



My Nana knits. She knits so well she can watch TV, hold a conversation and simultaneously make sense of a pattern so complicated it reads like advanced machine code. I tried knitting during my teens. I knitted my first love Toby a voluminous black sweater to cover his angular Smiths-loving six foot frame, a message of my undying devotion. Actually, I knitted him half a sweater, as he dumped me. The unfinished jumper became a symbol of trashed dreams and in a heartbroken gesture I gave it to him.

God knows what he did with it, or indeed made of the gesture. To me though it was obvious: my knitting had scared him enough to finish with me. It was a problem. If only I hadn't been so blatantly domestic, maybe he'd still love me? He marched on to Oxford and oblivion. Me – well, I never knitted for my next true love, or the next...

But as I became a stylist, I grew to love the homespun quality of designers such as Jessica Ogden, who, when her boyfriend bought her some knitting needles, taught herself, became obsessed, and added gorgeously chunky cardigans, scarves and crew necks to her collections. Or take Weardowney, a knitwear company based in a former pub in Marylebone. As well as designing, they run their Pop Up boutique and create beautiful pieces for design collaborations, such as knitted jewellery with Erickson Beamon. But they were also repeatedly being asked to teach others how to knit. So, last September, they set up knitting groups – and were overwhelmed.

Attendees were not necessarily what you might expect. As well as the fashionable revivalists, 'they were lawyers and hedge-fund managers, who wanted to be self-absorbed without being self-obsessed', says Gail Downey, one half of the design duo with Amy Wear. So great is demand that this autumn they are launching The Weardowney School of Handcraftsmanship, with courses and workshops for knitting, embroidery, jewellery and tailoring.

'As demand creates the mood, so it progresses,' says Downey. 'We are thinking laterally. Lectures to start you off for mastery and inspiration – flavours and skills. Then take it where you want to, design, knit your own patterns, craft your own jewellery. Listen, look at knitting... savour the rest of the group.'

'We've created a space for people to come together, use their hands and learn to be unselfish. What you can learn with your hands is infinite.'

In the wilds of Islington meanwhile, Loop ('one of London's top 100 shops': *Time Out*) holds workshops and classes from novice to Fair Isle, with an SOS drop-in clinic for knitting hazards, as well as experimental classes for the more, well, avant-garde designers.

Both Weardowney and Loop are offering a place where you can learn, share and create. And my friends and me have heard of lots of pubs which hold knitting circles. We all agree it is rather a pleasant way to spend the evening, holed up with a pint, a pattern and a shared goal. Gail Downey quotes from Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis*: 'There can be no understanding between the hands and the brain unless the heart acts as a mediator.' Perhaps Toby wouldn't have understood this sentiment, but I think Nana and this charming new generation of homespun craftsmen and women would get it completely.

By Tamara Cincik. Photograph: Mike Diver