



by Clara Parkes

Scarves are a joy to knit, inviting textured stitches in plump, luscious yarns. They begin as a happy swatch that keeps going and going until it comes off the needles as a welcome and useful accessory.

Knitted scarves are my constant companions half the year, my first line of defense against drafts and chill. Nestled within their safe, warm cocoons, I keep my thermostat low and heating bills down.

With this in mind, you'll understand my powerlessness against the swatching temptation of Kate Gilbert's Autobahn. The original was knit in Zitron Nimbus, a smooth and splendid 100% organic Merino yarn. While Nimbus did a fine job of rendering Kate's reversible ribbing and cabled stitch pattern, I wanted to see how the pattern would fare with a yarn with more multi-dimensional texture.

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Last Updated on Sunday, 17 February 2013 12:24

Published on Friday, 22 July 2011 12:12



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First, I tried to replicate the roundedness of Nimbus but with more air throughout. The solution came in Cascade Eco Cloud, a knitted tube yarn made in Peru of 70% Merino and 30% baby alpaca, all in undyed hues. An extraordinarily round, springy yarn, Eco Cloud gave the highest of high relief to the reversible cable pattern, along with stupendous bounce, body, and clarity. As a knitted tube, Eco Cloud holds a tremendous amount of still air, making it an appropriate option for cold climates. In terms of touch, this fabric has all the succulence and elasticity of well-risen, yeasted bread dough.





Next, I turned to a yarn whose fibers would add the texture: Classic Elite Lush. An even blend of wool and angora, this smooth four-ply is spun in Peru. Angora is a high insulator, and at 50 percent this is an extremely warm scarf. It's also fairly dense, with the wool still giving just enough basic elasticity to keep the ribbing snug—though nowhere near as snug as Eco Cloud.

The best part comes after you wash your scarf for the first time, as the angora has been tightly held in place and then blooms—not intolerably poofy, just gently complete. I urge you to knit a swatch and see what happens when you shock it—soaking first in hot water, then cold, then hot, then cold again. By semi-fulling the fabric, you're anchoring all the angora fibers in place to prevent stray fibers from making your nose itch—a common complaint with some of the poofier, lower-twist pure angora yarns.

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Finally, I considered an equally soft and warm, scarf-worthy yarn that would deliver even more textural nuance. My choice: Mirasol Akapana. Also spun in Peru, this two-ply yarn blends 65% baby llama, 25% Merino, and 10% of what it calls "Donegal."

I'm not sure how the FTC would view Donegal as a labeling term, but the fibers in question are really just slubby little bits (called "noil") that remained on the carding drums after fiber was run through the carding machine. Noil is considered undesirable for fine, smooth yarns, but it's often saved and added to other yarns for a tweedy effect. The actual fiber contents of the Donegal feel like cotton or raw silk to me.

Akapana is spun in an irregular thick/thin way that initially seems like handspun. Look more closely and you'll notice that both plies are uniformly thick and thin at the same spots—entirely possible in handspinning, but requiring a focus and discipline that doesn't translate well to mass production.

From a knitting perspective, the yarn's wildly varying texture made the cable stitches a little cumbersome to manage at times. But the end effect, when knit into the pattern, is that of a picture projected onto an old stone wall. The ribs that were so crisp and architectural in the previous two yarns became slightly wobblier—perfect for people who like a gentler, earthier look to their scarves.



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Whether you choose the yarn Kate did or one of the yarns I've swatched here—or a yarn entirely of your own discovery—keep softness and stitch definition in mind. This pattern adjusts nicely to differences in fibers and twists, delivering a most satisfying swatching experience.