

A Beginner's Guide to Rug Hooking

CREATE BEAUTY EVERYDAY



DEANNE FITZPATRICK STUDIO

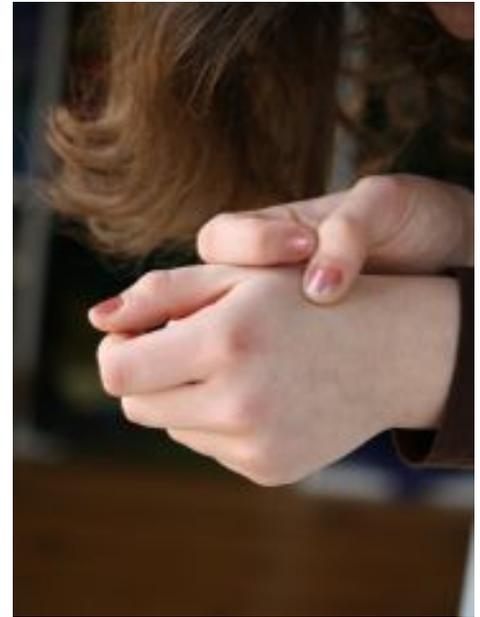


IT ALL BEGINS WITH WOOL

I love wool, that soft natural feeling between my fingers as I create something beautiful. I hook with wool because it is traditional, luxurious, durable and beautiful. I could go on. Rug hooking started as a way to warm cold floors in cold drafty homes over a century ago. Old Wool clothing was taken , cut into strips and hooked on burlap feed sacks that brought the winters provisions. Both my grandmothers and my mother hooked this way as a past time and as a necessity. Contemporary rug hooking is less about necessity and more about beauty. It is a chance to make time for yourself and escape into a world of colour, creativity and design.

one loop at a time

Everyday you get a chance....



I love to watch people's hands and to see the beauty they can create with them.

Create Beauty Everyday

Beauty matters
because it makes life better,
it makes people see more,
feel more, and be more

Our hands are meant to be used,
our days are meant for filling.
We create our lives
by hand and mind and soul.

Everyday is a chance to
make something beautiful.
Everyday is chance to
make time for what matters.

How to Hook a Rug

Hold your hook comfortably in your hands. Do not grasp it too tight, just hold it gently as if it was part of your hand itself. I like to hold my hook the way I held my pencil when I was a child learning to write long hand.



Hold Your Hook Like a Pencil

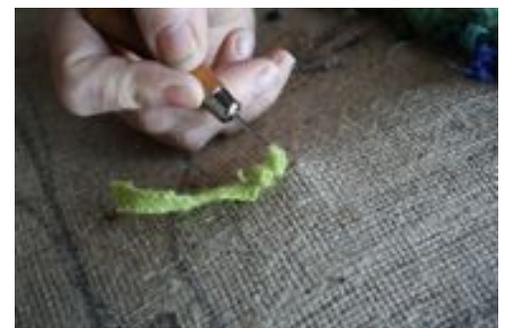
Hold Your Hook like a pencil on the top side of your frame, and put a strip of wool between your thumb and forefinger under the frame. The hook you choose should feel comfortable in your hand. I use the hook shown here for every width and weight of wool. I hold it on a forty five degree angle but as I keep hooking it gets straighter and straighter so that I am almost holding my hook straight up and down.

Both Hands Work Together

Put the hook down through the hole in the burlap and catch the wool pulling the end of the strip to the surface, using the hand underneath holding the wool, to help you guide it along. Both hands are working together almost wrapping the wool around the hook underneath. Keep moving the hand underneath as you move your hook along the top side.

Do Not Hook too Tight

Skip a hole and put your hook down again and pull a loop up. Skip another hole and pull up another loop, letting your hand underneath move along as you pull your wool loop by loop. Keep hooking, and be sure to skip some holes because if you hook in every hole the rug will be hooked too tightly and it will not lay flat. Often in rug hooking, something is outlined, then filled in. This is the traditional way of hooking. So you can start by outlining the design if you like if you like and then keep hooking it until it is filled in.





Hand Cutting the Wool

I like to take a 4" by 10" piece of cloth and fold it four times and cut it into strips with 5 and a half inch scissors to prepare my wool for hooking. This is a great method and saves on buying an expensive wool cutter when you are just getting started. I cut thicker fabrics more narrowly and thinner fabrics wider. Hand cut wool makes a beautiful finished hooked rug. Be sure to use the 5 and a half inch scissors and save them only for your wool so they stay nice and sharp. These smaller scissors work better for cutting wool than those with a longer shank.

Cuts of Cloth



My preference for cuts of cloth are shown above. I like: number 6 which is 3/16 inch wide and shown in yellow and number 8 which is 1/4 inch wide and shown in blue. I also like to handcut. The coral sweater is shown cut at about a half inch wide.

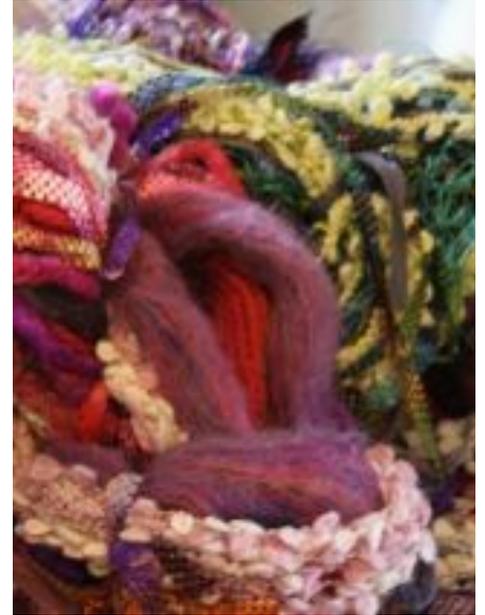
The Size of the Strips

I use all different widths of cloth. Wool cutters are available for rug hooking and they strip your cloth almost like a pasta maker. I use the bolivar and the contact info for buying cutters in on the faq page of www.hookingrugs.com .

These machines cut strips of cloth. In rug hooking the width of the cloth is referred to by a number with #3 being the narrowest cut at 3/32 of an inch wide and #16 being the widest cut at 1/2 an inch wide.

I find that the weight of the wool often determines how wide I cut it. Lighter weight wools are often cut wider, sometimes up to 3/4 inch wide. I also find that the design sometimes determines the cut you need. Sometimes to show a very fine detail I will cut a #6 strip into two strips. I do mix cuts in my rugs, using many different widths of cloth in the same rug.

Gathering Materials



You can use any materials but there is a strong tradition of hooking with wool cloth and yarns.

Be on the Look Out for Wool

The first place to start is in your closet, and with family and friends. Is there any old wool blankets stowed away. Does your aunt have some old scarves she no longer wears, or a few old skirts. Recycled wool clothing is getting harder and harder to find because very few wool garments are made anymore but there is still plenty floating around in second hand stores and closets. Let people know you are looking and you will be surprised what turns up. I also save any scraps of yarns and gladly take offers of left over wools from knitter's stashes.

Look for garments that are 70 to 100 percent wool. The higher the wool content the better. I throw all my recycled wool in the washing machine on a warm water wash and pop it into the dryer. When I am working with wool I like to know that it is clean. A hooked rug cannot be washed, just damp sponged as you would any good carpet so it is important to start with clean materials. I rip the clothes apart at the seams and fold in open shelving so that I know colours and textures I have available. Keep your wool out where you can see what you have to use.



Rug Hooking is a Meditative Craft

I love the sound of my hook as it thrums up and down through my burlap. I find it a very peaceful art. I have found that it soothes me. I sit down at the frame, tired or angry and peaceful motion of pulling the wool loop by loop changes me. It eases my mind and relaxes me. It is a forgiving and generous craft, letting you work along as you get lost in the motion and the sound of the hook. I just have to believe that passing time like this is good for you.



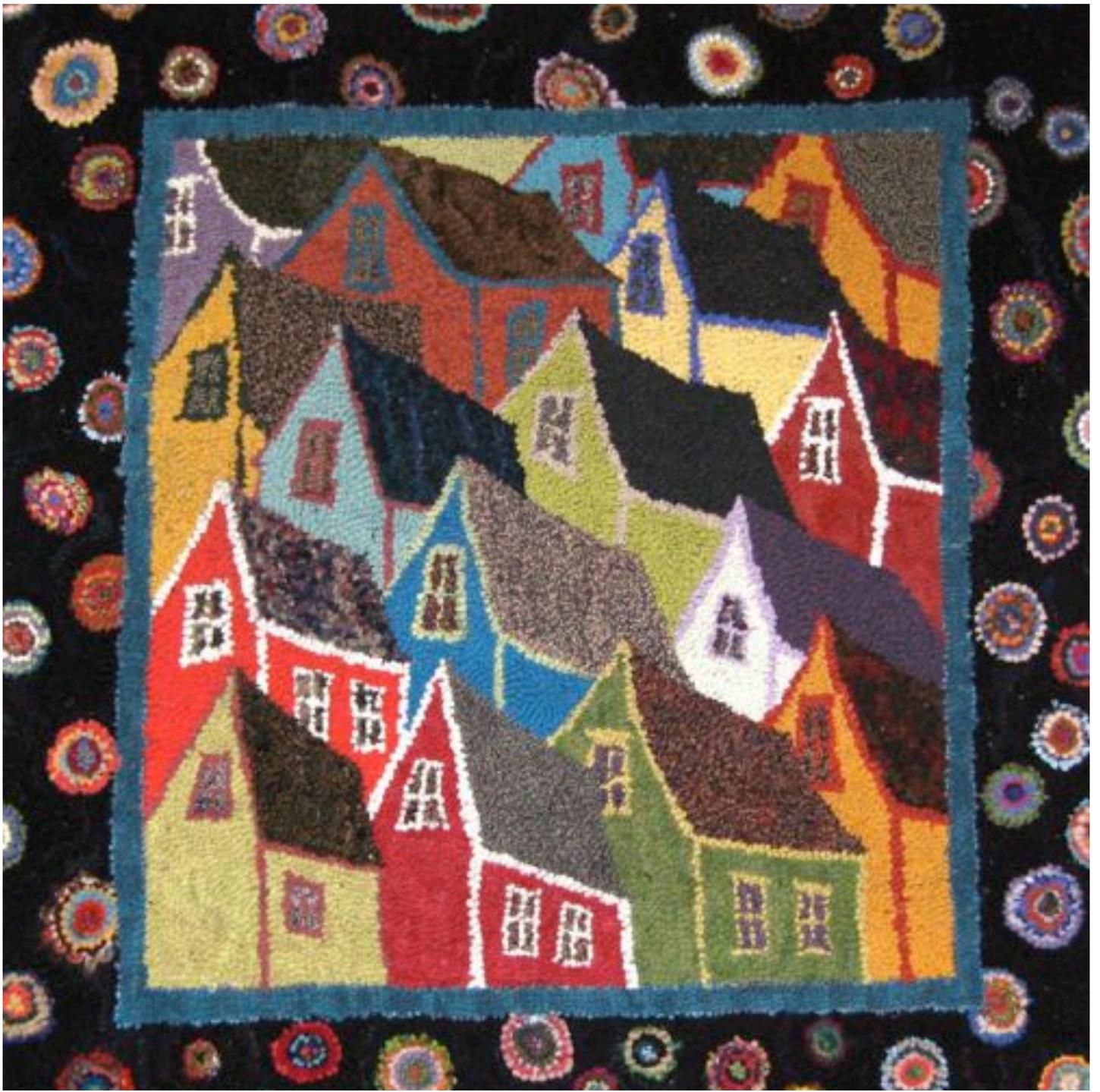
Backings and Frames

I hook on either primitive burlap (middle right) or linen (top left). Linen is thought to be more durable and long lasting while primitive burlap is great for decorative smaller projects. To stretch your backing or pattern you can start with a heavy duty hoop or lap frame. We have a good assortment of these things in the online shop at www.hookingrugs.com. You can also easily make your own frame, thumbtacking your backing to an old picture frame or artists stretcher bar. I like my backing to be stretched tight like a drum because it makes it easier to hook.

BACKINGS AND FRAMES

Since my first summer hooking I have used a Cheticamp frame . I bought it in Cheticamp from Henry Bourgeois. I still have it. I still love it because it acts as a table to hold my wool as I hook and both my hands are free. We do sell these at the studio and they are made by the husband of Brenda who works with me in the studio, with wood he logs and cuts himself. The gears are also made by a local machinist out of steel. The steel gears allow you to stretch your pattern very taught. I sit with my back straight and pull the frame right up to me so I am not hunched over the frame as I hook for long periods of time. As for backings, it is important to remember that your backing must suit the width of cloth you are using. You cannot pull up wide thick cuts of cloth through tightly woven backings. You will hurt your hands. Take it from someone who has learned the hard way. Make sure your linen or burlap is an open weave and that the cloth can be pulled up through the holes in the canvas with ease so there is not strain on your hands.



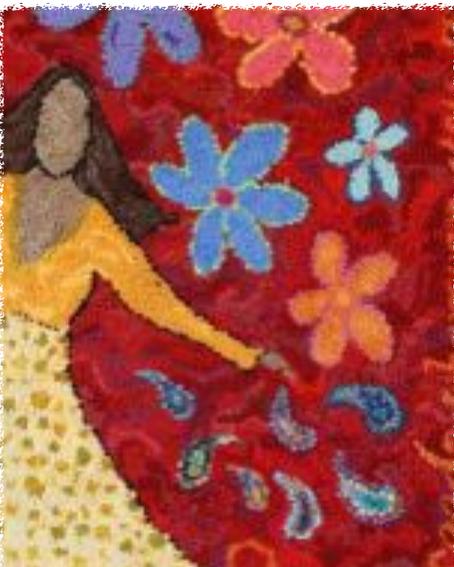




TEXTURE

It may start with wool cloth but there is no reason to limit yourself to that when it comes to creating beautiful rugs. I use hand spun yarns, wool sweaters, fleece right off the sheep, carded wools, silk yarns, curly locks, slub yarn, and whatever takes my fancy. I like to see what different yarns can do and how they act in the mat. Sometimes if a yarn is fine I will hook several strands together at once.

When I work with fleece I pull it into strands so that it resembles a strip of cloth. I also find that fleece and carded wools take the dyes differently and often look softer in both colour and texture than dyed dyed wool cloth. Different textures can lend a sculptural quality to your rug hooking. I often pull them higher (one inch) than I do cloth (1/2 inch) and this makes them really stand out.



A Rug in Progress

This rug is called "Scatter Seeds Wherever You Go" and it reflects what we believe at the studio. Teaching people about rug hooking and creativity has allowed me to scatter a few seeds along the way. I encourage you to share this booklet with your friends, and use it to teach others about the beauty of the handmade. Please share it with new rug hookers so they can get inspired and excited about this new community of rug hookers that they have become part of. My mother in law always said, "We are here to be good to each other." I believe her. Scatter seeds where ever you go.

SIMPLE BEGINNER PROJECT

I started hooking with a kit. I knew I had everything I needed to start and complete my first hooked rug. It was a traditional Nova Scotia pattern of scrolls and leaves. It is pictured here. I finished it with in a week. Early on I began drawing my own designs early on by using a sharpie marker to draw the designs on burlap. You can start quite simply with stripes or squares, hearts, or circles. Any shape repeated over and over again like the squares shown here will work for a simple beginner project. Make sure you have lots of wool on hand and all the supplies you need so that you do not get discouraged if you run out of something. Also be sure you have a good hook, a new clean backing, and a comfortable rug hooking frame. The rug shown above of simple squares is called, "Gone Mod" and though it is a traditional design it has a really contemporary feeling.



POSSIBILITIES IN RUG HOOKING

I have been hooking rugs for twenty two years. I learned because I had this old farmhouse, where I still live, and I wanted rugs for the floor. I continued because the creative possibilities were endless. I have made room sized floor carpets, pillows, wall hangings, table runners, stair treads, tea cozies, christmas ornaments, and purses. Once I even made a coat collar.

It is not only that you can come up with infinite ideas for rug hooking. It is also that even if you just want to make rugs or wall hangings, the possibilities for colour and design are as infinite for you as they are for a painter.

Rug hooking is just painting with wool.

Rug hooking is both craft and art. I am proud to say that my rugs have been used as mats for the back door and that they have hung in the Canadian Museum of Civilization and at many art galleries. It is both utilitarian and fine art at the same time and that idea sits well with me. Beauty can be everywhere, and even better if it warms cold floors.



THE JOY OF STORYTELLING

My first book, “Hook Me A Story” was published in 1999 and has been reprinted more than five times. It documents the history and method of rug hooking in Atlantic Canada. Rug hooking has a strong tradition of story telling behind it. You can use your rugs to record your personal stories, the history of your family, or life in the community around you. I have told many stories through my rugs, whether it is kite flying at Amherst Shore, or the joy found in women’s friendships. I enjoy using my rugs to express what I know and what I believe to be important. Rug Hooking is a chance to express yourself.



Our Online Courses



All of the women who work with me in the studio are wonderful smart people. Shown above are Katherine and Brenda who will often call people about their orders just to be sure they get it right.

Getting Wild with Wool Series of Online Courses

On my website www.hookingrugs.com I offer a series of online courses where I teach everything I know about rug hooking, art and creativity. These classes are designed to lead you through from the simple beginnings of rug hooking to rug hooking as an art. Each course is built around video, audio and written lessons with a live community of rug hookers. I design, teach and facilitate the online classes through a special website set up for teaching.

Join me for the Wild with Wool Series of Online Courses where you can create beauty everyday.

www.hookingrugs.com

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