



By Clara Parkes

Hats offer an ideal excuse to play with yarn. Unless you have a job that entails rubbing your head vigorously against rough surfaces all day, you don't really need to worry about durability. You can choose a yarn based on prettiness alone and know that almost anything will work.

I chose to swatch Faina Goberstein's lovely [Crown of Leaves hat](#) because it has such intriguing intricate sideways cables while simultaneously maintaining functional ribbing motifs everywhere else—which means you'll have fun knitting *and* the hat will actually stay on your head.

The original sample is knit in [Handwerks Classic DK](#), a smooth traditional plied yarn made from 100% superwash wool. I really couldn't improve upon this type of yarn's performance, so I shifted my focus toward differently constructed yarns.



First, I swatched Classic Elite Moorland. This tweedy faux single gives the hat a decidedly woolly, wintry look. Without any interruption of ply shadows, the yarn renders the stitches in a smooth,

clean way rather as if I'd been knitting with a tube of pasta.



In terms of fiber composition, Moorland has 42% merino wool, 23% alpaca, 19% mohair, and 16% acrylic—a reasonable mix of bounce, warmth, shimmer, and affordability. For the medium size in this hat, you'd need two skeins.



Moving from one ply to two, I cast on with Elsebeth Lavold Silky Wool. Generally you may hear people advise against using two-ply yarns for cables, since two plies always push away from one another instead of coming together to create a round, full fabric. And you want round, fullness in cables.



But Silky Wool has a slightly tweedy, wooly finish that fills in the gaps and works magic with cables (if you've seen any of Elsebeth Lavold's patterns you'll know this to be true). The rich colors are all heathered, adding to the gently weathered mossy finish in the fabric. At 45% of the total fiber content, wool is in the majority—followed closely by silk (35%) and nylon (20%). I'm guessing part of the yarn's slubby texture comes from raw silk, making the nylon necessary to hold the shorter fibers together. Despite generous yardage, you'll still need two skeins to complete a hat—with lots left over.

Many years ago, while researching my first book, I asked a long-time millworker what his favorite fiber blend was. Without missing a beat, he replied, "Cotton and wool, 50/50." He went on to explain how this particular combination made both fibers better, giving you an ideal fabric that was both cool and warm, well-wearing yet lively. I've never forgotten his advice, which is why I next swatched Classic Elite Chesapeake from the Verde Collection.



This 50/50 blend of organic cotton and Merino wool was spun in Italy. Its S-on-S construction (with fine, plied strands further plied together in the same direction) produces a round and springy yarn with spectacular high-relief stitch definition for cables. (It's the same yarn Tonia Bary used for her [Goose Rocks hoodie](#) in the Spring/Summer edition.) For those knitters in warm climates, this particular blend is an ideal way to get your wool kick without overheating your hands (or head).



It appears that the wool and cotton are kept in separate strands that are then plied and dyed (or vice-versa) so that the wool is fully saturated with color while the cotton stays lighter. This gives the yarn a candycane look that becomes more gently heathered the further away you stand. Yardage is a little shorter on this yarn, so you'll need three skeins to complete a medium-sized hat.



Since the S-on-S construction is so ideal for cables, I decided to swatch another fiber combination—this time ditching the cotton in favor of the softest, most plush, shimmery and luxurious blend I could find. The answer was Sublime Cashmere Merino Silk DK, a blend of 75% extra fine merino, 20% silk, and 5% cashmere (also spun in Italy).



This final yarn was pure decadence, rendering the cables in full, well-rounded definition while producing a springy and oh so squeezable fabric. This yarn has enough elasticity to make a hat that'll stretch to accommodate a far wider range of head sizes than any of the other yarns swatched. The colors are all smooth, saturated pastel solids. The combination of S-on-S construction and 20% silk content gives this yarn a crisp, well-tailored clarity and brightness. Lucky for us, a medium-sized hat requires only two skeins.