



Newsletter #24,
spring 2014
Fair Isle knitting & Shetland wool



“...And when I say Shetland, I mean study the label carefully. If it admits to enfolding a yarn of only 5% Shetland, even its manufacturer must agree that it is hardly Shetland at all... Real Shetland is a truly exclusive product, as it *has* to come from a cluster of small islands off the north coast of Scotland...”

-Elizabeth Zimmermann, *Knitter's Almanac*, 1974

Knitting Tams: Charted Fair Isle Designs
 Mary Rowe



Dear Knitter,

We are pleased to announce the publication of *Knitting Tams: Charted Fair Isle Designs* by Mary Rowe. Mary is a magician - mixing patterns and colors to create beautiful, functional works of art. All of the hats 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.

To make it even easier to jump into Fair Isle knitting, we offer a sale on our Shetland Spindrift wool. **Save 20% on selected colors** - for a limited time only.



Spring Shetland Sale
20% off selected colors

NEW

Meg Swansen's Knitting Camp - 41st year!

Here we go, plunging into the 41st summer. This year Session 1 is held over the Independence Day weekend (July 3rd to 7th); isn't that fitting for an Elizabeth Zimmermann based workshop? ***and space is still available!*** During Session 1 we discuss EZ's free-ing approach to seamless garment construction, two-color knitting, steeks, and much more. There are a number of small projects you can work on during our time together - choose one involving a technique which may be new to you. Examples include: The Very Warm Hat (*2-color knitting*); EZ's Norwegian Mittens (*a gusset and 'thumb-trick'*); an Entrelac Tam (*knitting back backwards*); a cap worked with Armenian knitting; and a Potholder (*utilizes over half a dozen I-Cord applications*). Knitters love the expert instruction, informal atmosphere and comradery.

Visit <http://www.schoolhousepress.com/camp.htm> to join us!



Very Warm Hat & EZ's Norwegian Mittens

Q&A with Meg Swansen

Q:

A dear friend of mine is going to do her first Fair Isle sweater. I, of course, suggested that she knit a Fair Isle Yoke Sweater from *Knitting Around*. This morning I got out my book and my *video of Knitting Around*. How truly wonderful to sit and watch you and EZ knit and talk. So much fun and so great to listen to the two of you joke and have so much fun with your knitting. What a genius your mom was (which she seems to have passed on to you, and you to your son). She truly used every gift God gave her and the best part is she shared it all with us.

One quick question. Why do you not want us to carry a finished yarn up a couple of rows where it will be used again?

Thank you for the answer, the book and the video.

A:

Thank you, dear Linda, for your kind words. I will be sure to pass your note to Cully.

If there is only one (or maybe two) intervening round(s), I usually carry the color up to work in the subsequent round. If carried a greater distance, you run the risk of distorting both the final stitch of the lower rnd, and the first stitch of the upper rnd; the carried strand might be either too tight or too loose.

And, that broken end can be valuable. By judicious darning-in, you can all-but-eliminate the appearance of a jog at the beginning of the round. Darn the final strand of any color *down* and diagonally to the *left*. Darn the initial strand of a new color *up* and diagonally to the *right*. If you look at the front of the work as you tug the broken strand in various directions and you can see what I mean.

Ron Schweitzer Collection

These splendid Fair Isle design books are now out-of-print, but we were able to procure the last of them. Order all 4 together for just \$29.95 (reg price \$63.80 - save over 50%): *Travel Logs*, *Chesapeake Collection*, *Appalachian Portraits* and *Postcards from Shetland*.



Q:

I am currently working on your Man's Norwegian dropped-shoulder sweater that was published in the 2002 special edition of *Vogue Knitting* and had a question about the pattern. I have completed the body of the sweater and am about half way thru the Fair Isle section at the top. My question is, when you place the 41 center stitches on a piece of wool and cast on the 5 steek stitches in their place, do you do that both front *and* back or just in the front.

A:

Dear Troy, I did that only at the center front (on the center back, I interrupted the pattern motif and knitted in the date), *unless* you want the neck-back to dip down.

Some people like that, and will make a second steek a little higher than the front one. I like the neck back to be higher and snugger; no drafts (or, draughts).

Q:

I am trying to knit a vest using EZ's EPS and *Meg's Fair Isle vest DVD* as a guide. I'm having a terrible time, however, determining the number of sts to be placed on a holder for the armholes and the number of sts to be dec for the armhole shaping. If I put 8% on a holder, and then it says to dec to 15%, I'm not sure what that means? And second question, if I use this method to also knit a vest in a toddler size, am I still able to use the same percentages or does that need to be altered? The child in question is 2 yrs old and has a 19" chest circumference. I hope you can help me!



A:

Dear Emily, For an average adult size, you want to remove a total of 15% of [K] for each armhole opening. I usually put about 10% of [K] sts on threads at each underarm, then decrease away the remaining 5% at the sides of the steek; i.e., for a 200-stitch body, put 20 sts on thread at each underarm. Cast on the steek sts and knit a few rounds. Now: 'k2tog, knit steek, ssk' every 2nd round 5x and you've eliminated another 10 sts (30 sts total, which equals 15% of [K]).

For a toddler, you may start with EPS, but beware that little bodies are sometimes in different proportion than adults. You can turn to one of the books (*Sweater 101* comes to mind) that give schematics for all shapes and sizes - adjust where necessary. In general, head openings should be about 50% (instead of 40% for adults), and arms rarely need shaping.

Q:

I am working on your *Fair Isle Vest* and have a question. I have knitted up to the underarm and am about to start the kangaroo pouches. I have knitted the final plain round of the pattern band, and backed up 14 stitches (I am doing the largest size) and put 8% of [K] (29 stitches) on a thread still counting backwards. Or should I put the 29 stitches counting forward again which will include the 14 stitches counted backwards?

Hope this makes sense and that you could help me out so that the V-neck will be centered.

A:

Dear Jae-Kyung, You have marked each side 'seam' stitch as well as the center-front and back sts.

Your second scenario is correct: knit to the beginning of the round; back up 14 sts - put them + the next 15 sts (the 'seam' stitch, plus the 14 sts on the other side of the 'seam' stitch) on a thread. Now you must break the wools and join them in past the 29 sts on a thread.

Knit around to within 14 sts of the other side 'seam' stitch; put the next 29 sts on a thread.

Cast on the steek sts and continue to the beginning thread. Cast on the 2nd steek and you are set to start the armhole shaping.

Q:

I have just received Meg Swanson's *Shawl Collared Vest* video and watched it yesterday. I am absolutely stunned! The video is amazing, great detail and such a different construction method. I also loved the cats; my cat also enjoys sitting near me, or even lying on the work, when I am knitting.

I am going to knit the vest for my dear husband and perhaps for myself as well. My husband was also watching the video and he spotted the beautiful fair Isle hat in the video, the one just behind Meg in caramel/brown (?) colours, and thought he would like that very much. I love Fair Isle knitting and have done this for quite a while. Is there a pattern or a book containing that particular hat? I would love to know.

A:

Thank you for your enquiry dear Hendrika. I just looked at the DVD and see the *Swedish Dubbelmössa*, knitted in single-strand *Unspun Icelandic wool*

(caramel, dark brown and cream). The construction is intriguing and results in a hat with 4 thicknesses of material around the brim - very warm and soft! The gauge is about 7 sts to 1" and the instructions (with charts) are in the book, *Handknitting with Meg Swansen*. And for those who want extra help, I also offer a video tutorial (on DVD).



Q:

I have been trying to replicate the original EZ seamless yoke sweater in *The Opinionated Knitter*, with fair isle but from what I can tell the chart that accompanies that pattern is slightly different than the picture of the original sweater. I wasn't sure if that was because that chart couldn't be republished since it was published in a magazine or if I'm crazy and seeing things!

If the chart is different and available for purchase I would love to get it, I have been trying to "unvent" the chart but it's been challenging and I was hoping that you all might have an easy out for me.

A:

Dear Lauren, It is a bit of an optical illusion: all the yokes on pp6, 12 & 13 are knitted from the chart on p11 (as hard as that may be to believe). Follow the chart faithfully and watch with amazement as that motif emerges from your needles. And, of course, your color choices will alter the outcome enormously.



Q:

I have recently begun to knit the Fair Isle yoke sweater featured in the *WG79* issue. I am unclear on a part of the instructions that calls for putting stitches "on threads." Can you please explain what this means? Is this the same as putting the stitches on stitch holders?

A:

Thank you for your enquiry, dear Pam. Yes, 'on threads' is a way to temporarily hold stitches. Simply pull a scrap piece of wool through the sts with a blunt sewing up needle.

By putting the sts on a piece of wool, they remain flexible. If you instead put the 4 groups of underarm sts on metal stitch holders, you will have a very difficult (if not impossible) time while working the first few rounds after assembling the sleeves and body.

If you are nervous about using lengths of wool, you can tie the ends together to assure that no sts will escape.



Q:

I have a quick question about the Henley neck Fair Isle decreases on p26 of EZ's *Knitting Around*. It appears all three decreases are of the 'knit 2 tog, knit one' variety, as opposed to the more subtle shaping of decreases described on p23. Also, it appears that the first decrease on the pullover version has the first decrease occurring before Pattern A, whereas the Henley neck has the first decrease coming *after* pattern A. I am assuming it is possible to substitute the pullover decreases while retaining the patternwork for the Henley neck version? And, if so, should the first decrease come before or after pattern A? I'm assuming it probably doesn't matter if the decrease falls before or after pattern A, since on the Henley neck version it's a small pattern, but before I commence knitting, I'd like to double check.

A:

Thank you for your enquiry, dear Jamie. Yes, I designed the Henley in the Olden Days - before I came up with the more subtle decrease-rounds. I now prefer 1/4, 1/3, 2/5 for the 3 rings of decreases (as opposed to my mother's original, 1/3, 1/3, 1/3).

Since the motifs do not line up with each other vertically, you may certainly substitute the alternate decrease method.

You may place the first decrease round wherever you like: before any patterns, or after the first small pattern. If you are working 3 concentric rings of decrease, you want the first decrease to be at about the halfway point of the yoke-depth.

Q:

Still being somewhat of a newbie knitter I can achieve stitch gauge but my row gauge is much larger than usual, with fewer rows per inch. Usually this is not important but it limits patterns such as on Norwegian yokes. What is causing my row gauge to be loose? How can I tighten row gauge without also tightening stitch gauge?

A:

It's a jungle out there, dear Pam; row gauge is so quixotic.

Two friends of mine were both knitting identical all-over patterned Fair Isle vests. They each achieved the *exact* same number of stitches to 1" -- but, at the same vertical height in the motif, one body was 3-inches longer than the other! One had oblong stitches and the other had square stitches.

I don't believe there is an easy way to alter your row gauge without affecting your stitch gauge, but as long as you know the shape of your stitches, you will be able to make necessary adjustments. For example, on a Norwegian yoke, you may use a shallower pattern, or start the pattern earlier. If you know your row gauge, and how deep you want the yoke, it is a simple matter of division to see what you can fit where.

I am still mystified by how stitch gauges can match so exactly -- but row gauges be so disparate. Isn't knitting amazing?

Q:

I am interested in the *Circular Stranded Surprise Jacket* (black, white and gray) for size small women. I am also interested in the *Latvian Mittens*. What yarns are recommended for these projects?

Also, I have knit many *Baby Surprise Jackets*, but have not had much experience with color/stranded knitting. I have been knitting for almost 40 years and can knit any pattern, but have not ventured into multiple color knitting yet.

Are these good projects to start with or will they be too overwhelming?

A:

Thank you for your enquiry, dear Mary Sue. If you are just launching into color-pattern knitting, I recommend you knit a few patterned hats or tams in order to establish your most comfortable and effective method.

We all knit slightly differently - and there are several variables. You may decide to hold one color in each hand; you may hold them both in your R, or both in your L hand. After 3 or 4 hats, your hands will have decided these things for you! And, one can never have too many hats to wear, or to donate to charity, or as presents.

The Adult Surprise prototype was knitted in our *Québécoise wool* at about 5 sts to 1".

The Latvian Mittens are in *Shetland Jumper-weight* at a gauge of about 9.5 sts to 1".

I hope you will fall under the sway of soothing and hypnotic color-pattern knitting.

Q:

I am interested in making one of the Faorese shawls you showed on the *Lace DVD*. How to do the lining?

A:

Dear Katy, Marilyn can Keppel's beautiful shawl pattern is from the *Faroese Shawl book (Bundanaurriklaedid)*.

She knitted the shawl in *Shetland Jumperweight wool* and worked the lining in *Shetland Laceweight wool*.

After the shawl is finished, take some Laceweight and, using same size needle as shawl, knit up sts - on the 'wrong' side - above the color pattern, keeping in the same horizontal row. Work in stocking stitch for the depth of the color pattern. Half-weave the raw sts to the row below the pattern. Tack the sides together.

