

Teaching Us Old Dogs New Knits

by Maddy Cranley

Turning on the radio last Saturday, I found myself tuned into an interview about to begin with a group of artisans who were in the process of setting up a craft show. When the first craftsperson identified herself as a knitter, the interviewer immediately responded, "You sound too young to be a knitter!" The woman replied patiently that knitting is an interest that appeals to many different age groups and shouldn't just be considered an activity of elderly women. It certainly was a reflection of the stereotype that knitters seem burdened to carry in relation to their craft. There is a prevailing notion that those who knit should be pitching and rolling in rocking chairs on the porches of the nation.

As well, a recent magazine advertisement for a popular brand of orange juice promoting the benefit of their product as a source of calcium, warns women to "avoid bingo, knitting and early bird specials". Now I began to feel some resentment. Maybe we should do what Margaret Scott did at Stoney Cove near Hinckley, England. Mrs. Scott, aged 72, in order to celebrate her birthday decided to knit at seventy-two feet underwater. The stunt was staged in reply to a friend's reprimand of Mrs. Scott that she should be at home knitting rather than pursuing a new found hobby of deep sea diving.

Many of us started knitting as children and we have accumulated twenty, thirty or forty years in the knitting wars which certainly qualifies us as veterans in skill not necessarily in age. We have soldiered through the apprenticeships of the garter stitch scarf, socks, hats and a first simple sweater - learning as we go. We have lived through or squeezed into the body hugging styles of the 50's or relaxed and rebelled in the free flowing styles of the 60's.

Younger knitters may have had their first knitting experience kindled by the influence of British designers in the 70's or had their start sampling one of the many specialty yarns to appear at that time, resulting in sweaters so fluffy one had to keep shrugging off this strong urge to hibernate come the next winter. Of course, if we have been knitting long enough we begin to see cycles as the style pendulum swings back to the more traditional knits of Fair Isles and Arans or forward to "picture" sweaters depicting the latest offering from Hollywood. These days, bugs and insects seemed to have replaced dinosaurs as the favorite motif of the month. You may also notice cycles in your own body of knitted work as you decide that the entire family should be dressed in chenille or what you really need is an extended family of knitted teddy bears.

Knitting is never old or just for the old. It is a craft full of changes and fresh looks as is evident by the limitless number of designs and ideas that come into the marketplace each new season. We may be veterans - old hands at our craft, experienced, wise and skilled but we are always looking to take on something new and challenging. So why not be comfortable while we explore the latest knitting adventure? Which way to the porch?

Maddy Cranley is a professional knitwear designer, who has created exclusive designs for knitting and craft magazines, authored and published three books on the subject of creating felt garments and projects from handknitting, and produces an ever-growing line of maddy laine handknitting patterns. For additional information, see <http://www.maddycraft.com>

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