

Wonder-wool WORLD!

Meet three women creating handmade happiness



Jem delights in the spectrum of shade variations

'A dye day still feels like play'

Jem Arrowsmith, 48, is a yarn dyer and knitting designer. She lives in Cambridgeshire with her husband and four cats

I came to yarn dyeing through knitting design. I was designing shawls and accessories, but I quickly realised that if I wanted to make it sustainable as a business, I needed to offer more than just the pattern. So, I started dyeing the yarn to go with my designs and completely fell in love with it.

What I adore about hand-dyed yarn is its individuality. Even if I dye the same

colourway twice, no two skeins will ever be identical. That variation is the magic! A dye day still feels like play. I might be working with colourways I know well, but I'll always experiment, perhaps by layering shades,

'Some of my favourite shades came from happy accidents'

adding speckles or responding to a photograph a customer has sent for inspiration. It's always exciting waiting to see how the yarn will turn out, as when it's wet the colours look darker, and you can't quite see what you've made until it dries. Some of my favourite shades have come from happy accidents!

The best part is when a customer shows me what they've knitted with my yarn. It's always incredible to see what the yarn drying in my kitchen for hours has become.

* undertheolivetreeknits.com

Bec loves the stillness that spinning brings



'My customers can select wool from their favourite sheep!'

Bec Briar, 46, is a hand spinner who lives in west Somerset with her husband and their flock of primitive sheep

I was knitting so much that I questioned whether it'd be cheaper to buy some sheep rather than all the wool I was buying. It turns out it's absolutely not! Spinning wool from my own sheep has become about the special connection between the animals and the end product. It's incredible to be part of the whole process from selecting the sheep, deciding which ram goes with which ewe, watching lambs being born, naming them, getting them sheared, the wool carded and then finally running the fibre through my fingers at the wheel.

At the wheel, with my foot treading and my hands steady, my mind quiets and it's one of the



With Vita, a Shetland ewe in Bec's flock

few things that keeps me still. I love to see the transformation of rawm, slightly greasy fleece become beautiful strong yarn.

'I've spent three hours spinning for a single piece'

Slow crafting demands patience. I've spent three months spinning for a single piece. I'll never earn properly for those hours, but that's not really the point.

The value is in the story, the sheep and their care. My customers get to know my sheep and can select wool from their favourite one!

* thewovenbriar.co.uk

'The rhythm of weaving is so absorbing'

Emma Baker, 57, is a hand weaver from Wiltshire. She makes scarves, shawls and snoods and teaches others to weave

Due to my love of knitting, about 10 years ago my husband bought me a second-hand spinning wheel to produce my own wool and I started spinning so obsessively that my knitting couldn't keep up!

With a build-up of hand-spun yarn, weaving felt like the natural next step. I bought a loom. Then another. Then another. Now I work on both a rigid heddle and a large floor loom, and weaving is the craft I return to most. I'm captivated by colour and it's exciting to see what new shades will be created where the warp

and the weft threads intersect. I think it's a kind of magic that other crafts can't replicate.

It's definitely a slow craft. Setting up the loom alone takes a day and a half, and it takes around five hours to weave just one scarf, but that slowness is its gift. The sound of the shuttle and the rhythm of the weaving is so mindful and absorbing. When teaching, it's wonderful to watch someone's amazement at what they've created and when I see someone wearing one of my scarves it's amazing to think that every thread of it has passed through my hands.

* [Discover more at emmabaker.org](http://emmabaker.org)



Hand-woven tea towels (above), and a checked weave under way



'It's a kind of magic that other crafts can't replicate'