



# get knitted!

By Sharon McIver

→ IN CASE YOU HAVEN'T NOTICED, **handcrafts are back, with "stitch and bitch" clubs cropping up everywhere** – even at the UCSA in the form of the brilliantly named Cocksoc (Club of Crocheting and Knitting – wonder what they talk about there...). The latest thing is guerrilla knitting, where a group of crafty types meet at a pre-arranged place such as a mall or supermarket, and at a signal whip out their needles or crochet hooks. Personally, I'd rather not linger in a supermarket longer than is absolutely necessary, but if they made the designated venue a bar, and there were big comfy seats (with no armrests to impede needle speed) I'd definitely get my purl on.

The strangest thing about this craze for crafts is that up until the last thirty or so years, the sight of a woman knitting in public would not have raised an eyebrow. Breastfeeding, yes. Getting your needles out, no. You only need to go back two or three generations, and look at family pictures to see just how much home-crafts were necessary in clothing the brood of kids lined up in their Sunday best. Manufactured garments were expensive, so before the age of double incomes and cheap imported clothing, women had no choice but to utilise any "spare" minutes to keep the kids kitted out.

Yet from necessity grew creativity, as mums, aunts and grandmas took pride in their work. Each new baby was greeted with a layette, which included a shawl, dress/romper suit, cardigan, booties, bonnet, and mittens (with extra garments often added) all knitted or crocheted in a fine lace stitch on very small needles. Never having attempted such a thing, I can't imagine how many hours that would take.

Of course, not every lovingly crafted gift was as welcome as a layette – and second-hand shops are testament to some appalling monstrosities. A hand-knitted Mickey Mouse jersey that a friend used to wear for his annual 9-11 commemorations springs to mind. Mickey's face looked like he'd been knocking back too many Cokes – no wonder it was hidden amongst the racks at \$2 Toffs.

Looking back, the only dodgy hand-mades I can remember having to wear were those that I had designed myself, and that my Mum had patiently helped me make without questioning my sartorial whims. And because I can't write about handcrafts without writing about my Mum, I am forever grateful that not only could she knit, sew, crochet, embroider, tapestry, and tat, but that she also had an eye for design. She dreamt of being an artist, and would have graduated from the Canterbury College School of Art had her mother not died, leaving her with three younger brothers to raise from the age of 16. Her dreams thwarted, she sublimated her talents into "useful items", something that she would do for the rest of her life.

Looking at the paintings in her art portfolio now, I feel sad for the young girl who painted pictures

that remained tucked away for the rest of her life, but happy for the Mum and Grandma who took delight in making beautiful things for her many descendents to wear.

I am also very, very grateful for the fact that before she died she passed the two most useful of her handcraft skills onto me – knitting and sewing. Which is not to say she didn't try to teach me all of them – it's just that these were the two that took. Whether whipping something up for myself, or as a gift, making my own is one of the most satisfying, and enjoyable ways to be eco-conscious.

And now it is my great joy to be able to pass them on to anyone who thinks they might like to pick up a needle or two, with help from Juliette Hamill (who will be teaching crochet) at this term's Eco-Living workshops, to be held in the Sustainability Office on Thursdays 12:10-1pm. The Sustainability Office is located in the Facilities Management Department on Engineering Road. Workshops are free, some materials will be provided, but please feel free to bring your own.

**Thursday 22 July:** Knitting Basics, Sustainability Office, 12:10-1pm. Bring needles, wool, patterns

**Thursday 29 July:** Revitalise Your Clothes: Mending and Adjustments, Sustainability Office, 12:10-1pm. Bring any clothes you want to mend, adjust or make over

**Thursday 5 August:** Getting Creative with Patches, Sustainability Office, 12:10-1pm. Bring old jeans/blankets (for cutting up), interesting fabrics etc.

**Thursday 12 August:** Crochet Basics, Sustainability Office, 12:10-1pm. Bring wool, crochet hooks, patterns.

Also, remember that during term time the UC Gardening Group is held on Wednesdays, 12:10-1pm at the Okeover Community Garden. We've got some great topics lined up for Term 3, and feature the return of popular gardening presenters Carl Pickens and Lily White.

For further information, go to [www.sustain.canterbury.ac.nz/ecoliving/index.shtml](http://www.sustain.canterbury.ac.nz/ecoliving/index.shtml) and [www.sustain.canterbury.ac.nz/comm\\_garden/gardening\\_group.shtml](http://www.sustain.canterbury.ac.nz/comm_garden/gardening_group.shtml)

## make it yourself - crafty tips!

➤ Second-hand shops are meccas for anyone wanting to take up crafts – especially the smaller charity stores. Look for needles, cottons, fabrics, wool and patterns, etc.

➤ Scan second-hand racks for clothing that can be adjusted, or which has enough fabric to be turned into something else.

➤ Revitalise old cardies by replacing buttons or removing them altogether and fastening with kilt pins.

➤ Sleeves from worn out merino tops can be turned into arm warmers by zig-zagging the raw edge on a machine, and hemming by hand.

➤ To turn wide legged jeans into skinny jeans, turn inside out, put on, and have a friend pin down the side of the seam that is easiest to take in (ie: not the 'french seam'). Remove (carefully) and sew down pin line with a sewing machine. Trim seam and zigzag raw edge.

➤ Old knitwear can be unravelled and knitted into new garments, but look for the plainest styles (knit, or garter stitch) as patterns can be difficult to unpick.