

Norway



Knitting came late to Norway, probably in the mid-1800s. Yet one of the most famous sweater designs of all times is the Norwegian *lusekofte* (lice jacket). Named for the simple *luse*, or “louse,” color pattern that covers the main portion of the body, these sweaters, which come from the rural Setesdal valley, are recognized around the world.

The lice pattern, created with white stitches scattered over a black background, was originally made with the tiny flecks on every other round, forming a dense, heavy fabric appropriate for wear in the cold Scandinavian climate. Today, the lice are knitted on every fourth round, producing a softer, lighter fabric.

It is impossible to know exactly when and where the lice pattern originated. It may have first appeared when knitters tucked loose fleece or pile into the stitches for mitten fabrics, to add warmth. Small pieces of the added wool may have shown on the outsides of the mittens, inspiring a new design in color knitting.

This world-famous Norwegian sweater style originated in the Setesdal valley at a time when the people of that area lived a nomadic lifestyle. Their winter homes were quite dark, and most knitting was done during the summer, when they moved to mountain farms. At the latitude where they lived, near the arctic circle, summer evenings were long and light-filled, and provided ample knitting time.

The *lusekofte* was originally a man’s garment, with a wide white band at the lower edge that was tucked into high-waisted trousers. Having the white portion show was tantamount to having your underwear exposed. Although young people today seem to have no problem with this type of fashion statement, it was quite an embarrassment in the past. The main body of the sweater was knitted with white patterns on a black background, perhaps to hide soot from cooking and heating fires in an environment where washing clothes in the winter was difficult.

These Norwegian-style sweaters have bands of color patterning. They are knitted in the round to the shoulder and the armholes are cut open—a relatively modern technique.

Traditionally, each sweater was unique and the knitters did not write down their patterns. Each knitter strove for originality and designed on the needles, choosing a new pattern stitch after completing the previous one. Although some pattern elements were commonly used, such as the lice pattern and the Saint Andrew's cross, knitters valued fresh ideas and would not copy other knitters' sweaters.

The sweaters have always been knitted in the round. This technique makes the pattern easier to knit because the right side is always showing. In addition, one-piece circular sweaters were more portable than sweaters made in pieces. Until circular needles were introduced, Norwegian knitters used long double-pointed needles. The live stitches were arranged on four needles and a fifth was used to work the stitches. Circular needles first appeared in Norway in 1881, although they didn't start to catch on until around 1925.

Chapter 5

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

Skills

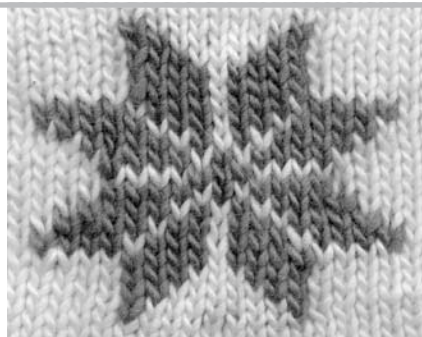
- ✓ Two-color patterning worked in the round

Techniques

- ✓ Modern cut armholes
- ✓ Simple faced boatneck or cut-opening crewneck

Garment styling

- ✓ Drop-shoulder, standard pullover style—boatneck, turtleneck, crewneck
- ✓ Upper body sections worked in the round
- ✓ Sleeves knitted from cuff to shoulder and sewn on, with facings



Lusekofte sweaters were started at the hem and worked upward to the shoulders. After the body was completed, the fabric was cut open to form the armholes. Then the shoulders were joined. The sleeves were traditionally picked up and knitted down to the cuffs. After the sweater parts had been completed, the neckline was cut open. Intricately embroidered trim was then added to the neck and cuffs. Often a fabric facing was also sewn inside the neck area, running from shoulder to shoulder. This facing added warmth, covered the cut edges of the fabric, and possibly acted as a form of shoulder pads.

Today, the sleeves on Norwegian sweaters are often made separately, worked from the cuff up, and then sewn into the armholes. A few extra rows are knitted at the top of the sleeve to form a facing that encases the cut edge of the armhole. At the neckline, the sweaters are often finished off with a self-facing, instead of the embroidered trim.

Techniques

Knitting with two colors

Knitting with two colors in a single row to form color patterns that reach all the way across your knitting is called Fair Isle, Jacquard, or stranded knitting. There are several ways to hold the yarn when knitting with multiple colors.

You can hold both colors in the same hand. This is easier to do when you knit continental-style, because you can just “pick” off the color you need. If you are holding both colors in one hand, make sure you always take the main color over the top of the contrasting color and take the contrasting color under the main color, so the strands do not twist.

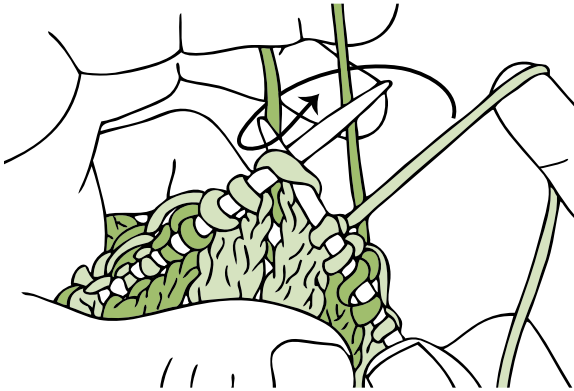
I prefer to hold one color in my right hand and the other in my left.

Working with both hands, hold the main color in your right hand (English style) and the contrasting color in your left hand (continental style). Strand the unused color loosely across the back of the work.

If you have more than 5 stitches of the background color, weave in the contrasting color to avoid inordinately long floats: The technique I’ll describe is based on my preferred method of

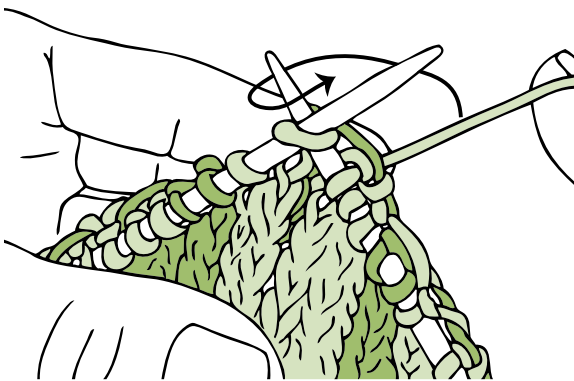
holding one yarn in each hand, with the most frequently used color in the right hand.

1. Lift the index finger of your left hand to lift the lefthand yarn *above* the working yarn. Knit one stitch.



Lift the lefthand yarn above the working yarn and knit one stitch.

2. Move the yarn in your left hand *below* the working yarn. Knit the next stitch as usual.



Then drop the lefthand yarn below the working yarn and knit one stitch.

Embroidered trim

Embroidered trim has been traditionally used on Norwegian sweaters. On the necklines and cuffs of the sweaters that follow, I have used knitted trims. If you want to add embroidered trim to your sweaters, check out the books on Norwegian knitting in the bibliography for ideas and instructions.