

The Colorful KRISTIN NICHOLAS

YMN's Karin Strom recently visited the veteran designer at her picturesque New England farm to talk about everything from Nicholas's blog and her new book (*Color by Kristin*, Sixth&Spring Books) to her everyday busyness and business-savvy advice.



DECICCO PHOTOGRAPHY

KS: Your fans can read about your creative life on your blog (getting-stitched-on-the-farm.blogspot.com), where you share some very personal and poignant aspects of your life. What made you decide to write a blog, and how do you draw the line with regard to not being too “public” about your private life?

KN: My family and I live on a sheep farm in western Massachusetts. Even though we're living where we really want to be, I do feel isolated from what I have always thought of as typical American suburban life. I thought the blog format would give me a way to connect with people out there in the real world while also sharing what we do here. Because I post so many pretty pictures on my blog, I sometimes think that my readers believe we are living an unreal, perfect existence. That is so untrue. There is a lot of life, death, hard work and dirt on a farm, and I have always wanted to be honest with my readers.

As for being “public” about our private life, I only write about those things I feel comfortable sharing with the world. I include personal things on my blog because I think the experiences I have had can help other women in their own life situations. My daughter Julia has hydrocephalus, a birth defect that is treatable (she has a shunt), but which has caused learning disabilities that are very challenging. She also has juvenile diabetes. We struggle with a lot of health issues on this farm. I think it's good for people to know that we face real-life challenges here every day.

KS: The beauty of your surroundings is very evident in your creative work. Other than nature, what gives you ideas for colorwork, patterns, textures?

KN: It really depends on the medium I am working in. I get many of my color ideas and

some shape and texture from the world around me. Finding inspiration from other places is a bit tougher. When I go to Boston or New York I try to fit in a museum visit or do some shopping. Out here, I rely on magazines—shelter mags are my favorites; sadly, they're disappearing at an alarming rate—to keep up with fashion and trends.

KS: You recently conducted workshops at your farm, allowing several of your readers to experience a bit of your reality for themselves. What prompted that decision?

KN: My husband and I are extremely committed to agriculture—helping to keep the rural character of our beautiful area alive and sharing it with others. And it is very difficult for me to leave the farm and teach, even though knitters and shop owners ask me to constantly. My “Get Stitched on the Farm” classes combine our lovely area, our life on the farm, the art in our home and my love of color with knitting and stitching. And to top it all off, we serve fabulous food! I just started doing the classes this past summer, and I hope to continue offering them here at the farm. It was a blast, and those who attended really loved it.

KS: You spent 16 years as creative director at Classic Elite Yarns. What's been your biggest takeaway from that experience?

KN: Oh, boy, that's a tough one. I started working there when I was 25. I grew up there, professionally. I loved that job so much. It wasn't until I felt I just couldn't do it anymore creatively that I wanted to move on. My family life became more important, taking care of an infant who needed many surgeries. Other projects took center stage. I just had to stop! I did love the challenge of coming up with a collection twice a year, even though it was grueling. I loved thinking about how shop

owners would sell a particular yarn. And I loved thinking about how an individual knitter would actually turn a yarn into a finished project.

KS: What would your advice be to shop owners in these challenging times?

KN: I'm sure this is hard for new shop owners to believe, but times were equally challenging most of the years I worked at Classic Elite. I think a yarn shop's main focus should be to keep new products on the shelves and to constantly develop new ideas to inspire customers to keep coming through the door. It can be something as simple as making a swatch for a featured design in an alternate colorway or running a class about creativity. I also think it is very important for shop owners to get away, somehow, from their businesses—to see a new place, shop in a new city, take a knitting trip, even if they have to close their stores for a few days to make it happen. By doing this, they will feel more ready to deal with the ho-hum everyday-ness of a shopkeeper's life.

KS: How do you see things going for the yarn industry in the near future?

KN: I think that as long as companies can keep bringing out fresh and creative ideas and products and stimulating interest in knitting and crochet, the yarn industry will survive. It's not always going to be gangbusters busy, but that is a normal business cycle. I would like to see more “cross-pollination” of all the different needlearts, combining crochet, knitting, needlepoint, embroidery and sewing together. Unfortunately, so many knitters and shop owners want to focus only on knitting. That's too bad, because mixing it all up is such fun.

Read our entire interview with Nicholas at www.yarnmarketnews.com.