

A Thoughtful Girl

... IN COLLABORATION WITH NEW YORK.

<http://www.athoughtfulgirl.com/post/4771085037/crazy-sexy-wool-and-the-gang>

CRAZY, SEXY WOOL (and the GANG!)

A 6th floor walk-up on Grand Street, with hardwood floors and lots of natural light, is the setting for Wool and the Gang's Soho studio. Designers Jade and Aurelie work there each day of the year. *Except* for the days of December. In December the two girls, who have been friends since college, flee the cobbled streets of downtown to find design inspiration in the remote *cordilleras* of Peru.



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First they fly south— but that is the easy part. The flight is followed by a drive that covers the winding distance between the city and the rural village high up in the mountains that is their destination.

“It’s like taking a bus-plane to get there,” said Jade. “The whole trip takes twenty-four hours.”

At last, they arrive at a house with a courtyard. They make their way to the back of the property and take their place among thirty women sitting in a circle, knitting. Each time they arrive, it is like they were never gone, and they are greeted warmly and casually. It is in this improbable setting where the girls set to work designing the following year’s ready-to-knit kits and ready-to-wear collections for Wool and the Gang.

This knitting circle in the mountains of Peru is special. The village is the heart of the knitting tradition, which is something dear to both Jade and Aurelie. Jade started knitting when her grandmother taught her at age 7. Both she and Aurelie focused on Knitting when they studied Textiles at St. Martin’s College in London. Then they followed their passion to Wool and the Gang.



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They are thrilled with the opportunity they have each year to come to this village, where women have gotten together for countless generations to stitch.

"Knitting is their life," said Aurelie about the women in the village, most of whom are farmers' wives. "They are very respected for being knitters."

But the knitting circle is also special for another reason, which is that the women who host it are super, super nice.

"They are like moms to us," said Jade. "They offer us food. They give us the hats on their heads so we won't get sunburned."

For anyone familiar with knitting, such hospitality is no surprise. The thing about knitting, unlike other forms of art, is that at its heart it is communal. Sitting in the circle, people can disconnect from their daily lives, relax and get inspired.

For Jade and Aurelie in Peru, that means disconnecting from the hectic pace of the City. For the other women in the circle, it means something different.

"Because there were no men there, this was their moment," explained Jade. "Some of the women had hard lives. But there in the circle, we just laughed all day."

Jade and Aurelie have a real appreciation for the community aspect of this tradition. For them, being expert knitters means being good hosts as much as it means mastering the stitch.



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And that's where Wool and the Gang's knitting parties come in!

Twice a month, Jade and Aurelie throw open the doors of their Soho store after hours. They bring wine, cheese and plenty of yarn. They're happy to help new knitters master a stitch and forget their cares!

Last week, I stopped by for my first party. I received a primer from Jade on beginners' technique. And I met some super-cool girls, like Danielle, a musician from Venice, CA and Elsa, an architect from Paris.

Conversation at the table centered around Burning Man, the merits of Williamsburg, and the good, bad and weird things that happen on the New York subways...



And also how knitting has become a new art...

And how awesome widely stitched scarves can be for the beach...

And how designing the Jane Collar is like designing a building...

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And how, wouldn't it be cool if the concept of Wool and the Gang was expanded to bring other heritage traditions to Soho?? ("I'd like to do this with Scottish cashmere...." suggested Jade.)

And how, if Jade and Aurelie set out to bring something completely amazing to Soho, they have succeeded :)