



Home + Design

i made it myself

Claire Waring
craftschmaft.com

Claire Waring, craft blogger and fledgling sock-toy tycoon, has a theory about the craft boom. It's all about computers. And not just because social networking fuels the feverish spread of crafting trends. Waring thinks there's another reason computers can take credit for the new arts and craft movement. "Everybody has become so screen-based and so digitised that people have a real need to get hands-on again in their spare time; to do something that involves using their hands rather than their eyes," says Waring, 34, who was a digital creative director before she had her craft epiphany.

After an arty northern beaches childhood, Waring neglected craft until she returned from living in London in 2003. In her first winter back in Sydney with her husband,

Photography
Damian Bennett

Hair and make-up
Allison Boyle

Craft is booming. From sock toys to knits, Sydneysiders are discovering the joy of creating an item from scratch. **Stephanie Wood** meets three women who share a passion for the handmade.



Luke, she knitted a textured wool-square blanket as a “settle-in kind of thing”.

When she fell pregnant with her son, Oscar, 2, nesting urges struck. “They weren’t to clean but to get creative for him, so I began sewing quilts and cradle things before he was born. And after he was born, I started sewing sock toys and making my own up and it snowballed.”

Waring, who is pregnant with her second child, was spurred to explore craft as a business when she returned to work after maternity leave and found she could no longer do the hours her senior role required. She took a part-time business course aimed at women at home with children underfoot, but her venture was never going to be about making soft toys. Instead it was about creating toy patterns. “When people can buy something out of China for \$10, the amount of time that goes into creating a softie means that economically it’s not viable.”

She quit her corporate job last October and started to sell patterns and kits for soft toys – mostly using socks. “I cannot go into

a department store without going into the sock section,” says Waring, who uses the online craft and design marketplaces Big Cartel and etsy as “shopfronts” for her products. While the business isn’t yet paying the bills, she has started to wholesale patterns and, in June, leased a garage near her apartment as a workspace and “warehouse”.

Her owl mobile kits are big sellers and Waring is particularly pleased with her new Sausage Roller, a pull-along sock dog she created for Oscar. “We take Sausage Roller out for a walk and Oscar will say, ‘I take the dog for a walk.’” →

Claire Waring’s online favourites:
madebyjoel.blogspot.com
sewmamasew.com
myrtleandunice.com





Alison Brookbanks and her daughter Pia, 3, who wears outfits created by her mother.

top craft websites

etsy.com Immense global online handmade marketplace for buyers and sellers. Crafters can set up "shops" displaying their wares; buyers can search for goods based on criteria including location, colour and category.

bigcartel.com A hip online marketplace popular with clothing designers, T-shirt artists, record labels and crafters.

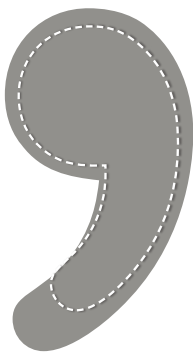
madeit.com.au An Australian-based online market for crafters featuring everything from soft toys and jewellery to books and zines.

ravelry.com An international knitting and crochet community. Register for free and get access to patterns, forums, yarn sellers, inspiration and ideas.

the-craftroom.blogspot.com The home page for a loose collective of Sydney crafters who meet monthly, with groups in the northern beaches, inner west and Hills District.

thefinderskeepers.com Biannual design market at CarriageWorks in Eveleigh. Its Winterland market will showcase design, art, craft and vintage wares. Thursday, July 29 and Friday, July 30: 6pm-10.30pm; Saturday, July 31: 11am-5pm; 6pm-10.30pm.

"I thought, 'Oh my god, there are people out there who knit; there are people out there who knit furiously and talk about it!'"



Alison Brookbanks
sixandahalfstitches.typepad.com

Followers of Alison Brookbanks's crafting blog, 6.5ST – and there are many – know to expect raw emotion and poetic expression along with the knitting and sewing. Within two months of writing her first post in July 2004, 39-year-old architect Brookbanks had shared the story of her postnatal depression. Other stories followed: about exhaustion and stress and mothering anxieties; about a cat called Neko whose temporary straying caused Brookbanks distress; about her ongoing depression; and almost too much information about her second child's birth.

But over the years Brookbanks has also written, with sly humour, about cashmere crises, soul-searching over selecting buttons,

her "cupboard of angry Tupperware" and the chaos of her craft space in the inner-west home she shares with her architect husband Albert and their two small children.

Accompanying her reflections have been photographs of her exquisite work – from merino socks to a smock made in Hello Kitty Liberty print for daughter Pia, 3 – and adulatory comments from a community of dedicated readers.

As Brookbanks discovered in 2004 when a friend sent her links to a selection of pioneering, mainly American, craft blogs, community is at the heart of the phenomenon. "I thought, 'Oh my god, there are people out there who knit furiously and talk about it,'" she recalls. "I thought, 'I could actually connect with some of these people.'"

Brookbanks was initially coy about revealing her knitting and craft habit, which had been nurtured through a Canberra childhood by her knitting, calligraphy-loving mother and a town-planner father who never went anywhere without a sketchbook. "It was geeky. You just didn't admit to people that you did it ... This was the '80s and the '90s, which were all about consumption and 'Look how much I've spent on my outfit.'"

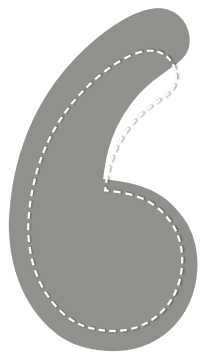
But there was strength in numbers. Around the world, a stream of chic closet crafters were launching blogs and hastening the demise of craft's macramé-and-tie-dye image. Brookbanks, who was one of Australia's earliest craft bloggers, remembers the first item she made that she was proud

of: a tiny charcoal kimono-wrap top for her son, Max, 7, when he was a newborn. "It seemed to capture everything about what I wanted for this child, which sounds a bit sappy, but [I thought], 'I can find a voice through this child; he doesn't have to wear things that are merchandised, he doesn't have to wear things that everyone else is wearing. I can make a little bit of a mark through my child.' It kind of grew from there."

Two years ago, Brookbanks quit her job with the firm Architectus to explore the commercial potential of her craft ideas. One of only two Australian contributors to *The Crafter's Companion*, she sells her photographs online through Big Cartel and patterns on the knitting site Ravelry. At The Finders Keepers Winterland market at CarriageWorks, which is on until July 31, she will sell pieces including knitted arm-warmers and cushion covers (from \$20 to \$100).

Nevertheless, Brookbanks still considers craft a hobby. "I enjoy the fact that I can evolve very quickly in what I'm doing." And her architectural instinct is never far from her work. "When I start using different combinations of fibres, it becomes more than a piece of knitting. As far as I'm concerned, I'm creating a piece of architecture for the body." →

Alison Brookbanks's online favourites:
assemblage.typepad.com
thedailypurl.com
purlsoho.com



“Two women walked past and one said, ‘Oh yeah, I hear donkeys are the new owl.’”

Kristen Doran

kristendorandesign.blogspot.com

Kristen Doran likes to talk about donkeys. In fact, the Loftus textile designer will happily take the credit if and when donkeys elbow out owls and butterflies as the motif du jour on fabrics and in craft projects. At a Stitches & Craft Show in Melbourne last year, Doran offered for sale a new fabric line, a red, chocolate and avocado-green design featuring a cuckoo clock – and two donkeys with their tails entwined. In a cheeky effort to pass the time, Doran and a friend at an adjacent stall started spreading rumours as crowds passed: “Donkeys are the new owl.”

Two months later, at the show in Brisbane, the rumour was rife. “Two women walked past and one said, ‘Oh yeah, I hear donkeys are the new owl,’” laughs Doran, a single mother of two boys, Harry, 10, and Jack, 7.

Her hand-printed designs are not usually the result of such mischief-making. “Winter Nest”, for example, was inspired by a tree in a friend’s front yard. “On the way to school every morning, we walk past it and I’d look up at the little nest sitting there and think, ‘That’s got to be a fabric print.’” From a photograph of the tree emerged a design of bare branches and the outline of a bird.

Doran, 40, who studied fashion design at East Sydney TAFE, has slowly transformed her hobby into a business. She sells fabric both by the metre and in panels that crafters can turn into items such as cushions, handbags or dolls, as well as backstitch kits. She has concentrated on wholesale trade but also retails via her blog and at The Finders Keepers Winterland market at CarriageWorks, where she will have a stall until July 31 selling items including cushion covers and felt snowflake brooches.

From the age of nine, Doran told anyone who’d listen she wanted to be a fashion designer. She remembers sitting on her grandmother’s Oatley front porch, embroidering. “My grandmother was a crocheter and loved to sew and make evening gowns to go out dancing in,” she recalls. “She was very flamboyant. I have memories of sequins all over the house.”



But Doran claims she has a “two-dimensional” eye rather than the three-dimensional vision required to be a good fashion designer so, after finishing college, she moved into fashion illustration and textile design for an Alexandria-based mainstream fashion company.

She went on to work as a graphic designer for Wesley Mission but, since 2001, she has juggled freelance textile and graphic design with the demands of her burgeoning business. But there have been some drawbacks. “When your own craft hobbies turn into a business, you need another hobby,” says Doran, who has begun to crochet as her new pastime and is enthusiastically making granny squares for a blanket. (S)

Kristen Doran’s online favourites:
threebuttons.blogspot.com
tsktsk.typepad.com
mikodesign.blogspot.com



Flex your craft muscles with three free patterns from our Sydney craft whizzes: Alison Brookbanks’s “Shadowbox”, a one-size-fits-all women’s knit that’s a cross between a cowl and a cape; Claire Waring’s “Woof Woof” puppy sock-toy pattern; and Kristen Doran’s mini-robot embroidery pattern. We’ll send out patterns to readers who log on to thesydnemagazine.smh.com.au and fill out the form. Offer ends August 31.

Great stuff from other local crafters

1. Vintage storybook tiles, small, \$45, large \$80 (theredthreadblog.blogspot.com)
2. Sterling silver chrysanthemum pendant, \$US150 (etsy.com/shop/howlindoggie)
3. Hand-bound notebook, \$US20 (etsy.com/shop/paperlion)
4. Bedtime bus roll print, \$24 (frame not included, mysweetprints.com.au)
5. Retro gift tags, \$US7 (etsy.com/shop/percivalroad)
6. Pocket mirrors, \$US7, small pinback button, US\$6 for a set of three (etsy.com/shop/fatalsweets)
7. Madeline the Mod Bear, \$US35 (etsy.com/shop/thetwotwindmills)
8. Michael Stephenson candlesticks in European beech, Oregon and rosewood, \$75 each. (mlstephenson@optusnet.com.au)
9. Indian linen skyline lampshade, \$120
10. Hand-screen-printed yellow hemp clutch, \$US70 (etsy.com/shop/sirtom)

* Items sold on etsy.com are quoted in US dollars. Currency conversion done at time of sale.

