



By Bruce Weinstein

It's 6 p.m. on a Thursday evening in early fall. My class at Sit-N-Knit, a spacious and welcoming yarn shop in Bloomfield, Connecticut, is filling up—ten women have come to learn how to knit sweaters from the top down. Each one is knitting a sweater for herself, and each seems to have a sad story to tell about her experiences knitting for a man in her life. None of them are eager to try again; I'm hoping to change a few minds.

I always bring food to class. It helps everyone relax, gets people talking, and ensures they'll all come back week after week no matter how frustrated they might be with their sweaters or how little progress they may have made. On the menu this week is a three-layer coconut cake from my latest cookbook.

Around the table everyone is eating, casting on, and sharing their stories. Mary says she's hesitant to make anything for her husband since the first sweater she knitted for him ended up at the Salvation Army. I don't know how, but she recounts the story with a smile and great humor. Irma says her husband begs her to bake cakes like mine, but she's on strike since he doesn't appreciate her knitting. Barbara is *wearing* a sweater she made for her husband. I hear their tales and encourage them to keep knitting for their guys. But regardless of their talent, I realize that these women have some homework to do before they will be able to create garments the men in their lives will want to wear: They first have to understand the male psyche.



Over the years, many women have knitted beautiful items for their boyfriends, husbands, sons, brothers, fathers, and uncles, only to have the goods packed away in drawers never to see the light of day.

Disappointing? Yes. Frustrating? Certainly. But is a man who does this being intentionally insensitive? Is he trying to push his girlfriend's buttons? Is he holding out for something more exciting from his wife in bed? Not at all.

When men don't wear what women make them, they're just being men—with their own quirky likes and dislikes and an inability to express them. When they abuse the garments knitters make them, they're still just being men—hardwired *not* to think about feelings, *not* to think about how much work went into making them, and *not* understanding why their behavior is so upsetting. Women can't expect to change these male characteristics, but they can change what they choose to make for the men in their lives.



As a rule, most men don't read *Vogue*, window shop, or care about fashion. They don't know what's in style and, in most cases, they don't care. While women know that fashions change and that beauty has its price, men don't pay attention to any of it. Men like three things: simple designs, muted colors, and soft fabrics. And to hell with what the magazines, fashion columns, and yes, even their women, tell them they should wear. What this means is that your man will rarely pick out the same pattern and yarn for himself that you would pick out for him. And what makes this situation even more challenging is that men don't communicate as well as women do, so you'll rarely get him to tell you up front what he likes. But if women want to succeed at knitting for men, they're going to have to find a way to extract this information from the male brain.

Now, before you give up on knitting for men altogether, know that help is on the way. As a man, I know what men like and don't like, which gives me a genetic edge that most knitters don't have. And as a knitting instructor, I am equipped to be your translator, and to help you match your knitting skills with what the men in your life really want. (For starters—here's an easy one—nix the knitted iPod, golf club, and beer cozies.)



I learned to knit from my grandmother, a dressmaker by trade. She worked for top designers in New York City, creating samples from sketches. Her creations were exclusively for women and always *au courant*. During her off hours, she knitted exclusively for men: me, my brother, and my cousin. These creations were anything but trendy. They were dark, simple sweaters that we wore and loved. My grandmother knew what worked for men and it had nothing to do with her personal taste or what she created for runway models.

Only once did my grandmother knit me a sweater that I refused to wear, and in all honesty, I asked for it. On my first day of college, I befriended the woman sitting next to me in graphic design class. Her name was Rainey Day (yes, that is her real name). I fell in love with her Bing-cherry tinted hair and her hip-length tunic sweater with wide horizontal ribs that started at the bottom hem and went all the way up to the oversized turtleneck. She told me she designed and knitted the sweater and I immediately asked to borrow it. I took it to my grandmother and begged her to make me one.

“Nice work,” she said, “but why do you want a woman’s sweater?”

I was young, thin, and in art school, and it seemed like a good idea at the time. Looking back, I realize that I wanted that sweater as a work of art, not as a piece of clothing. My grandmother made the sweater in my size and by the time she’d finished it I had to admit that, despite my bohemian attitude, I would never wear it. I’ve kept that sweater to this day, partly because I feel guilty all these years later that I made her work so hard on a sweater that I never put on and partly



because it's my own personal time capsule of the late 1970s. But it's also a good reminder for me of how easy it is to veer off course if you aren't careful.



The truth is that women often make sweaters that their guys are not comfortable wearing. They use colors that are too bright, make the cables too wide, or choose buttons and zippers that are just too flashy. How does this happen? Well, some women have told me that they find most men's patterns boring, so they adapt them from women's patterns to add a little more interest. The "interest" that is added, however, is often totally inappropriate, like feminine stitchwork and edgings. Other women insist that they won't touch dark, drab colors, period. So they choose bright colors that are more fun to knit with. But the fault doesn't just rest on the knitter here. Many women claim that they can't get their guy to turn away from a football game long enough to look at yarn samples. And men love to rely on revisionist history—when asked if they like something, guys will say *sure, sure* without even looking up, only to complain later that they don't remember being offered a choice. The first trick to finding the right pattern for your guy is striking a balance between patterns that are fun and interesting to knit while still being simple and classic enough for a man to wear. The second is learning to communicate what you intend to make for him every step of the way.



To that end, in the book I share ten rules that will help you knit successfully for all the men in your life. Some of these rules may strike you as overgeneralizations, but I assure you that men, no matter their lifestyle, are fairly consistent. Following each rule is a corresponding pattern that should please you and your guy, such as a two-tone cotton baseball jersey with a wide saddle shoulder, and a basic hooded sweatshirt that is so soft yet easy to take care of, your man can roll it

in a ball and shove it under the bed and it will still look great when he takes it out to wear.

The patterns are written to be worked in multiple gauges for almost any yarn to fit nearly every man. So you can knit the same sweater for your guy whether he's tall and skinny or built like a linebacker. And why only ten patterns? Because when it comes to fashion, that's all any man wants or needs. When a man finds what he likes, he sticks with it. It's not uncommon for a guy to have three or four of the same sweater crammed into a drawer. If he wants variety, he might have it in black, navy, and dark gray, and when one sweater wears out, he's likely to buy the same exact sweater to replace it. And while this book may not erase the pain of handknits past, I hope that these insights and patterns will add joy to your knitting—and to your relationships with men—from this page forward.