

cutting edge CRAFTERS

Crafter: Nate Van Hofwegen
What he makes: Upholstery, leather bags, vinyl throw pillows and Vinyl-Lux wall art for his home and for sale (www.natescustomsewing.com).
Started sewing: "In the '90s. I was a south Minneapolis punk rocker sewing patches on my pants. I made a leather bag, my girlfriends liked it, so I made ones for them."
Day job: Restaurant upholstery. "I came up with the Vinyl-Lux idea while sewing Perkin's seat covers."
Favorite design: The Red Owl grocery-store logo. "It's nostalgic. I've always been into '50s and '60s stuff. I'm a fan of real clean lines."
Weirdest project: "A sex towel. Someone asked me to make one in three layers with a fuzzy leopard print on top and a waterproof bottom."



Photos by JOEL KOYAMA • jkoyama@startribune.com

Nate Van Hofwegen sews pillows, wall art, upholstery and other leather and vinyl items on an industrial machine that he taught himself how to use.



"The craft scene still feels grassroots, even underground. It doesn't feel like it's sold out, which is weird to say because so many people are selling stuff." Kristen Himsl Hunter

"Knitting is very relaxing. Kind of Zen. And you see immediate results." Julie O' Connor

"People used to make things to save money. These days, the products that you use to make the craft projects are so expensive that it's definitely not a cost-saving measure. It's about relaxation and entertainment." Megan McAlister

"I taught my friend Tom how to knit, and he made ribbed wool beer cozies. He and my brother and a couple other guy friends would sometimes show up at our Stitch and Bitch meetings. We said, 'If you're here, you have to knit.'" Megan Wilker

◀ CRAFT FROM HI

They're forming alternative craft guilds with names like Craft Mafia and Crafters Local 612. They're doing "Subversive Cross-Stitch" (the title of a recent pattern book, which includes words that would have made Grandma blush). And they're gathering at indie craft fairs, such as Bazaar Bizarre (Boston), Crafty Bastards (Washington, D.C.) and No Coast Craft-O-Rama, which will be held Dec. 2 in Minneapolis.

From punk music to quilts

How did old-style crafts become cutting-edge? Trish Hoskins, who opened Crafty Planet three years ago with her husband, Matt DeVries, sees a link between the punk-rock culture she embraced as a college student

NO COAST CRAFT-O-RAMA
What: An alternative craft show featuring handmade items by more than 75 vendors, artists and designers.

When: 9 a.m.-7 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 2.

Where: Midtown Global Market (Lake Street at Chicago Avenue), Minneapolis.

Tickets: Free admission.

Info: 612-788-1180.

and the alternative craft movement of today.

"The '80s were very much a DIY spirit — fighting mass consumerism, making your own 'zines and your

own records," she said. Those former punk rebels are now keeping house and bringing that hands-on aesthetic to feathering their nests. They're making quilts, rugs and holiday decor, just like their grandmothers did, but with an edge.

"Just because you sew or knit doesn't mean you can only make sweet things," Hoskins said. "You learn the same skills as someone more mainstream but do something different with it."

For Emily Kircher, a "recycling artist" from Madison, Wis., who will be in Minneapolis for the No Coast show, crafting is a way to be an environmentalist. She makes rugs out of recycled clothes, crocheted handbags using thrift-shop yarn and mosaic picture frames out of broken glass and bottles. "I like to send a message: This stuff was garbage, headed for a landfill."

Kircher went to Madison to get a Ph.D. in environmental toxicology but didn't want to end up working for a pharmaceutical company, she said. "I'm crafting as a livelihood, as a rebellion against science and having a 9-to-5 job."

An antidote to technology

In some ways, today's craft surge mirrors the Arts and Crafts movement of a century ago, when a handmade aesthetic emerged as a reaction to the Industrial Revolution. Now the Digital Revolution appears to be fueling a similar craft revival.

"Everything today is so mass-produced that it's driven people to create their own things, to express their individuality," said Carla Sinclair, editor in chief of Craft: Transforming Traditional Crafts, a new magazine (www.craftzine.com).

"The Internet has fueled the movement," she added, making it easy for like-minded crafters to connect in cyberspace. And the more time we log in the virtual world, the more we long for an antidote. "People are in front of screens all day, so it's a relief to get into a more tactile space for a while," Sinclair said.

That strikes a chord with Kristen Himsl Hunter of Minneapolis, who makes and sells retro-kitsch Christmas tree skirts and stockings online at www.kristenmary.com. "It's such a technological age," she said. "I love the Internet and computers but I also like to take a break from that."

Kerri Nelson of Minneapolis agreed. A lawyer who recently passed the bar exam, she enjoys crocheting baby clothes and creat-



Rhena Tantisunthorn worked on a Christmas gift at Crafty Planet.

ing homemade Halloween yard displays. "I do so much work in my head; doing something with my hands is a nice balance," she said.

Breaking, remaking the craft chain

Alternative crafters can have a hard time relating to traditional craft stores. Duden, who knits, crochets and quilts, couldn't find the colors and designs she was looking for, she said, and found the classes too confining.

"I don't knit correctly, and I don't follow patterns well," she said. At Crafty Planet, students are free to alter patterns or techniques to suit themselves. "Other places tend to take themselves way too seriously. They're too attached to the tradition of it: 'We must knit this way, follow the pattern.' I think it's a generational thing."

For Duden, who grew up on a communal organic vegetable farm, there was no generational gap in the crafting chain. "I grew up with a crafty family," she said.

But for many crafters whose mothers didn't knit or sew, those disciplines can form a link to earlier generations.

"With crochet, you can relate to the past in a way that is sort of continuous," Nelson said. "I don't want to romanticize the past; people's lives, especially women's lives, were very difficult. But it makes you feel part of something larger than yourself."

Kim Palmer • 612-673-4784



Crafters at work on a recent "Craft and Chat" night at Crafty Planet included Rebecca Yaker, Megan Wilker with baby Beatrix, and Stefanie Nett.