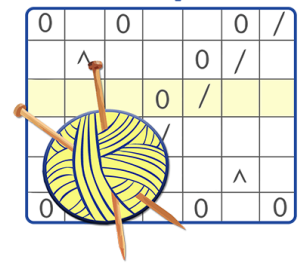




## Inside the Designer's Studio Hunter Hammersen

knitCompanion



*This month I had the delicious pleasure of spending some time with [Hunter Hammersen](#). She is a fascinating person, and a delight to talk to. Her background in history offers a world of inspiration and clearly influences her designs. And I am so grateful her original plan to be a history professor took a turn into knitwear design! There is a long historical tradition of a salon where a group of people would gather for amusement and conversation, almost always with the goal "either to educate or to please" (Horace). Hunter is someone who would be a wonderful addition to any salon. No matter what, with Hunter the conversation would never be boring and everyone would be sure to learn something new.*

**Sally:** From the wonderful introductions in the *Knitter's Curiosity Cabinet* series to the details of vintage etiquette books in *Fine Things for Plain Occasions* it's clear that your love of history and curiosity to understand the human element behind the history is a big part of your inspiration. How did you travel from being a graduate student in history to knitwear designer?

Hunter: Well, it was a fairly unexpected development! I started knitting regularly while I was in grad school (I'd tried it a few times in college but it never stuck). I found it used a different part of my brain that the work I was doing in school, and I think I needed that.

I got tired of following other people's patterns pretty quickly (I've never been good at following directions) and started making things without a pattern. I posted pictures of the things I was making on Ravelry, and people asked where they could get the patterns. I figured I could probably write down what I was doing (I'm bossy too, which goes well with the not following directions thing), so I did. People liked my patterns, so I kept doing it.



Linaria Bipartita Sock, Curiosity Cabinet

I finished my bachelor's and my master's degrees (also both in history), but I left part way through my doctorate. My field was the history of science, medicine, and technology. And I was through all my classes and exams and starting to write my dissertation when I decided to make a break for it! Within a few years, I'd written one book with a publisher and was working on self publishing the next one. I realized I was trying to make time to fit my schoolwork in around my knitting work, and reevaluated. It seemed I had made myself a job I loved (and one I could do at home in my pajamas), so I made the switch!

**I can't imagine you don't have your own personal Curiosity Cabinet! What are a few of your most treasured items? Do any of them have a great story behind them?**

I walk this slightly precarious path between being a minimalist and being a total magpie. If I don't pay attention I'll either end up with a house full of my own personal treasures, or a totally empty space. I try to find the balance, but just where that point is varies a bit depending on what's going on in my life (when I'm stressed I want nothing more than to throw things away...).

That said, I do have a little treasure pile or two. There's a card catalog in my office. (I was working on a project in my university's archive and mentioned how much I adored it. They said they wanted to get rid of it but just didn't have a way to carry it out. I made a few undignified noises and said I'd be happy to take it off their hands for them.) Officially, I use it to store yarn. But the top tends to be where many of my favorite things end up. I've got a fantastic, two part fossil of a fern (it was my grandfather's), some really excellent rocks, an ancient stone axe I found when I was a kid, a sea urchin shell from a trip to the beach earlier this year, and a few little orchids on there now. But the things tend to change depending on my mood and what goodies have followed me home most recently!



Loasa Lateritia Cowl, Curiosity Cabinet

**If you could hold a salon and invite guests from any time and place, who are the top 3-5 people you would want to invite? What conversations do you imagine with your guests?**

Oh hmmm. Let's make it a very fiber-y salon, shall we? Which means we'll need Elizabeth Wayland Barber. She's my very favorite textile historian. She's done the nice meaty academic stuff (*Prehistoric Textiles: The Development of Cloth in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages*), but she's also written amazingly accessible works aimed at a more general audience (*Women's Work: The First 20,000 Years, Women, Cloth, and Society in Early Times*).

And while we're talking about folks who do a good job surveying and presenting a massive body of knowledge (and really, fiber totally qualifies), let's not leave out James Burke. His Connections tv show has done a glorious job of reminding folks 'you know what, history is not just dates and dead white guys, it's lots of really nifty, deeply interconnected stories about every single thing you care about.' I'd love to see what he'd do with textiles as a theme.



[In Case of Draughts](#), Fine Things

And while we're at it, let's bring Bill Bryson in. I know most people think of his humorous writing, but his *A Short History of Nearly Everything* is probably the most accessible introduction to the history of science you could ask for. And in *At Home* he turned his attention to the evolution of our homes, which necessarily involved rather a lot of bits related to fiber and textiles. He does a remarkable job of getting interested in something, learning an awful lot about it, and presenting it in such an engaging way that anyone who reads it finds themselves fascinated.

If you could only have one book (*shudder*), what would it be?



Rosa Rubiginosa Mitts, Curiosity Cabinet

Oh man. I tend to take things to the extreme. I think I'd almost rather have none than have one lone book, taunting me, reminding me of all the others that went missing!

***Violently Domestic* creates such a delicious dichotomy inside my mind, and leaves me sure that no matter what you do, you embrace the experience to its fullest. How did the name come to be?**

I've actually had the domain longer than I've been knitting. We're a slightly dorky household, and when a particular phrase tickles someone's fancy, we've been known to just register a domain to see if anything comes of it.

So, way back in 2009 when I had a pattern to put up and needed a spot to put it, I happened to have that domain handy and so used it! It seemed to work out well. It's easy to say, easy to spell, and easy to remember.

I rather like that it's not knitting specific, as a fair amount of what happens on the blog is only tangentially related to knitting. And, well, it's a fairly accurate assessment of my housekeeping style. Let's just say my domesticity comes in fits and spurts...sometimes I'll spend all day cooking, sometimes dinner is that thing the nice delivery guy brings!



[Fine Things for Plain Occasions](#)

**When you aren't designing and publishing what is your favorite place to be/activity?**

I'm working awfully hard to find a way to spend more time on the coast of Maine. We go up there every fall, and it's getting harder and harder to leave. There's something sort of magic about that part of the world, and I can't think of anywhere I'd rather be.

And as for what you'll find me doing (there or here!), well I'm sort of a homebody. I tend to be happiest with a nice stack of books to dive into and a kitten to keep me company. And if there also happens to be a lovely pile of board games and someone who is up for a round or two, that's lovely too!



**I'm very impressed with Pantsville Press. Self publishing is both liberating and daunting. Successful self publishing such as you are doing is a rare gem indeed given all the details and depth of knowledge required to successfully bring books to market. Tell me a bit about the journey of creating Pantsville Press.**

Oh, remember how I said I didn't like to follow instructions? And that I was bossy? Well add in more than my fair share of stubbornness, and it was fairly inevitable that I'd end up self publishing!

I did my first book with a publisher, and it didn't end up being a good fit for how I work. I felt like I had two options: never do it again, or do it all myself. I didn't like that first option, so I decided to do it myself. It's been amazing, but it's also astonishingly hard.

I always say that the design work is maybe (*maybe*) ten percent of the actual work that goes into bringing a book into being. The rest of it is planning and logistics. You've got to source yarn and sort out knitters and photographers and models and editors and graphic artists. And you've got to deal with printers and freight companies and shipping companies. Oh and don't forget sorting out your website and business licenses and taxes and accounting and marketing and half a hundred other things you do not expect to deal with when you first think 'yeah, yeah maybe I could write this sock pattern down...'



If I'd known what was really involved when I started, I'd probably have been too scared to try it! I had no idea what I was getting into.

But...but when it all goes right, you also get to make *exactly* the book you want. I did that with *Fine Things*. It is the book I've been wanting to make for years (right down to the line drawings and the delicious paper and the wee ribbon bookmark). I love everything about it, and no publisher in their right mind would let me do it the way I did.

But if you're doing it yourself, you get to indulge your flights of fancy, and that's just how I like it!



[Fine Things for Plain Occasions](#)