

Mohair Craft – Garment Making

D L Stapleton 28 Bowman Ave. ORANGE 2800

In the previous articles I developed the theme of Mohair Craft to the point of dyeing and spinning yarn. The question now: what can you do with it?

The answer is: almost anything. Fabric construction includes knitting, crocheting, and weaving but there is also felting as a non-yarn technique. The first two methods are easy using looping and knotting techniques while weaving uses more complex technology involving a frame (loom) and transverse interweaving of threads. Eventually the weaving effort results in a length of fabric. In that case the fabric can be an end product such as a scarf or a table centre piece or it can be a length of cloth for further manufacture. This still begs the question, what to make with it.

Almost by definition, the first two methods involve continuous knotting, trebling the thickness of the yarn in the fabric. Weaving involves the blending of one layer, a doubling of single yarn, and this seems to be a more efficient use of yarn. Weaving takes much less yarn for a given area of cloth and produces a thinner, lighter, less bulky cloth.

[Differences between wool and mohair.](#)

It's worth looking at differences between wool and mohair yarns. Wool shrinks and felts, mohair really does not. There are two physical differences. Wool fibre has a pronounced crimp while mohair fibre is essentially straight. Wool has a raised cuticular scale pattern which aids felting, while mohair has a low scale profile. Spinning puts the individual fibres under some tension but when washed, wool fibres reclaim their crimp causing the yarn to "shrink". Wool will also "felt" as the cuticular scales lock together. Mohair fibres lie parallel and straight and, rather than causing the yarn to shrink, there is a tendency for mohair fibres to slide over one another so causing the yarn or garment to stretch.



Skeins of wool unwashed and washed. Left two "superwash" knitting machine yarn, the right-hand skein is hand spun wool. Note the marked swelling of the hand spun yarn as the wool has shrunk.

So, what does mohair bring to the hand-made article?

Perhaps that depends somewhat on the method of manufacture. Knitting is perhaps the most obvious, but crocheting is also widely practiced and is my favourite. Apart from the question of, what to make, there is the deeper one of, why would you use mohair? Hand-made mohair yarn is quite heavy and because it does not felt, it suffers from stretching, especially when wet.

If you intend to knit a sweater with hand spun mohair yarn, you are taking on a big adventure. A beginner might start with something simpler like a scarf or a beanie. However, if you want to risk a sweater you need to work out the amount of yarn you will need and the size of needles. Run test strip to gauge the tension to maintain and the size of the article. It probably helps to have a pattern, but it is important to control the stretching by including cotton tape in the seams. When washing the article keep it flat and don't lift or hang the garment when wet because the weight of the knitting will drag fibres apart. Unlike mohair, wool will shrink so if you use wool the size needs to be considerably bigger to compensate and washing will show how much the article will shrink.

While a mohair sweater will be very special, it is likely to go out of shape but that might be an attraction. Coarser mohair may well prickle the wearer so choose kid mohair. With wear, the article may become somewhat "fluffy" as straight fibres move and protrude from the garment. While not the typical hairy jumper of the late 1960's it will take on a little of that character. This will increase the insulating characters because of the increased layer of trapped air, and the sheer weight of fibre will generate considerable heat from sweating or from mist and rain. (Wetting of wool and mohair is an exothermic reaction.)

Crocheting offers another outlet for "cloth" manufacture. Mohair is known for its rugs and upholstery. Rugs and blankets use the insulative properties of "hairy" (some would say "brushed") finish but crochet construction with a larger size hook is both simple and rewarding. The end product is relatively heavy but traps a lot of air in the gaps between stiches so is quite insulative.



K9 door stop and scarves on double bed rugs - 140
trebles by 106 rows

The crocheted article has a unique “drape” with a soft handle and a subtle form. Again, if you have to wash a rug of hand spun mohair do it gently and well supported when handling the wet article. Dry it flat or it will stretch, and threads could possibly break. Surprisingly, broken threads don’t go far and can actually be ignored.

There is a trend getting around of crocheting covers for things. Everything from pet rocks to telegraph poles. There is even crocheting table settings and other sculptures. Such is the attraction to fibre artists. Not that a rock (pet or feral) requires insulation, it’s just the shape and the surprise effect of the art. A friend of mine has just finished a mural of the Darling River with crocheted animas and trees – “a bayou tapestry”.



Fancy covers for pet rocks

In many ways, mohair is similar to wool though it has lustre and presents brighter colours. Perhaps it is in the spinning and dyeing that mohair has the advantage for crafters. However, the non-felting continues to be an added advantage in the garment.

Weaving uses **strong** lengthways, “warp” thread and a **more bulky** crossways “weft” thread. The warp of a piece of weaving is fixed on the as a weaving frame while the weft is passed backwards and forwards through the “shed” created by heddles which are raised and lowered warp threads between passes of the **shuttle** which has an internal bobbin of wound weft yarn. Once passed through, the weft is “beaten” against the previous pass of weft. This beating stresses the warp threads which can break so the warp yarn is made of stronger fibres and yarn, or even made of a synthetic yarn. Hence, for craft weaving the warp yarn may be specially purchased for the purpose.



Here is a grand scale floor loom weaving 1.2m mohair cloth. This photo is from a craft factory in Swaziland. Note the hand driven bobbin fired by a sling, the overhead heddle driven system controlled by foot pedals and the warp threads rolling off the rear warp drum past the weaving edge with the finished cloth wound tight to keep an even tension on the work.



A table loom can be used for smaller projects but undoubtedly still requires considerable skill and patience.

Colour and Texture.

There are two significant properties of the constructed materials. One is colour and the other is texture. Colour can be in both warp and weft and texture can be achieved by alternating the patterns created by the heddles. Colour patterns in the extreme are typified by that in tartans and textures like the angled ridges in “twills” (like the pattern in jeans), is created by

forming a sheds of two adjacent warp threads lifted one at a time. Woven mohair cloth often has a crisp handle and displays lustre because the fibres are straight and parallel. Woven rugs use looped weft threads with the loops broken during finishing to make fluffy insulating blankets.

There are countless variants in all three methods of cloth construction. Different stiches in both knitting and crocheting create patterns and textures. Weaving can be reduced to narrow “braids” or expanded to “tapestry” pictures. Craft weaving is limited by the space and size of the weaving “loom” or frame. The challenge with weaving is the scale of the project, the control of tension and the effort required to “tie in” the finished warp threads.

How much yarn do you need?

Before looking at ideas for projects perhaps it is worth thinking about how much yarn you might need and how to produce it. Major projects like sweaters and blankets need 10 or more 100g balls. This is a big ask for a hand spinner, not just for doing the spinning but also getting the amount of a



Woven craft mats of African designs

particular colour together or choosing a combination of colours. It is wise to have enough yarn ready because there is no guarantee that more yarn of the same colour and thickness will be available if you run out. Despite choosing fleeces with a particular characteristic, each fleece is subtly different. Best get all the yarn from a single fleece if possible. This is also true for colours or colour combinations.

I get bored with spinning the same fleece or the same colour, so I need a reason to continue with the same stuff and that comes from a clear objective for a project. That said, I am unsure that big projects are feasible if you don't spin the yarn yourself. If nothing else, the cost of buying 10 or more balls is relatively high, even if you could find a spinner willing to supply that much.

A note on the term "ply". For spinners the term ply means the number of single ends wound together to make yard. Most hand spinners stick to 2 ply.

Commercial makers of knitting yarn have their own description of thickness or bulk. You often see labels with "6 ply" or "8 ply" and this relates to the commercial pattern for knitters. In this case, ply is a unit of thickness, not the number of ends in the yarn.

Commercial makers of knitting yarn have their own description of thickness or bulk. You often see labels with



Perhaps a little on the commercial side but here is a warp winding exercise using various colours wound in batches onto a warp roller from cones of yarn. Groups of warp threads are wound across the width of the blanket to be woven on a mechanical loom.



In mechanical weaving the shuttle carrying the weft is fired pneumatically across the warp shed which is controlled by a pattern. The cloth is wound onto a drum as the warp feeds off the original warp drum. Regular gaps are left in the weft to facilitate separation of individual blankets.