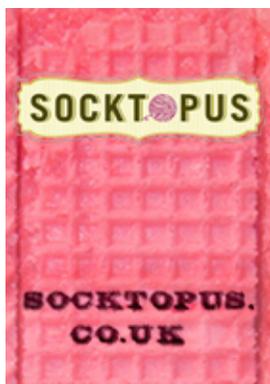


The Inside Loop

Dedicated to Fibre Arts in the United Kingdom

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Imagine Your Handspun

By Joanne Seiff

Knitting with handspun yarns is a special experience. The yarn is live, textured, handmade and unique. Yet, many spinners haven't made the leap. Their handspun yarns remain finished objects in themselves. These fabulous skeins decorate baskets and cupboards, waiting to be taken to the next level - that of actual garments.

What's the hold-up? Here is a brief tour of my cedar chest. Hopefully these well-worn items will help inspire you to experience the joys of knitting (or crocheting) with handspun. Help handspun realise itself as a finished item with its own use. It's well worth the adventure.

I can't get handspun to match the tension of the project I want to knit.

Reverse your process. Start first with what the handspun offers you in terms of tension and meterage and then find or adjust the pattern to fit your treasure. When you're ready to work with handspun, pick a needle size you think looks like it will match and experiment until you like how the tension square knits up. This is done with practice. If you don't like the first needle size, experiment by going up or down in size until you get the knitted fabric that's right for you. The hand and feel will vary depending upon the fibre and spinning style. For instance, merino is a fine wool, and will pill if knitted into something that will see hard wear. Karakul is a coarse wool ideal for rugs, but to be avoided when thinking about knitted camisoles!

An example from my own cupboard would be this lace poncho. Spun out of a New Zealand



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Romney, this two-ply dk weight yarn doesn't look or feel like lace. However, I swatched it and tried it with the kimono lace pattern from *Folk Shawls* by Cheryl Oberle. It looked fabulous, but I didn't think I'd wear a stole. After I knitted and blocked the garment, I stitched up the ends and it became a hardwearing poncho. Great for someone who's often on the go and who loves wearing handspun but doesn't have a dressy lifestyle that allows for delicate fibres or laceweight.

The colour variations of this yarn make it hard to use in a pattern.

Do you ever throw your yarns in a dye pot and get a wild combination of colour? I have! A great way to use that colour successfully is to choose a pattern that isn't too complex. You don't want the colours to clash with a complicated cable or texture. Then, try knitting with two alternating balls of yarn, or use a centre pull ball and alternate using either end of the same ball. This makes for a splashy blend of hues without much pooling or too many stripes. My best examples of this are two sweaters, one scarlet and one blue, which I made in graduate school. We lived in a drafty old house, and it was hard to concentrate on my studies in the winter. I took a variety of bulky weight yarns, dumped them in the dye pot, and knitted each of these sweaters up in about three weeks on 9mm (13US) needles. Are these masterpieces? No, but they never needed to be! These thick woollies keep me warm, and I still wear them, several years later.

A second example is entirely different. I loved spinning a two ply naturally grey variegated Romney wool yarn from a friend's sheep. Yet, when the time came for knitting it, I was stuck with – you guessed it - variegation. Instead of fussing over it, I embraced the stripes. I used a simple broad rib in the vest, and while the results are quirky, they're also artistic. When people ask about this, I explain that the sheep came in this colour, and hence, so does the finished garment!

I'm intimidated by knitting with this. My handspun is too (fill in the blank) to use!

What goes in the blank? Flawed? Perfect? Too thin? Too thick? Many of our concerns about using our own handspun come from our own psyches. All yarn, thread or rope is useful. Our ancestors spun all their fibre into yarn, and wove or knitted it. They found a use for it. It's truly a luxury to feel your yarn is something that cannot be used. Even some of my experiments in linen spinning found use, as a way to tie up my tomato plants in the summer time. Uneven and

unattractive, that yarn did a great job in the garden.

Some handspun is truly a work of art, and deserves to be saved for an heirloom knitted garment. I'm incredibly proud of a counterpane cardigan I knitted out of handspun Texel/Friesland wool. I bought this special fleece on my honeymoon in Devon, at [The Big Sheep](#). It took me about three years to work through this project, which I knitted into around sixty triangles on 3.25mm (3US) needles. The oversized cardigan I created may not be worn every day, but I'll never forget this special fleece!

Other skeins were never anything special *until* they were knitted up. I wear mittens that I made about fourteen years ago. Knitted from single ply chunky handspun, they were nothing special back then. I churned out mittens for all my university friends, too. Today, I cherish these school day remnants, which still keep me warm.

Handspun yarn isn't perfect, and that's where I find the most pleasure in it. If you spin your own yarn, you have control over a finished product and over what that yarn can become. Every fleece and skein has such potential! Experienced spinners may plan their next knitting or weaving masterpiece when they meet the right sheep or fleece.



The rest of us don't need to feel that much pressure. Hold that skein in your hand, and close your eyes. Imagine yourself wearing some special creation, or maybe, just an everyday pair of socks or a sweater. Imagine it's made of handspun.

[About the Yarn](#)

Handspun yarns are a delight to work with. For all your spinning needs contact [DT Craft and Design](#).

[About the Author](#)

Joanne Seiff is a writer and knitwear designer. See more writing and Seiff's patterns at her website, <http://www.joanneseiff.com>. Her first book, about U.S. fibre festivals, will be published early in 2009.

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