

Knitting the World Together

“My brain is made for knitting. If I see something interesting, I immediately think about how I can turn it into knitting.” Bernd Kestler—knitting artist, designer and instructor—knits everything from the standard socks and scarves to the not-so-typical *haori* (kimono jacket) and lampshades.

Growing up in a small town in Germany, Kestler loved to play outdoors. He also enjoyed the beautiful knitwear his elder sister made for him. When he was 12 years old, something happened that changed his life. “My sister started knitting more for her boyfriend and less for me. So I taught myself knitting, and have kept on with the craft for more than 40 years.”

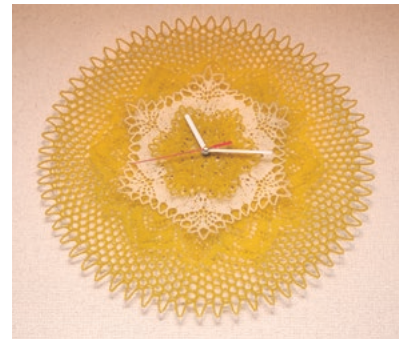
While in university, Kestler worked part-time for a company that developed and organized business seminars. “I organized classes on Japanese management philosophy, so I had to study about Japanese business, traditions, and modern culture, like animation and games. Japan fascinated me!” After graduating, he got his first job in Tokyo with an interior design company. While he enjoyed the job, he felt something was missing. Meeting people who did what they liked for a living, Kestler would wonder, “Why not me?” Finally, in 2010, he decided to start his first knitting class.



“I think of knitting all day long, even in my dreams. I don't need a vacation, because I don't need to get away from anything.”



In Kestler's class, students make whatever they like while enjoying conversation in Japanese, German and English.



Kestler's works vary from knitwear to interior accessories such as a wall clock.



Heel-less socks are one of Kestler's masterpieces. They fit all sizes and are easy to make even for beginners.



As a part of his “Knit for Japan” project, Kestler finished a huge blanket with people in Tohoku and earned the Guinness World Record for the largest crochet blanket.

Kestler often thinks of how knitting might not only fulfill creative desires, but also contribute to society. His “Knit for Japan” project exemplifies this quest. After the March 2011 Great East Japan earthquake, Kestler and his friends donated hand-knitted gloves, scarves and hats to people in Tohoku who lost their homes. “After a year, I knew they needed something else. I started thinking about what we could do that would also involve the local people. By knitting squares together, I thought they could interact with each other, and this would cheer them up.” Kestler asked people in Japan and friends from around the world to crochet 20cm × 20cm “granny squares.” “Many supporters, my friends and a Japanese yarn company offered to help,” says Kestler. “The response was overwhelming.” With his volunteers, Kestler connected 11,250 granny squares together into a 476.78 square meter blanket, a feat that earned him the Guinness World Record and an award from the Japanese Ministry of Economy and Trade. “The awards were a great honor to receive and added a heartfelt touch for everybody involved with the project,” he says. “Each of us sat down for an hour thinking about the people in Tohoku, as we made a square. We were knitting the world together. That was very special.” Kestler later divided the giant blanket into smaller blankets as presents for people living at shelters in the areas hit by the earthquake.

Does having knitting on his mind night and day tire Kestler? “Never. It’s in my DNA. Knitting is magic; you create something beautiful with your hands. Japan gave me the chance to do what I really enjoy. I would like to explore Japanese culture and traditional crafts and incorporate traditional dyeing methods such as *ai-zome* (indigo dyeing) and *kusaki-zome* (botanical dyeing) in my knitting. By bringing beautiful colors into people’s lives and showing them how exciting knitting can be, I want to change the perception of knitting. Colors bring happiness, and Japanese history is full of amazing colors. I hope people can enjoy these colors through my works.”



Bernd Kestler

Born in the county of Hessen, Germany. Studied horticulture in university and worked as a landscape designer in England. Moved to Japan in 1998. Lives in Yokohama and works on his knitting pieces while enjoying gardening.