

on your feet

Knitting in the Noughties

Don't let anyone pull the wool over your eyes ... knitting has a new image, insists **Lisa John**.

It may still get you some funny looks in the staff room, but knitting has come full circle in the trend stakes. Already gaining popularity in the US due to the publication of a funky knitting book aimed at young women (*Stitch 'n' bitch* by Debbie Stoller), the snapping of celebrities such as Julia Roberts and Elle MacPherson with needles in hand acted as the catalyst to a knitting craze among the young and hip.

Knitting as a craft can be traced back to Egypt at the beginning of the first millennium AD but, over time, and with the introduction of the knitting machine, it has become a social activity and now makes for a fantastic and rewarding hobby.

You only have to master two basic stitches – knit and purl – before a world of patterns and designs opens up to you. The rhythmic

clacking of needles and repetitive looping of wool swiftly becomes a very therapeutic pastime – lulling you into an almost meditative state (until you drop a stitch!).

The equipment is fairly cheap, apart from the wool, but the sense of pride and achievement you feel in finishing each piece you knit more than makes up for the cost. You can pretty much guarantee that no-one else will be wearing the same hat, bag or jumper – or have decorated their sofa (or the waiting room chairs?) with the same cushions or throw.

In the last two centuries, knitting has come in and out of fashion many times but with the wealth of information and support available this time round and the backup of the internet, it looks as though the widespread popularity of knitting across the western world is here to stay. Equipment, materials and patterns can be bought from department stores and haberdashers throughout the UK (and are even available in Topshop!) and from numerous websites.

Knitters are no longer as easy to classify as the rocking-chair hugging, bespectacled grannies of yesteryear. The hundreds of modern patterns and baffling variety of colours and textures of wool available reflect the variety of people interested in the craft

HINTS AND TIPS

* To begin with, use a pair of big knitting needles, for example 10 mm, so that you can easily see what's happening and it's easier to spot mistakes. Once your confidence increases you can use smaller needles.

* Scarves are a good project to begin with. You can just cast on, knit away and then cast off. Simple!

* Knitting clothes and toys for babies and young children is popular, as they are small and often quick to complete.

* Be aware that many books and websites about knitting are American and their needle sizes are different. They also use some different terms, eg 'bind on' instead of cast on.

* If you're teaching yourself, don't be afraid to give any pattern a go. The more techniques a pattern involves, the more skills you'll acquire.

– you only have to look at the knitting blogs online to see that men and women in their teens through to their 40s have taken up the hobby with a passion. Would you believe that the penguin pictured here was knitted by a man in his twenties?!

Useful websites

www.knitty.com

www.knisters.blogspot.com

Useful books

The knitter's bible by Kate Buller

Knitted toys by Zoe Mellor