

hooked again!

Contemporary crochet takes a bow

Throughout the resurgence in handcrafts in the last decade has anything really been more dazzling than the return of crochet? Seriously, no matter how much you might personally love it, no one can deny that, in the 80s and 90s, crochet was about as popular as stomach flu. With science fiction and action films dominating cinemas and padded shoulders and superwomen filling magazines, there was hardly a crochet hook to be seen. Fast forward to 2010 and all that has changed. Established designers like Britain's John Rocha and newcomers like Canada's Lucian Matis are all bringing crochet to the world's most fashionable runways. Contemporary crochet is ready for its close up and local makers are jumping on board.

Great books have hit the stores in recent years such as *Wrapped in Crochet*, *Candy Crochet*, *Pop Goes Crochet* and *300 Crochet Tips*. Books only get produced because the publishers think there is a market for them. Common sense tells us then that the 10,267 results you get on Amazon.com when you type in 'crochet' are worth taking note of. Let's put it this way, only 210 results come up when you type in 'quilling'.

In her beautiful book, *Crocheted Gifts*, author and crocheter, Kim Weker, speaks of the impulse one feels to crochet that just can't be ignored. In fact, she describes her book as being "full of projects we must conjure when we're compelled to crochet for the people we love" and so she gathers 25 projects from big names in the field



Couture crochet - John Rocha's spring/summer 2010 collection.

(Photo: BEN STANSALL/AFP/Getty Images)

such as Doris Chan, Kathy Merrick and Annie Modesitt. These include intriguing homewares and accessories like a wire hairpin-lace bowl, floral coasters and a fantastic zipper bag. Kim herself includes a design for crocheted juggling balls.

But impulsive crocheters no longer need to limit their creativity to throws that stay behind closed doors or pretty baby-cot covers. People who love fashion can also love crochet and, more and more, challenging, elegant and highly directional patterns are being offered for crochet garments.

At Rosemont Australian Fashion Week (RAFW) in 2009 local labels-on-the-move, Bec and Bridge and Romance Was Born, both offered crochet creations. On the global stage, as mentioned previously, the famous John Rocha is just one to feature crochet. His 2010 spring summer collection included crochet in black or cream, dipped in sugar and water to stiffen it, and then moulded into shapes around the body, such as an hourglass dress, a spherical skirt and a bell-shaped mini. Phew, we love it!

Vickie Howell, probably one of the USA's coolest needle-toting young women, has recently released her book, *Vickie Howell's Pop Goes Crochet* which pays creative tribute to popular culture, past and present. Vickie has her own website, vickiehowell.com, and a number of books to her name plus, for eight seasons, she was the host of the (USA's) DIY Network and HGTV's show, *Knitty Gritty*.

You know if Vickie is on to something then it's high on the radar of 'coolness' in contemporary culture. In her new book she presents 40 projects inspired by celebrities in fashion, music, film and television, including clothing, jewellery and accessories. There's the fascinating 'Yohji' asymmetrical jumper (in homage to designer Yohji Yamamoto) and a funky striped 'Cameron' hoodie inspired by the laid-back Californian style of actress, Cameron Diaz.

Also from the USA, knit and crochet

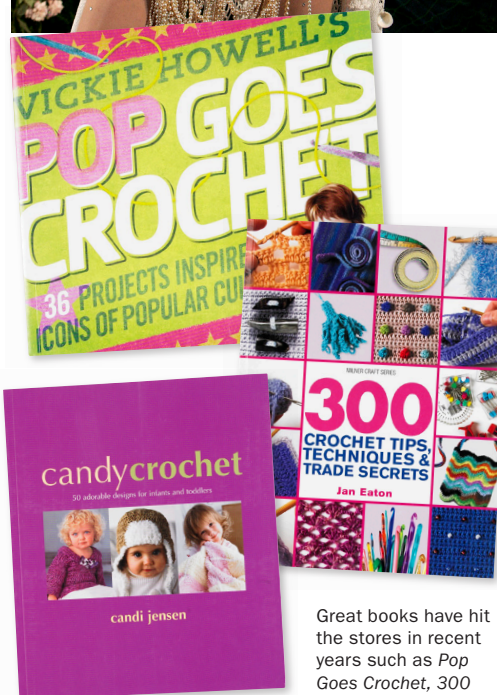


designer, Kristin Omdahl, combines her affection for mathematics and natural fibres in wonderful knitting and crochet patterns. Kristin designs knit and crochet garments and patterns under her label 'Kristin' and has authored other books including a new one out this winter called *Crochet So Fine* (Interweave). She appears in every episode of *Knitting Daily TV* on public television in the USA as the show's 'Crochet Corner' expert and conducts seminars around her home country on crochet. There is also the DVD workshop she released in 2009.

Her new book, *Wrapped in Crochet: Scarves, Wraps & Shawls*, got us thinking about the distinctive, eye-catching accessories one can produce with crochet.

John Rocha's collection included crochet dipped in sugar & water to stiffen it.

"One of the greatest advantages of crochet is that, as a beginner, you can identify and fix mistakes much easier than you can with some of the other fibre arts," says Kristin. "Unravelling back to your mistake is so easy in crochet. Also, I find that reading crochet charts and symbols is so similar to



Great books have hit the stores in recent years such as *Pop Goes Crochet*, *300 Crochet Tips and Candy Crochet*.

the finished fabric. Charted crochet is a great tool for beginners, and for determining at a glance if a stitch pattern is right for you and your project.

"I must add that reading symbol crochet patterns is also a universal language that doesn't need much translation, so it's easier to read from international patterns and symbol crochet is also great for crafters with reading difficulties like dyslexia".

Practicing what she preaches but

Here & right: projects from *Crochet So Fine* by Kristin Omdahl.



Kristin Omdahl



Bold colour use from *Wrapped in Crochet* by Kristin Omdahl.

struggling to find time to make outfits just for herself, (Kristin's just finished writing her third book and is planning her second DVD and fourth book now), the designer says she has her heart set on making an organic cotton lace skirt and a simple, short sleeved cardigan for the USA spring. "If I could squeeze that into my work deadlines, it would make me very happy. A belted lace cape would be wonderful to add to my wardrobe, too. I think that is my favourite wardrobe item right now. Cinching the waist with flowing sleeves gives a flattering silhouette to many body types," she says.

Getting to the crux of the appeal of crochet, Kristin has in the past spoken of texture and the many options both knit and crochet offer a designer. "Textures in nature heavily inspire my work ... Sometimes I think of a shawl as a canvas, where I can 'draw' a geometric design with my stitches. In crochet, it's pretty easy for me to just pick up my hook and some yarn and manipulate the stitches as I wish – no chart, sketch or swatch first," she says.

"A crochet fabric is only as good as the skills, yarns, gauge and love you put into it!" - Kristin



Left & below: Stylish new crochet titles from Kristin Omdahl.



Asked what the most common misconceptions she feels are held about crochet, Kristin says, "Occasionally, I hear that someone doesn't like crochet because the finished fabric is too stiff or bulky. A crochet fabric is only as good as the skills, yarns, gauge and love you put into it! You can manipulate crochet fabric with gauge (changing the size of your hook), you can choose quality fibre yarns and you can choose from so many beautiful stitches and patterns."

Texture is also the appeal that crochet holds for young fashion designer and 'Project Runway Canada' runner up, Lucian Matis. "I love the look and feel of crochet. It allows you to create your own materials, which adds so much originality and playfulness. Crochet also has a textural quality that you cannot find in any other medium or fabrication. I love incorporating 'old' techniques and making them more modern, updating them . . . making them my own," he said in an interview with *Interweave Crochet* when he first hit the headlines.

Knowing when something is hot is the job of staff at Sydney-based Murdoch books. Known for its beautiful and stylishly illustrated books on food and other leisure and lifestyle categories, Murdoch turned to Port Douglas-based Stephanie Milne when they decided to produce *Handmade Style: Crochet* (2007), part of a *Handmade Style*

Stephanie Milne's openwork stole.



'Jellyfish' by Stephanie Milne.



'Sirens Rope' by Stephanie Milne.

series that includes *Knit* and *Quilt*.

Stephanie's book offers 23 fun, contemporary projects for both experienced and novice craftspeople and includes designs for homewares, such as cushions, throws, oven mitts and a lampshade; garments, including a vest, skirt, shawls and bathrobe; and accessories, such as bags and beaded jewellery. Each project is clearly explained, with directions given in both written and diagram form, and there is a section with instructions on the basic techniques of crochet.



Above: *Crochet: Handmade Style* by Stephanie Milne. Right: Stephanie in her Port Douglas workspace.



Murdoch Books turned to Port Douglas-based Stephanie Milne when they decided to produce *Handmade Style: Crochet*

United Kingdom-born Stephanie is a fascinating character. A true artist but with an impressive commercial pedigree, she produces paintings, textiles, photography and jewellery. Stephanie studied art and textiles in the UK before moving to Scotland to work for Barrie, a company that designs, develops and manufactures the highest quality cashmere knitwear for prestigious couture houses around the world.

From there she moved on to the

famous British house, Burberry, whose distinctive tartan pattern has become one of its most widely copied trademarks. The higher Stephanie rose in the design world the further she found herself moving away from actual design.

"I travelled all over the world, worked six or seven days a week, often for 14 hours a day, and I knew I had a job some people would give their right arm for," says Stephanie. "But, on the tube (train) one day I had one of those light bulb moments and realised I was being very ungrateful. This was not what I had gone to art college for and I was not happy. I knew someone else should have my job and I should be doing something else."

Stephanie took a "sabbatical" from her professional design life for two years and travelled, learned to scuba dive, worked with orang-utans in Borneo and,

nine years ago, arrived in Australia.

"Creatively I had been completely burned out," she remembers. "I got to Australia and that creativity just clicked back on. I returned to craft and started making handbags and bits and pieces and selling them at Bondi and Paddington Markets." She moved on to jewellery making, selling pieces priced from \$30 to \$900, featuring fine knitted yarn with precious stones and beads knitted into it.

"I was very focused and had some great, esteemed stockists such as Object and Form, Studio Ingot and Craft Victoria but I found I was becoming a mini factory. People began comparing my stuff to the cheap woven goods coming out of India. I knew it was time for a change." Stephanie continues to use the technique in her exhibition pieces,

incorporating it into other works of art.

These days Stephanie is interested less in commercial products and more in producing a “purely art based product”. “It makes me happy!” she declares.

She paints and works towards exhibitions and private sales but is also a civil celebrant in romantic Port Douglas. She originally got involved with Murdoch Books on their *Knit* book, producing some knitted jewellery. “The editor of the crochet book had a piece of my jewellery,” says Stephanie. “She asked me to make something for the new title and I said, very clearly, ‘I do basic crochet’. Somehow, though, it turned into me writing all the patterns for the book. Everyone else dropped out.”

A woman who seems to have endless energy and no concept of the words ‘no’ or ‘can’t’, Stephanie set about immersing herself in crochet. “I had to read a lot of crochet books to learn about stitch notation,” she says, “but in theory it’s not that different to knitting.”

Stephanie created the designs from the easiest to the most difficult,

making the piece first and working out the stitch notation along the way. (She has enough additional notes to produce another book, if anyone’s interested!) “I’d make a project, write the pattern along the way, then make sure it all corresponded. The editor was a crocheter too so she worked through the projects as well. Plus she put it more into the UK format.”

According to Stephanie the most complicated projects in the book are a shawl, skirt and vest. The easiest but most time consuming is a beaded curtain she created. “Not one for cat owners,” she warns.

“It was really a fabulous project to work on in the end,” she says. “My knowledge of garment construction certainly helped. I think my fashion design background comes through most strongly in the openwork stole I created. It’s probably one of the cleverest pieces if I can put it that way.”

Since the publication of the book Stephanie says she still uses the crochet oven mitts from *Handmade Style: Crochet*. “In my artwork I use as many different craft mediums as possible,” she says, as a way of

tempting the fine arts community closer and closer to acknowledging textile arts as an important medium. “In Europe textiles are more recognised as an art form than here for now,” she says. “But then again couture in Europe is so highly coveted, maybe it is easier to make that cross over.”

Either way this woman behind one of Australia’s most stylish collections of crochet projects in recent years will carry on painting on her Port Douglas balcony, dive deep into the sea, and continue to create.

“You don’t have to try to be inspired up here,” she says of the town she now calls home. “It’s so beautiful, the light is wonderful and there is always something in flower. It’s just an all round inspiring energy.”

find out more

www.StyledbyKristin.com
www.stephaniejmilne.com
www.rafw.com.au - celebrating its 15th year in 2010. 



win!

WIN IN ONE OF TWO COMPETITIONS!

Competition No. 1

For your chance to win one of three copies of *Crocheted Gifts* by Kim Weker (published by Interweave and distributed by Search Press Australia RRP\$38.99) simply list your name, address and phone number on the back of an envelope and post it to **Get Creative Crocheted Gifts Competition, Locked Bag 4321, South Melbourne VIC 3205**. Competition closes Friday 28 May, 2010. The winner will be contacted directly.

Competition No. 2

For your chance to win a crochet book stash containing *Wrapped in Crochet* (distributed by Search Press Australia RRP\$29.99), *Candy Crochet* by Candi Jensen (distributed by Capricorn Link Australia RRP\$34.99), *Pop Goes Crochet* (distributed by Capricorn Link Australia RRP\$34.99), and *300 Crochet Tips* by Jan Eaton (distributed by Sally Milner Publishing RRP\$44.95), simply list your name, address and phone number on the back of an envelope and post it to **Get Creative Crocheted Gifts Competition, Locked Bag 4321, South Melbourne VIC 3205**. Competition closes Friday 28 May, 2010. The winner will be contacted directly.



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