

RKG – Colorwork – Oct 16, 2023

Our workshops this year are going to involve colorwork, and I wanted to provide a brief introduction to various ways of incorporating color into your knitting. This isn't intended to teach any of the techniques, but to inspire you to explore further on your own, either by finding books, patterns, or classes that incorporate those that catch your eye, or to just start playing with the yarn and needles - there are a lot of stitch dictionaries with many options. You can use colorwork with basic patterns – things like Ann Budd's Handy Book series – just work a big enough swatch that you'll have good numbers to plug into Ann's grids.

It may seem odd to have knitted the samples for a color presentation in grey and white, but I wanted everyone to be able to focus on the actual structure of the knitting, and not get lost in color reactions. This won't be any kind of color theory program, either – that's a whole different subject.

1. Stripes – the simplest way to incorporate color is to just use stripes. They can be narrow (1), or wide (2). They can be regular, like the two just shown, or they can be irregular (3), either in a planned sequence or chosen randomly. They can be shaped with short rows, either in triangles like this sample (4), or in curves. You can use just two colors, or make every stripe something

different. You can get some interesting effects by striping some stitch patterns.

2. Stranded knitting (5) is worked by carrying two or more colors along in a single row, and choosing the one that's wanted to form the pattern. The choice of yarn, color, and motif can vary according to style, and there are recognizable styles – Fair Isle, for example, or Nordic – but the technique is the same. The challenge is to find a way to handle the yarns that suits your knitting style, and to maintain a proper tension – not pulled too tight, but with the carried strand lying flat against the work and not hanging in long loops. This technique also works much better in the round, so that the right side of your work is always facing you and you can see what you're doing.
3. Intarsia (6) is a way of working isolated motifs or blocks of color where trying to carry the unused strand is impractical. The challenges with intarsia are to be sure to remember to twist the yarns when changing colors and to manage the tangling that can result from that twisting. This technique works much better knitted flat, although there are adaptations that can be made to knit in in the round.
4. A technique that combines intarsia and stranded knitting is usually termed Armenian knitting (7), although its history is a bit murky. It was used by the Armenian women who knitted for Elsa Schiaparelli in Paris in the 1920s and '30s, but isn't clear if anyone else had used it earlier. In this technique, you carry both colors along in every row, even when one won't be used, but lock the floats in some regular pattern. This lets you knit isolated motifs in the round, and gives a heathered look to the work. It makes a

fabric that's thicker than usual and quite inflexible. This technique works best with one color carried in each hand. The book on Armenian knitting by Meg Swansen shows a couple of ways to work it with the yarns both carried in the left hand, but it takes a little manipulation.

5. Modular knitting (8) lets you work individual sections of the work, knitting them together as you go. The sections can be striped or solid, can be a variety of shapes, and can be arranged in a variety of ways.
6. Slipped stitches (9) are a way to work with one color at a time, but slip stitches of the previous row to carry a color up to the row you're knitting on. The slipped stitches can be done at any distance apart that will give the visual image wanted, and need not be consistent from row to row.
7. Mosaic knitting (10) is a form of slipped stitch knitting that works the slips in a more regular, consistent, and frequent pattern. Again, you're working with only one color per row.
8. Double knitting (11) produces a fabric that's double layer, with two right sides, and can produce either a mirror image on the reverse side, or can have an independent image (12). Alasdair Post-Quinn did several workshops for us last April on various forms of double knitting.
9. Two-color brioche (13) produces a fabric with a similar look on each side, but with the colors reversed (14). The fabric is very thick. Each row is knitted twice, first with the main color, and then the stitches are slid to the beginning end of the needle and worked again in the contrast color. The rhythm is a bit different

from standard knitting, but those who love it really love it.

Beautiful movement can be created with increases and decreases.

10. Entrelac (15) is a way of knitting individual shapes that's different from modular knitting. You begin by building a base row of triangles in a single color. You then change colors (if you're doing more than one color), pick up stitches along one edge of a triangle and knit a rectangle (or another triangle at the edges), knitting it onto the shape in the row below. So only one color is used for each row of shapes. Each shape can use a different stitch pattern if the knitter wishes. The challenge with this stitch is the short lengths of the rows in the individual shapes. It's usually recommended that knitters learn to knit back backwards if they're going to use it frequently.
11. Illusion, or Shadow knitting is much simpler than it looks. When viewed straight on, it looks pretty much like simple stripes (16). When viewed at an angle, however, a pattern will appear (17). It's formed by using smooth, round, high-contrast yarns and changing colors every two rows, working the right side of each ridge in knit, and working the pattern on the wrong side, working in knit or purl depending on whether the color should advance or recede when viewed from the right side. The knitting is simple to do; you just need to follow the charts accurately. Amazing detail is possible.
12. Embellishments – there's no sample for this, but it's perfectly possible to embellish knitting after the basic fabric is complete. Duplicate stitch is used to embroider fine details by following the path of the knitted stitches to make it look as though those stitches were originally knitted in a different color,

but with none of the tension issues (as well as general annoyance) that could result from actually doing that. Standard embroidery can also be done. Single stitches, or a single leg of stitches, can be picked up and i-corded, say, or knitted onto to make ruffles, loops, or other 3-D features.