



Newsletter #27

November 2014



Available to Newsletter subscribers only! *Gradient-Dyed Unspun Swedish wool.* Light and warm, each wheel is unique in color progression and size (wheels average 4- 5 oz. A single strand knits up at about 4 sts to 1"). The gradient dyeing results in amazing color shading. Our supply is limited - call Tami for details/orders: **1-800-YOU-KNIT (800-968-5648).** Colors (clockwise from far left): 38-Purple/Green/Blue, 719-Brown/Yellow/Orange, 710-Red/Yellow/Orange, 704-Rainbow, 705-Purple/Pink/Lilac, 713-Blue/Lime/Lilac, and 708-Blue/White.

Dear Knitter,

Yes, we have already received snow in Wisconsin. How appropriate, since we are very excited to present two new wools: *Gradient-Dyed Unspun Swedish wool* and *Blackberry Ridge Finger-weight wool*. Take advantage of our free shipping offer (bottom of page) as you stock up for winter projects. **For a limited time, every order of Blackberry Ridge wool includes an original 2-color hat pattern from designer Meg Swansen - free!**

See p2 for a Q&A with Meg about Fair Isle and 2-color knitting (plus we offer a brand-new book from Europe).



Meg's tam pattern free with BR wool order!



Blackberry Ridge Finger-weight wool. Put up in 1 oz. skeins (112 yds), this 2-ply fingerweight is hand-dyed in small batches of 20, so make certain to order plenty for your project. Meg has already knit a tam and is working on a sweater - she loves knitting with this wool. Click [here](#) to see all 50 colors!



free shipping* on any order over \$50!
 Offer good through 11/30/14 (use promo code 'Nov Sale').
 *US postage only. International orders will be credited the equivalent US rate.

Q&A with Meg Swansen

Q: *Why are you so fascinated with Fair Isle knitting and what led you to it?*

A: At the outset, I would like to distinguish between Fair Isle and other types of 2-color knitting. The differentiation has been getting increasingly blurry since Fair Isle knitting began to be spelled with a lower-case 'f' and 'i', and sometimes as a single word *fairisle*, and was used when referring to any multi-colored knitting. However, Fair Isle is a very specific type of 2-color knitting, as practiced on the Shetland island of that name.

Icelandic and Scandinavian color designs are not Fair Isle. The most important variance is the employment of color. While using only two shades per round, the coloring can be as simple or complex as you like: sometimes a Fair Isle motif may be shaded from light to dark and back to light; sometimes the background colors are being shaded; frequently both foreground and background are being shaded at the same time. This technique is exclusive to traditional Fair Isle knitting. While a few of the motifs may overlap with other cultures, the classic OXO and peerie patterns remain uniquely typical to Fair Isle. The main motif band is an uneven number of rows high, and frequently an unexpected color is used on the middle round only.

My greatest pleasure when knitting Fair Isle patterns is finding the 'song' hidden in each round. For instance, in Chart 3 of my *Giant Latvian Mitten Cardigan (Schoolhouse Press Pattern #34)*: *5drk, 1lt, 3drk, 5lt, 3drk, 1lt. Repeat from *. It becomes quite hypnotic. The rhythmical aspect is very soothing and, when coming upon a repeat OXO, I love remembering that particular song from earlier in the sweater.

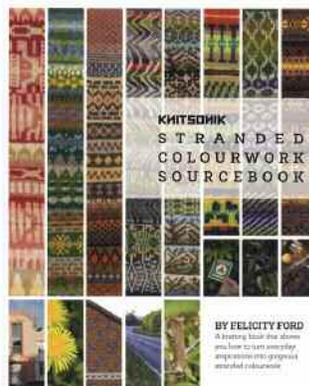
Naturally, the play of colors is exceedingly satisfying and provides unendingly variation.

Q: *If I'm new to Fair Isle (or color pattern) why is a tam such a good place to start?*

A: I usually recommend knitting a hat (or tam) to anyone who is learning or practicing any new technique; I call it a Swatch Cap. You need only one (as opposed to socks and mittens), it is a relatively small project (not a large investment in materials), and even if you are not thrilled with the result, someone will love it, or some charity will be grateful to receive it. Meanwhile you are knitting your third or fourth hat, while altering or correcting the things you didn't like about the first ones. Check out *Knitting Tams: Charted Fair Isle Designs* by Mary Rowe for some great hats with easy to follow charts.

Q: *What do you like about the new Blackberry Ridge wool, and why is it a good fit for Fair Isle or 2-color knitting?*

2-Color Knitting Books from Schoolhouse Press



Brand-New! *Knitsonik Stranded Colourwork Sourcebook*,

which shows you how to turn everyday inspirations into gorgeous stranded colourwork, by Felicity Ford. Upon seeing a splendid landscape, or garden, or grocery-store display, how many of us have had a flicker of knitting scamper across our brains? This is the mode used by Felicity Ford to conjure up her idiosyncratic and wonderful color patterns.

For her inspiration, Ford uses biscuit tins, tree branches, row houses, fruit cake, and assorted other shapes and colors (colours) in her surroundings, (the 8 Practical Exercises on page 11 will cause you to *see* anew). She then gives you a step-by-step process to choose colors, sketch the motif, and knit a series of swatches. An altogether lovely and unique book.

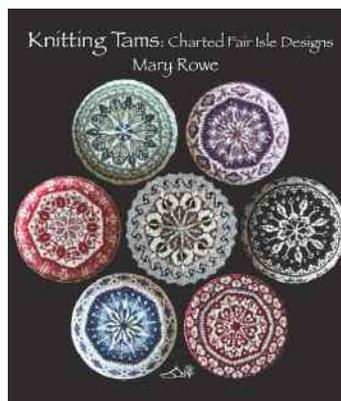
Traditional Fair Isle Knitting,

Sheila McGregor. This is an indispensable book for Fair Isle knitters/designers: 900 (yes, nine-hundred) pattern charts, arranged according to height. So, if you have a finite amount of space for a yoke pattern, you can dial up motifs with the proper number of rows. Really an amazing treasure trove of patterns. arranged in the most useful of ways.



Mary Rowe's splendid *Knitting Tams: Charted Fair Isle Designs*.

Mary is a magician - mixing patterns and colors to create beautiful, functional works of art. All seventeen of the new tams in the booklet feature comprehensive charts - we think you'll love knitting these wonderful little jewels. You can play with Fair Isle patterns and colors without having to commit to an entire sweater. Most of the tams are knit in the beautiful *Shetland Spindrift*, available in over 200 sparkling colors.



A: The diameter of the wool is a perfect weight for Fair Isle and other 2-color knitting. It yields a general gauge of between 6 and 7 sts to 1", with room for variance. I love the range of colors being offered, and the most surprising thing for me is the softness of the 100% wool. I am now at work on a BR sweater and enjoying it immensely.

Q: For Fair Isles what is the best way to swatch (i.e. test knitting to choose colors and find gauge)?

A: Again, I turn to a Swatch Cap. I like the idea that my swatch - while yielding important information to me about colors and tension, will also end up as a useful artifact. (Or, if I run out of wool, my swatch cap can be ripped to finish the sweater.)

Color choices for a standard Scandinavian or Icelandic design are relatively simple, and a quick cap will answer your



questions about color compatibility. However, if you are designing a true Fair Isle garment from scratch, there may be several months of swatching ahead of you. Employment of color in this more complex knitting tradition is an art and science unto itself, and the slightest change in color-choice may yield significantly different results.

Swatching is a fraught subject:

- It is a necessity (because how *can* one knit a properly-fitted

sweater without thorough knowledge of one's gauge?), but an unpleasant one for some.

- Others are philosophical about it, and will quite happily knit as many swatches as are needed to obtain not only critical gauge information, but also experiment with color. I think of Betts Lampers - one of our knitting community's treasured Fair Isle designers. She patiently swatched for several months before deciding - not only on all the colors for her

breathtaking *Autumn Color Fair Isle (SPP #31)*, but the critical employment of those 18 colors.

- There is another bunch of knitters who are quite happy to *only* knit swatches. They learn about hundreds of different types of knitting materials, stitches, and color combinations. They sometimes unite them into useful blankets.

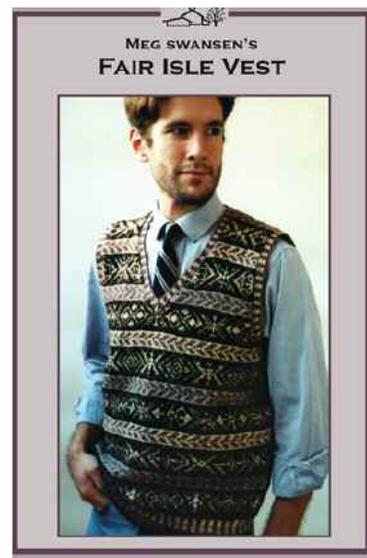
- I am part of a rather small gang of non-swatchers (Joyce Williams was in my gang). I would rather make a guess at gauge and needle-size and have to rip several inches on 300 sts and re-start from scratch, than knit a 6-inch square. If I must knit a swatch, it will be a useful swatch cap. Knitter's Choice.

Q: Do you remember your first Fair Isle project (what was it) and when did you design your first original pattern?

A: My first Fair Isle was the yoke sweater shown here (left) and on the back-cover of *The Opinionated Knitter* by Elizabeth Zimmermann. I followed my mother's chart, but chose my own colors and was very pleased with my results.

I wore that sweater for decades, during which I knitted a number of other yoke sweaters; some Fair Isle, some just multi-colored utilizing my own original motifs. I would spend days and weeks (and many erasers) with blocks of graph paper, experimenting with shapes and designs... little knowing the ease of computer-charting which lay only a few decades ahead of me.

For my original *Fair Isle vest DVD*, I built a 32-stitch template and made up all my own OXO motifs (no two alike). I'm sure they exist somewhere/sometime, but I did not copy any from McGregor's *splendid book* (my main Fair Isle motif source, details p2). The colors for that design were all chosen from the surrounding landscape during April in Wisconsin.



Good Knitting.
Meg