

# Decorating YOURSELF

*Ann* \* Is it just me, or does it seem like everybody else in the world is a better dresser? Now that I have no choice but to call myself a grown-up, I have been thinking about grooming. Natural splendor is no longer carrying the day; I have got to get busy.

There's a friend I see around town. We'll call her Madame X. Madame X dresses at such a fine level of detail that I spend most of my time with her pondering whatever ensemble she has cooked up. She has Outfits. Suits. Pantsuits. Blouses. Skirts and dresses and scarves and belts and heels and pocketbooks. I've never seen her wear the same shoes twice. Things are snappy. Things are kinky.

On one morning, while we sat drinking coffee, I realized in a flash that Madame X doesn't dress herself; she decorates herself. She's not tracking down her least-bad-fitting pair of blue pants, the way I do. She's operating under the same impulse that leads a person to hang stuff on a Christmas tree. It's not profound, or important, or efficient. It's fun. It's pretty. I'd never thought about this.

When people put a lot of effort into what they're wearing, I have always concluded that they must be shallow, vain, or boring. I never entertain the possibility that they're simply having fun. But during my visit with Madame X, I realized that she goes to her closet every morning with a little thrill: "It's time to decorate me!"

I'm not wearing enough handknits. That's what Madame X says to me every time I see her. "Why don't you wear your handknits? Surely you have a ton of 'em. Why wouldn't you wear them *all the time*?"

It's a fair question, if a painful one. My guess is that Madame X's question comes mostly because, in her mind, I knit so often that I must have nothing but handknits in my closet. To her, it defies explanation how I could have clothes that are not knitted.

She has a point. For all the knitting I've done, I remain remarkably undecorated. And I have a feeling that many fellow knitters are going through the day without consideration for their self-decoration. So, underdecorated knitters of the world, this chapter's for us. Go ahead—think about all the people you have knitted for. Now (it's not disloyal to do this) just forget about them for a minute. Give yourself a little decoration. These are projects that you can wear for years to come. You don't have to make them for the niece who's graduating from high school or the best friend who just had a birthday. We realize that you are likely to do this anyway, but still.

Make these things for the one you know best: yourself.







# The Fairest Isle OF ALL

*Ann* \* I can't believe I'm doing this.

It's time to talk about Fair Isle knitting. Hold on! Don't turn the page. Please? You may think you would never, in a million years or at least the next decade, consider knitting in the Fair Isle way. Frankly, I don't blame you.

Fair Isle is cool. It's not like any other kind of knitting. I now understand the impulse that certain ministers have when confronted with people who are skeptics, or Episcopalians, or otherwise not interested in hearing about soul-savin' salvation. I'm kind of evangelical about this: If I wave my arms around enough, if I quote enough texts at you, maybe I can convert you. No? Stay with me for a minute.

Your doubts about Fair Isle likely include the following issues:

1. Knitting with two hands.
2. Using tiny needles.
3. Keeping track of 12 different shades of yarn.
4. Following a fussy and complicated stitch pattern.
5. Cutting up your knitting to make an armhole.
6. The terrifying possibility of ending up with a boxy, loud sweater after spending 200 hours of your life working on it.
7. Never finishing.

This chapter will answer each and every one of those doubts. One promise: you won't end up with a boxy, loud sweater because there are no sweater patterns in this chapter. You will, however, gain the skills to make anything in the Fair Isle way, including the boxy, loud sweater of your dreams.

The road to salvation may not lie in learning to knit with two hands, but you will likely have a religious experience of some kind once you crank a round of the stuff in less than 30 minutes. This may be the first you've read about Fair Isle, but we hope it isn't the last.



*Watermelon colors for your  
sweet little watermelon.*



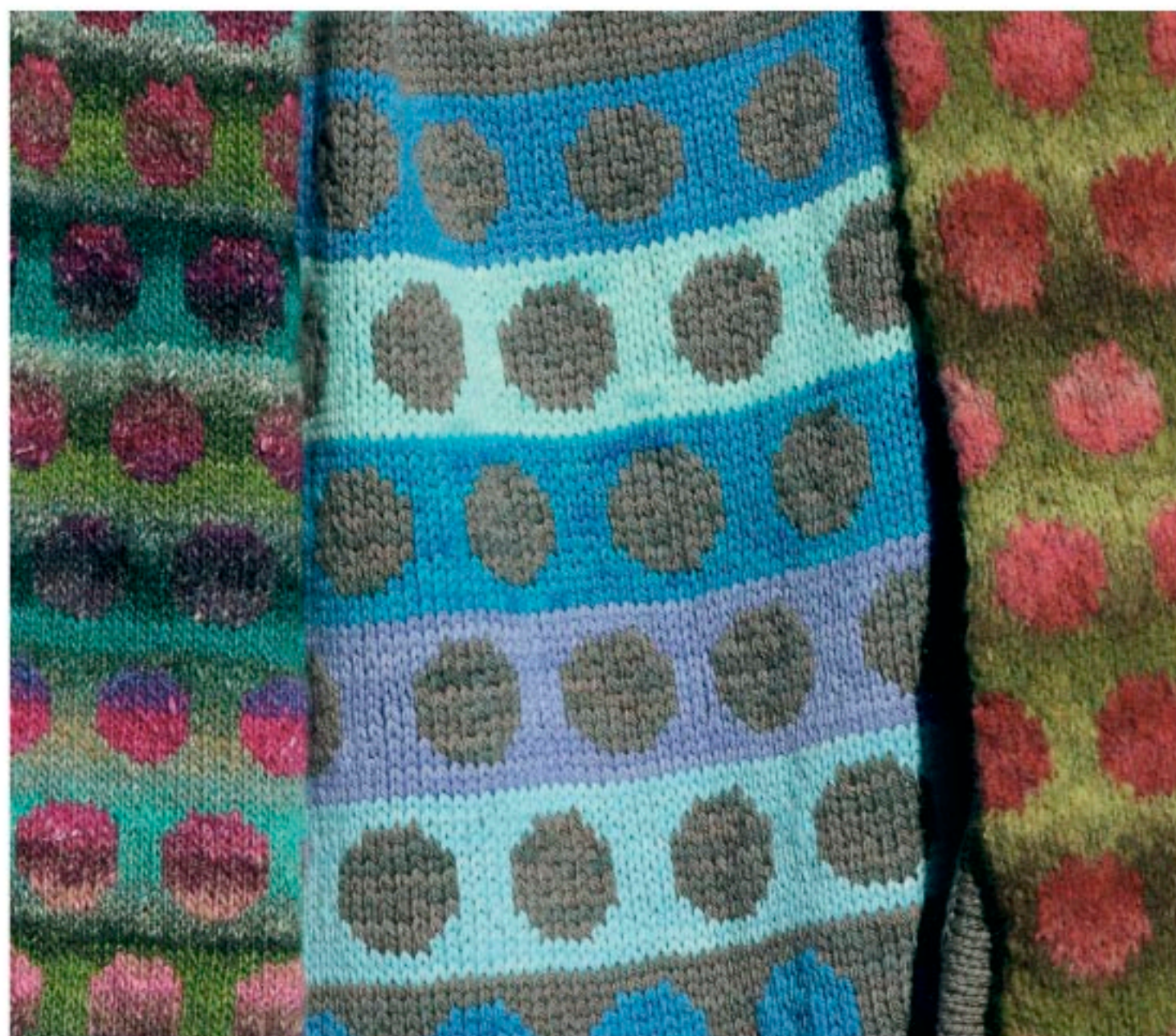


## Unapologetically Untraditional Fair Isle

There are traditionalists for whom Fair Isle is a very particular thing: Shetland yarn, fingering weight, in a lot of colors, knitted on size 3 (3.25mm) needles, in the round, working traditional stitch patterns. I love that stuff, but I'm not wedded to it. I'm not a traditionalist. In fact, I have spent a fair amount of time trying to find ways of using the Fair Isle technique that are anything but traditional.

One chronic puzzle is the problem of choosing colors for a project. Hard! Complicated! Too many choices! May require knowledge of the color wheel!

One of the great recent developments in the evolution of yarn is the availability of multicolor yarns, where you can find a symphony of pleasing colors built right into one skein of yarn. If you work Fair Isle with two different colorways of one of these clever yarns, you can end up with an extremely colorful result with little heartbreak. The Baby Dotty Blanket is designed to make the most of variegated yarns. It is also designed to be a very flexible pattern, easily adapted to whatever gauge yarn you happen to have. As written, it calls for chunky yarn that is worked on size 10 ½ (6.5mm) needles.



*A very simple Fair Isle pattern, worked on large needles, means that you will have a finished blanket pretty soon. At left, Noro Silk Garden. Center: Lorna's Laces Shepherd Bulky. Right: Crystal Palace Merino Stripes.*



# Covering THE SMALL HUMAN

*Kay* \* If you're a knitter, you probably have at least a couple of kids on your knitting radar. Knitters need kids. Kids are small; you can achieve high-volume sweater production stats if you're knitting for smaller bodies. And kids are gullible—they don't think there's anything wrong with rabbit ears on a hat, and in fact the rest of their wardrobe leads them to think dressing like a woodland creature is normal.

You don't have to look that far back in vintage knitting books to conclude that kids bear the brunt of most of the "cute" ideas that we knitters come up with. If you think I'm lying, ask yourself this question: When was the last time you put knitted ears on a garment for an adult? I'm guessing every pom-pom you've ever committed was for someone too young to vote.

If the kid you knit for is teeny, you're reading this complacently. You're smiling to yourself, thinking of how little Johnny shrieks with delight when you tell him that the project you've

got on the needles is aimed at him. You're remembering how Dylan just loves when you knit diaphanous wings to go with her handknit fairy outfit. You're living in a dream world. Someday, my friend, you will wake up to the cold, hard facts of life: Kids grow up. Somewhere in the range of 8 to 10, Johnny and Dylan get the idea that what Auntie Knitty is making for them is flat-out the fugliest stuff they have ever seen. They dig in their heels, and their heels are *not* wearing handknit slipper socks.

