

Knitter's Review

Experience the World of Yarn



Report from the 2007 National NeedleArts Association Winter Trade Show

San Diego, CA

January 13-15, 2007

San Diego was a busy place last weekend. While the San Diego Chargers played (and lost to) the New England Patriots, a Martin Luther King Jr. Day parade and festival took place downtown, and 7,500 Mary Kay Cosmetics salespeople converged for their annual leadership conference, I and other members of the [National NeedleArts Association](#) gathered to plot our courses for the summer knitting season. We did our best to embrace the summer-knitting spirit while unseasonably cold weather dipped below freezing each night. (If your LYS is especially well stocked with wools this summer, you'll know why.)

The gathering takes place twice a year. Needlearts manufacturers, distributors, designers, agents, and retailers come together to network, take classes, and conduct business for the coming season. Admission credentials are closely monitored, and photography on the show floor is strictly forbidden.

I did see one guest blithely take photos of a booth on the show floor, explaining to its astonished staff, "It's for my blog!" But otherwise, everybody I saw stuck to the rules. (Any photos shown here were taken outside the show.)

Seeing Smooth

I'd seen hints of an industry migration away from novelty yarns at the [last summer's TNNA](#), but this time the shift was obvious. Even [Trendsetter Yarns](#), long considered the high-end leader of unusual textured yarns, shared a booth with classic Italian spinning mill Lane Borgosesia, giving prime booth space to the resplendently sophisticated Jane Slicer Smith "Signatur Collection." The garments had the colorful geometric shaping of Hanne Falkenberg or Vivian Hoxbro, but with a touch of Teva Durham's unusual composition and cablework thrown in for good measure.



Meanwhile [Kollage Yarns](#) was making the transition with several new smooth, classically spun yarns (shown at left) as well as exclusive Melissa Leapman designs to support them. I was especially intrigued by their new American Yarns line of cotton. These yarns (currently four) all use cotton that's grown, spun, and dyed in the United States. For every skein sold, Kollage will set aside 10% of the wholesale price in a special savings account. Every three months, the stores that carry this yarn will get to vote on a worthwhile charity, organization, or cause to receive the

funds.

Designing Women

Lily Chin was on hand to promote her [Lily Chin Signature Collection](#), and several major yarn companies entered the designer-yarn market with new releases too. [Tahki Stacy Charles](#) unveiled its long-anticipated Teva Durham line of yarns and supporting patterns. Meanwhile, Classic Elite Yarns promoted its new [Twinkle Yarns](#) and patterns, featuring the creative work of designer [Wenlan Chia](#). And at the South West Trading Company booth, TV host Vickie Howell (of HGTV's Knitty Gritty) promoted [her new line of yarns](#).

Space Politics

The show floor is not divided by industry type, so yarn store owners must navigate row upon row of painted needlepoint canvas to find the vendors they need. And yet despite the industry mix, some competing vendors were placed uncomfortably close to one another—against the requests of both parties. It made comparing lines much easier for show-goers, but I suspect it made exhibiting stressful for the vendors.

The sold-out marketplace had 348 exhibitors occupying 881 booths (over 300 of which were dedicated to needlepoint and counted thread). If you do the math, that means each exhibitor averaged 2.5 booths apiece. A few distributors had particularly large mega-booth clusters (Westminster Fibers had 13 booths and Knitting Fever had 9) that skewed the averages even further.

Favorite Newcomers

With booth space at a premium, only 29 new vendors were able to get booths at this show. Among the newcomers, I was particularly pleased to see [Wild Fibers Magazine](#) and [Moving Mud](#), the Vermont-based maker of exquisite glass buttons and closures. The Nordic-style garments at [Arctic Circle Inc.](#) were stunning, but many yarn store owners were frustrated to discover that the exhibitor only sold finished garments, not yarn or patterns.

Among new yarn vendors, I had two favorite finds. First, [Yarnmasters](#), which was introducing Zealana organic merino and merino blend yarns from New Zealand as well as organic Osiyo cotton yarn.



And at the Himalaya Yarn booth I greedily fondled the 100% yak down yarn from [Shokay](#). I couldn't extract a sample from them, but I did manage to get away with these cute color cards (at left). You'll notice the general darker tones, a result of the fiber's naturally tan to light brown color and resistance to bleach.

Where are the Books?

At previous shows there was palpable excitement about the book signings. They were a rare chance for yarn store owners to meet several of the well-known authors whose books they'd been selling and supporting throughout the years—and meet the newcomers whose books they *would* be selling.

Alas, these signings often resulted in long lines that upset other vendors, forcing TNNA to create new regulations that put an end to the book-signing excitement. Attendees had to get tickets for signings ahead of time, and only a limited number of tickets were available for each book. People forgot, didn't know, or assumed the tickets were sold out, and as a result more than one author was left sitting alone at a table, pen in hand, waiting for anyone to show up—only to turn people away when they *did* arrive because they didn't have a ticket.

Mind you plenty of knitterati roamed the show. Among them, I spotted Nicki Epstein (the embellisher extraordinaire), Sally Melville (the brain behind the Einstein Coat), [Cat Bordhi](#) (whose socks continue to soar), Trisha Malcolm (Editorial Director of SoHo Publishing), Adina Klein ([Knit.1](#)), Rick Mondragon ([Knitter's Magazine](#)), Teva Durham ([Loop-d-Loop Crochet: More than 25 Novel Designs for Crocheters](#)), Tara Jon Manning ([Nature Babies: Natural Knits and Organic Crafts for Moms, Babies, and a Better World](#)), Suzan Mischer (the owner of LA shop [Knit Café](#)), Kristi Porter (designer and [Knitty's](#) technical editor), Amy Singer (mother of [Knitty](#)), Melanie Falick (who tends her own knitting imprint with [Stewart Tabori and Chang](#)), Pam Allen (the shepherdess of [Interweave Knits](#) magazine), [Brandon Mably](#) (the crown prince of color), Erika Knight (the [British designer](#) who makes Rowan yarns sing), and the maestro of color himself, [Kaffe Fassett](#).

Old Players, New Games



Among the repeat vendors, I noticed that several focused on expanding current lines rather than releasing new ones—an intelligent move for these somewhat tighter times. Both [Lorna's Laces](#) and [The Fibre Co.](#) (shown at left) announced gorgeous new colors for their existing yarns.



I was also pleased to see [Buffalo Gold](#) still going strong after its first year. Owner Cecil Miskin continues to explore ways to make softer, more cohesive and cost-effective bison-down yarn. He showed me a particularly lovely new batch of worsted-weight two-ply yarn (shown at left) and I also got to play with a skein of their nylon

sock blend.



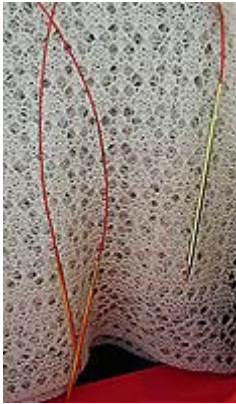
Among the new additions, I saw that [Sheep Shop Yarn Co.](#) was showing Sheep Shop Number 3, a sport-weight two-ply blend of wool and silk (at left). Also, [ArtYarns](#) had a stunning display of hand-dyed silks with beads similar to those offered by [Tilli Tomas](#), but in gorgeous variegated colorways.



[Alchemy Yarns](#) introduced two new lower-priced offerings: Vita, an earthy slubby silk that's actually the rough component of [Wabi Sabi](#); and a single-ply variegated wool-silk blend (whose

name I forgot to note) that's dyed *prior* to spinning. I find such a technique gives you much

more subtle, organic color shifts. Both new yarns are less expensive because they are not hand-painted by Alchemy owner Gina Wilde herself.



In the accessories market, I was excited to play with [Skacel's](#) long-awaited sharp-tipped Addi lace circular needles (shown at left). Their smooth join, fluid cable, and well-defined but not-too-sharp tip will be a welcome boon for those who find the [Knit Picks Options](#) tips too sharp for comfort.



And finally, speaking of circular needles, I saw two fine options for storing and organizing them. [Della Q](#) had a lovely tri-fold fabric case with 12 numbered pockets (shown at left). And [Lexie Barnes](#) previewed a brand new circular needle case that's tall and slender, zips around the edges, and holds more circular needles than

I can even contemplate. It should be in stores at the end of this month and I can't wait to try it out for myself.

What you see here is just the very tip of the iceberg. While the market adjustment continues to play itself out, I'd say we're in for a strong summer season. But don't take my word for it—go to your LYS and see for yourself!

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