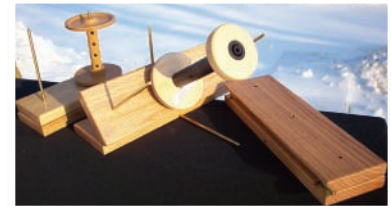
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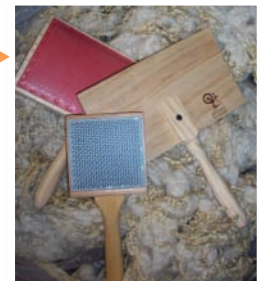


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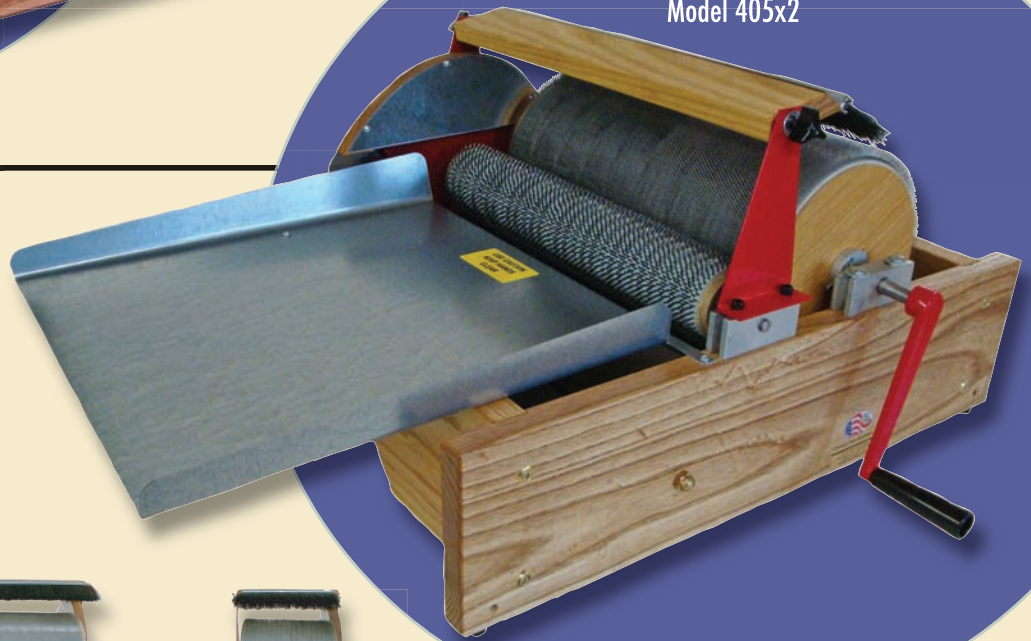
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