

SEWING: Needle felting adds lush touches

June 26, 2005

BY BARBARA GASH

When I saw a demo of needle felting machines, I was truly amazed. The process has been the buzz of the Internet circuit of fiber people for a few months now.

The task these machines accomplish was explained by Barbara Skimin, manager of Universal Sewing Center in Royal Oak: "Needle felting uses a cluster of special serrated needles to push one fiber into another. No thread is used. You position loose yarn or roving (unspun wool or silk) on the fabric you wish to embellish, and simply sew on it in any direction.

"You are forcing the fiber on top down into the base fabric, quite quickly," Skimin said. "The design process opens up a whole new world of creative possibilities for the home-sewer."

The Internet has also added to my comprehension of this technique. One person was making scarves in mixed colors of polar fleece and wool roving, all felted into silk fabric. Another thought the reverse side could be as attractive as the top, depending on preference.

Paula Scaffidi of North Carolina has explored the process extensively and says, "A love of color and texture at your fingertips is all that's required, with visual effects that can range from very softly blended to fairly crisp."

Scaffidi has created lush landscapes and seascapes, as well as scarves and handbags. Now a teacher in this emerging field, she explains that there are currently four brands of machines available:

- Baby Lock, a stand-alone machine called the Embellisher.
- Bernina, with a decorative needle punch accessory that can fit on Bernina models equipped with a CB hook. This attachment has a special presser foot-finger guard and needle plate.
- Brother, with an attachment called a Feltsaper, for its PQ series of machines.
- Embroidery Source, a machine made in Australia.

Prices vary, so visit your local dealer for more information.

If you want to get more familiar with the technique, check out Web sites such as these: www.fiberella.com; www.sophiegefli.com and www.deltafiberart.com.

To contact Barbara Skimin, call 248-584-1111. Keep in mind that although needle felting is fun and easy, it takes some practice and experimenting to see what the possibilities are.

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