



*by Clara Parkes*

For me, nothing is as satisfying as a quick pair of fingerless mitts. Pair them with a hat and I'm over the moon.

You can use pretty much any yarn you like. After all, what's the worst thing that can happen? The hat might lack sufficient elasticity to hug your head (or give you that dreaded hat hair). Or the mitts might stretch out or pill over time. But by then you'll be on to the next hat, the next set of mitts.

To pay tribute to my love of quick mitts, I chose to swatch Deborah Newton's charming hat and fingerless mitt set, [Ballast](#). The original pattern calls for O-Wool Classic, a simple two-ply yarn made from organic Merino wool. Its two-ply construction lends a lovely weathered effect to the patterned purl motifs and the twisted pairs of knit stitches that wander diagonally to the fabric.



You'd be quite well served if you stayed with Newton's recommended yarn. But the nature of this column requires that we push the envelope and experiment, so I did.

First, I thought about the puff factor. I love a good halo in my hats and mitts (and scarves and sweaters and pretty much everything else), and nothing says "halo" like Classic Elite Yarns Fresco. Whereas some fluffy yarns lose points for durability, Fresco has a tight three-ply construction with a cohesive anchor of 60% wool dusted with 30% baby alpaca and 10% angora.



My swatch knit up like a dream. The yarn's three plies made the stitches much rounder and more three-dimensional than they appear in the original versions, with those purls popping from the fabric surface—while the halo covered it all with a cozy blanket of fluff. The high percentage of wool kept the fabric snug and bouncy, making it an ideal candidate for hat hair *and* cozy hands.

Next, I wanted to lighten the fabric just a tad without losing any of that halo or luxurious softness. I chose Zealana Air. It's composed of four single strands that have been plied together in the Z direction instead of the S that you often find in commercial yarns. It's a small difference, but as I was knitting I had that slightly off-kilter feeling, like if I'd swapped my left and right contact lenses.



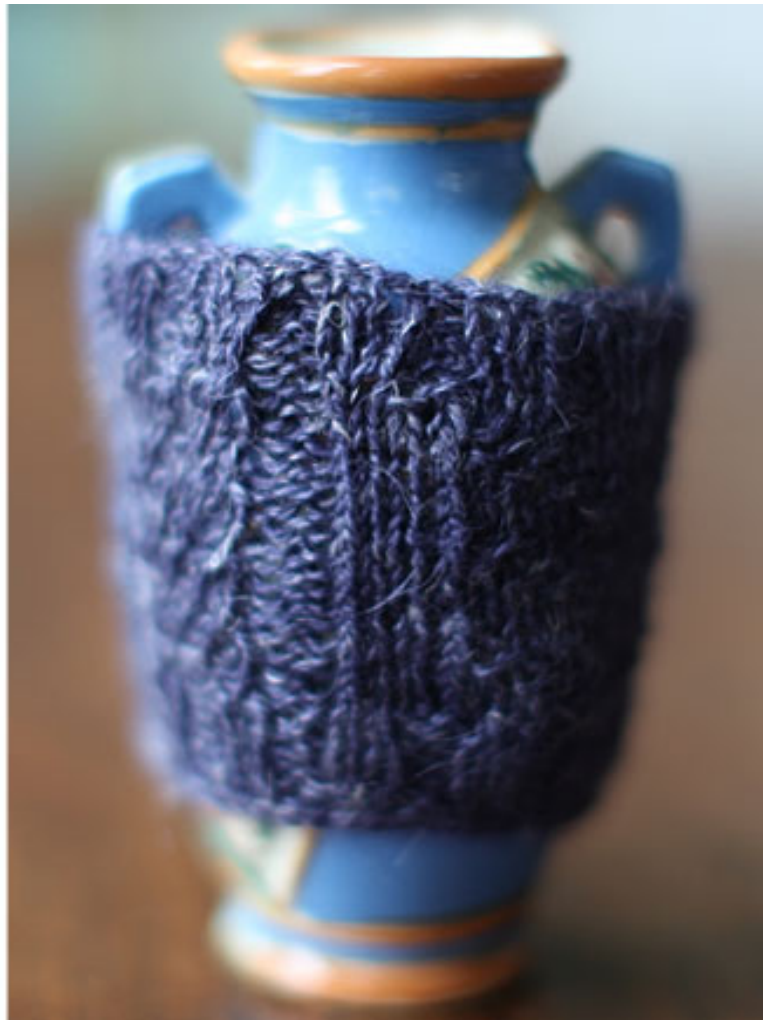
Here, the halo is much subtler and finer, consisting of 40% cashmere, 40% possum down, and 20% silk. If I had the patience, I'd knit myself an entire sweater out of this yarn, and I'd never take it off.

The yarn was far too slippery on my Addi Turbos, so I switched to bamboo for better traction. Knitting was swift and generally pleasant, although I did snag a few plies repeatedly. I blame the Z ply.

The results were lightweight and true to the yarn's name, airy. Cashmere, possum, and silk are not known for their elasticity, and this fabric wasn't nearly as springy as the Fresco. But it wasn't

completely *inelastic* either, and the alternating knits and purls added a little bounce to the mix. I'd pursue this angle if you wanted a capital-f "fancy" set for yourself or a special gift for someone else who understood it wasn't meant to be worn while shoveling snow or playing rugby.

Finally, it seemed only fair to switch from fine to rustic while still holding onto as much luxury as I could. As if on cue, the Fibre Company announced its new yarn Meadow. An attractive, well-defined two-ply yarn, Meadow blends 40% Merino for bounce and cohesion, 25% baby llama for that certain *je ne sais quoi* (or would that be *no sé lo que?*), 20% silk for sheen, and 15% linen for that rustic effect.



While most of these fibers are similar to what we saw in the other yarns, that 15% linen really does change the game. The linen took none of the dye, and its significantly longer fibers were far more eager to protrude. The combined dual-toned coloring and earthy texture toned down stitch clarity to the point where I had to look closely to see exactly what's happening. The motif isn't so complicated that you'd resent having your work muted, but muted it is nonetheless.

Bottom line? Well, there is none—and that's the fun part with small projects like this. Just pick a yarn that calls to you, cast on, and see what it does.