

Keeping Hollywood in stitches

Knitting shop takes customers back to simpler times

By Tim Talevich

In the hustle-bustle, ultra-chic world that is Hollywood, one of the hottest spots isn't a new haute-cuisine restaurant or health spa. It's a small, cramped shop, La Knitterie Parisienne, where the stars go to unwind, enter a simpler world and find joy in a pastime that many of their grandmothers practiced.

On any given day, you might find yourself comparing knitting notes with Daryl Hannah or crochet patterns with Sofia Coppola. Movie stars Catherine Zeta-Jones, Elizabeth Taylor, Kim Basinger and dozens of others are also occasional customers.

The unpretentious shop, located in Studio City, is narrow and crowded floor to ceiling with colorful skeins of yarn of all textures and types. Scattered throughout are drawers of buttons and racks of needles—everything needed for fashioning scarves, baby booties, hats, handbags and throws. In terms of items (there are some 13,000 yarns in the shop—and maybe that many more in an off-site warehouse), La Knitterie Parisienne is one of the largest knitting shops in the world.

But it's not really the inventory that attracts the customers. It's a small, yarn-strewn table with chairs in a side nook, where customers can work on projects and peek at each other's work. More so, it's Edith Eig, 60, the motherly figure who runs the business with her husband, Merrill. With a steady sense of calm and care, Edith gently answers questions, shows techniques and lends advice to a small crowd perpetually tugging at her sleeve.

On a recent day, she squeezed through the shop's aisles, answering questions while Merrill attended the cash register. One customer, buying yarn for matching baby booties and hat, asks, "And can you help me with the strap?"

"Sure," Edith responds reassuringly.

Another presents her with the beginnings of an afghan. "Could you feel this and see if it's too tight?"

"No, no it's fine," Edith replies with just the right doses of authority and encouragement.

The Eigs opened the shop in 1996 after moving to Southern California from New Jersey, where they operated a similar shop. Edith had learned knitting as a schoolgirl in Paris, where sewing and knitting were part of the curriculum. In setting up the California store, there was never any grand plan to cater to Hollywood celebrities—it just turned out that way.

"We had a lot of people who started coming into the shop little by little, and luckily we were near the studios so we had a lot of actors with downtime between takes, and they'd come and sit in here," says Edith. "I have to

tell you that those high-profile clients are just ordinary people like you and me. This is a place where they can come, relax, be away from other people."

The timing was right. Across the country, it has become cool to knit, with knitting circles joining book clubs as popular ways to spend leisure moments. The Eigs say there's a good reason for this resurgence: Knitting is therapy for our modern times.

"We're always busy, traveling in our car, working on our computer, talking on the telephone. Here, you force people to sit down like our great-grandmothers did at the quilting bees," says Edith. "You can sit and talk and share ideas: 'Oh, you did this, this is wonderful, where can I get this, how can I do this?' And people in my shop exchange ideas and stories—not always about knitting."

She adds, "Knitting prevents people from smoking and overeating, because their hands are busy. I always tell them, 'This is an addiction, but it is a safe one.'"

With Hollywood celebrities as clients, it's no surprise that La Knitterie Parisienne has attracted substantial media attention. *People* magazine proclaimed Edith "Hollywood's knitting guru." She created a knitting show for DIY (the Do It Yourself network) and has written a book, *Mother of Purl: Friends, Fun, and Fabulous Designs at Hollywood's Knitting Circle* (Collins, 2005).

But her real love is helping her customers at the shop. As to plans for the future, Edith responds, "People have asked me to franchise, but I can't, because basically my customers want *me*—I can't cut myself in two pieces. So we're taking it day by day. The business has been going tremendously and we're very thankful for that. This is such a personalized, one-to-one type of thing." **E**



Edith and Merrill Eig's shop, La Knitterie Parisienne, offers knitting supplies—along with helpful advice.

STUDIO 1501 PHOTOGRAPHY

member profile

Name: La Knitterie Parisienne

Owners: Merrill and Edith Eig

Member at: Van Nuys, CA, since 1996

Employees: Usually three full-time

Comments about Costco: "When we need something, Costco is always able to satisfy our immediate needs. We'd like to look at other services from Costco."

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