


Chapter One



Have It Your Way: Seeing Beyond the Pattern

 ver the past three decades of knitting, and with hundreds of projects under my belt, I think I have only followed a pattern completely a handful of times—almost never with the yarn that the pattern called for. This wasn't necessarily because I feared conformity or lacked patience, but because I had limited materials to work with and wanted to create something uniquely “me.”

Within this book, I hope to pass on a little of what I have learned over the years.

After showing you some of the tools you will need: needle types and sizes, a few of the many yarns you can buy, and then teaching the basic knitting techniques you'll need to start with, this book will guide you on how to adapt a pattern to make your knitted item turn out just the way you want. Make it individually yours, or follow the patterns exactly as they are written. (There are a number of things in here that I want to knit for myself!)

I'll offer simple ways to alter the look of the pattern. Just changing the colors, yarns, and trims of items can alter the look completely. The possibilities are endless!

The patterns in this book have been gathered from a variety of contributors; some of the designers are new to knitting themselves. My aim was to offer a collection of patterns to suit a wide audience and show how knitting is a diverse craft for a diverse crowd.

God or Science? The Evolution of Knitting

Was God the first knitter? Is (S)He up there now, desperately trying to complete a new ozone layer because we wore a hole in the last one?

I'm joking about this, of course. But a lot has been said about knitting being “the new yoga.”

I'm not a religious person—knitting is my religion and I practice it daily. I'd like to think of yoga as being my religion too, but if that were the case, I'd have a beautifully toned and flexible body instead of a ridiculously large yarn stash!

Strange as it may seem, there is a connection between knitting and yoga. Many knitters find peace and spirituality while clinking away with the needles. The simple rhythmic motion, the feel of the yarn running steadily through their fingers, the low chanting, “Knit one, purl two, slip, slip knit...ooooooooooooommm.” Oh, I almost drifted off then, just writing this!

Knitters feel great satisfaction in completing a project, especially if it is a gift. We can proudly say, “Here, I made this for you; there's love in every stitch.”

Some people say that knitting is like an addiction, as we get a buzz every time we buy yarn for a new project—the side effects being that as we spend so much time knitting, the housework suffers. But who cares about a little dust on the mantelpiece when you can make your own beautiful sweaters?

The Not-So-Distant Past

Before the popularity of the knitting machine, all knitted items were made by hand. Working-class children learned how to knit from their mothers and grandmothers. They would knit for their families, usually learning a pattern by heart, then churning out the same item over and over again. If there was anything left after clothing their families, they would sell knitted items to help pay for food and other household necessities.

Although it was mainly the women in the family who took on the bulk of the knitting, men also knew how to knit. Their tasks were more masculine. Fishermen would knit their own sweaters out of heavy oiled wool, which made them somewhat waterproof. Those crafty sailors used knit and purl stitches to include their initials into the patterned yoke of their guernseys, thus enabling them to be identified if they fell overboard.

Knitting back then was very different from how it is today. As recently as the 1950s and 1960s, yarns and fabrics were relatively cheap. My grandmother made all the sweaters for her family, and just before she passed away, she completed all her projects. It was as if she knew her time was almost up. All of my grandfather's, father's, and uncle's sweaters were finished, elbows were patched up, and socks were darned. Not until the house was in complete order did she leave this life.

Nowadays we really don't *need* to knit. Machines can whip out sweaters much more quickly and cheaply than anyone can by hand. Knitting today is not the chore it used to be, but much more of a luxury pastime. Many people knit for relaxation. It helps us through hard times, it helps us concentrate, and it helps steady a restless mind.

In this computer-dominated age where machines do everything for us, we never need to leave our homes. We can buy everything we need over the Internet. Why do we even bother getting out of bed? Is it because we live in this age of time-saving devices that enable us to work longer hours to earn more money to buy more time-saving devices that we need to sit

down, take some of that precious time, and create something beautiful and functional with our own two hands? It feels good to say, “I made it myself.”

So forget about your worries and the pressures of everyday life. Pick up a soft bundle of fiber and your needles, snuggle into your comfy chair, and slow down for a change. Let your knitting guide you and indulge in your creativity.

The Here and Now

Today, handicrafts are back in vogue. If only I had been born in this decade, I would be so much cooler in my original, lovingly created outfits. Even mass-produced items are being churned out with details giving them a homemade look.

New yarn shops are springing up all over the place. The coolest ones are part yarn shop, part café, so you can sip your mocha-choca-latte while perusing the latest in luxury yarns and browsing the pattern books, which are looking more and more like photography books than ever before.

Knitting is no longer a hobby you practice only in your living room. This is big business! I knit on the subway, while waiting in line at the bank or post office—I even knit while walking the streets of Manhattan and nobody seems to bat an eyelid.

Groups of knitters are gathering all over the world to share their hobby and their lives with other like-minded people. Internet groups have members thousands strong, swapping patterns and tips. Large numbers of these knitters are older ladies, for whom completing a sweater for little Jimmy, religiously following their patterns, is reward enough, but the army of new knitters whose numbers are growing daily want something *more*. More exquisite yarn, more exciting patterns. Knitters today have never had it better.

Now that you know a little about knitting history, I hope this book will entice you into becoming a more inventive, more fearless knitter as you experiment and enjoy taking knitting into the future.