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An Interview with Beth Brown-Reinsel at EduKnit

This PDF is intended to serve as a resource to go along with our interview post with Beth Brown-Reinsel, found here: <http://eduknit.com/?p=2212> We hope you'll enjoy reading the highlights from Beth's interview!

Types of Color Knitting

Beth says that Intarsia isn't her favorite style of knitting, but she could do stranded knitting forever. She mentions that even though most people think of Fair Isle as the only method for color knitting, that's a misnomer. She explains that Fair Isle has a particular set of rules, such as only including two colors in each round or how many stitches you can "float" the yarn along in a row. So Fair Isle is a part of stranded knitting, but not all stranded knitting is Fair Isle. Several other types of color knitting exist - including Norwegian, Swedish, and Latvian knitting - and those often incorporate several colors in one row or round.

Beth explains that "technique is technique" - and there are many ways to knit color work, using one or both hands according to the knitter's preference. Each style of stranded knitting tends to have its preferences where that is concerned.

Steeking

Steeking isn't just the act of cutting your knitting - it's the act of putting extra stitches into your knitting for the purpose of cutting them later. Shetland wool has many microscopic "hooks" in each fiber, which helps to hold the fibers together. So as Beth explains, you can cut Shetland wool and it won't really go anywhere, making it ideal for color work that will be steeked. Other more slippery fibers will unravel when you steek them.

Historically, knitters would add stitches at the armholes and the front of a cardigan in order to keep knitting in the round. Beth believes that it's from this practice that knitters began avoiding the concept of purling back across a piece of stranded knitting.

In contrast, when Beth examined 19th century knitted garments in Scandinavia, she was surprised not to find steeks. A museum curator explained to Beth that the knitters were very

frugal in that age, so when knitting one garment they were already thinking ahead to how they would re-use that yarn in another garment once this one had worn out or been outgrown. So they would knit in the round for the body of a sweater, and then work back and forth for the underarm and neck portions in order to avoid cutting the yarn, so it would be more useful in the future after the garment was unraveled.

In modern Scandinavian color work, the garment often has smaller steeks - anywhere from zero to four stitches - so the knitters will stabilize the steeks by sewing on a machine before cutting, rather than relying on the yarn itself.

Yarn Dominance

Yarn dominance is the phenomenon that results from holding two yarns in one hand while you knit a piece of stranded color work. The yarn that is held below will actually create slightly larger stitches than the one held above; and this creates a visual difference in the finished knitted piece. Here is an example of that:



Left: Red dominant. Right: Black dominant.

Yarn dominance is one reason that it's so important to swatch your stranded knitting. You'll want to figure out how the yarn dominance is happening in your work, and which way you want to control that for the finished piece.

Free floats vs. weaving floats

When you carry a float behind your work, you create more elasticity in the finished garment. Catching the yarn and weaving the floats around each other can prevent snagging the float, but it also creates a much denser garment. In the interview, Beth shows an example of a garment which includes weaving between every other stitch - but you can actually see the alternating yarns on the front of the work when that happens. The act of weaving actually changes the dominance of the yarn for one stitch, so it affects the overall appearance of the project.

More Tips from Beth:

- When holding both yarns in one hand, place your middle finger between the two strands to help separate them and improve your tension.
- Most people prefer for the "patterning" yarn to be dominant and the "background" yarn to recede, so think about that as you're swatching and knitting.
- Beth's general rule for floats: The float needs to be over an inch long before she "catches" the float as she goes. She does note, though, that with most wool the floats will gently felt on the inside of the garment and it won't make much difference; most of the fear of catching our yarn is greater than the reality of it actually happening.
- Stretch your work often and vigorously in order to even out your tension.
- When working on double points, turn your work inside out so that you are carrying the yarn around the outside of the piece instead of the inside.

Thank you so much for joining us at EduKnit to bring your expert knowledge to our members, Beth!

About EduKnit

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