



I Have This Hobby Called Knitting, You've Probably Never Heard of It

Lauren Casteen started knitting at age 14, attending a community center class to learn more after needlepoint sparked her interest in yarn crafts. Lauren is not, however, a comfortably retired grandmother but a 22-year-old undergraduate. According to her, "It is actually a growing trend, which is cool." Her great-grandmother crocheted afghans, but Lauren knits more eclectic projects, ranging from Jolly Roger tea cozies to anthropomorphic corn, the latter as a present for a friend. "Jennifer loves corn and Cornhuskin' and I wanted to make her a birthday present." She pointed out the website Ravelry, a social network for knitters, as a hub of interaction for the wave of younger, hipper knitters taking over the craft. "That's where I archive all of my projects to get feedback. You can publish patterns and in-process projects, too."

Lauren learned the basics from the community center class – "knit and purl are the two basic stitches everything else is based on, and cast on and off" – but then, like any modern craftswoman, headed online. With the aid of YouTube video tutorials and Amazon, she learned more about knitting. "I recommend the book *Stitch 'n' Bitch* by Debbie Stoller," which Amazon calls a "slightly offensive, sassy guide-which could easily have been subtitled 'The Bad Girls' Guide to Knitting'" and is definitely aimed at the under-45 set. She also says, "You can find a lot of patterns online, including a lot of inappropriate ones."

In the knitting world, there are process and progress knitters; Lauren considers herself the former. "I'm a process knitter. I knit because I like it. Progress knitters knit for the end result; they knit because they want something." Despite this, she prefers quick, easy projects she can use to occupy her hands while doing other activities. "Projects range from super-easy to super-complicated. If it's super-easy, you can do it while you're doing something else and be productive. Sometimes I'll bring stuff to class [...] teachers don't mind because it's less distracting than when people twitch or jiggle their feet." Another example is her hobby-within-a-hobby of knitting turtles – "I make them whenever someone I know is having a baby" – or the aforementioned corn – "I

made it in two nights, sitting on the couch watching TV, probably a total of four and a half hours.” Lauren’s favorite project, however, took her almost four and a half months: a green cardigan, the first sweater she ever knitted. “I like to be able to use the things I’ve knitted. I can cram it in my bag and put it on in class when I’m cold.”

Lauren emphasizes the creative aspect of knitting. “You’re actually creating the pieces. Instead of starting with something and breaking it down, you’re starting with nothing and building it up.” When asked if she had ever had any pieces displayed other than on Ravelry, she laughed. “It’s more of a craft than an art form. It’s not something that’s usually displayed...well, except the people who wear stuff I make them.”

In the future, she’d like to be able to attempt bigger pieces. “I made another sweater this summer and it went a lot faster than the last one. But I’ll get frustrated and quit. That’s why I wouldn’t knit a blanket. Or lace – that’s too much math for me.”

—*Katrina Kempney*