

Sewing and knitting make a surging comeback

NEW YORK (AP) — With the concentration of a pool shark lining up a shot, Priya Pillutla leans over a broad sheet of green fabric, steadies a large pair of scissors and makes a cut.

"It's going to be a wool skirt," the 25-year-old medical student said. "And I got this stuff for just \$4 a yard."

Suddenly, sewing has joined knitting as a hobby for 20- and 30-somethings.

How-to books are selling well and instructors say classes are packed with young people from Los Angeles to New York. And stores that stock the tools of the craft — thick spools of knitting yarn to tiny sewing-machine bobbins — are doing brisk business.

"It's very 2003," said Elissa Meyrich, who teaches sewing and knitting five nights a week from a cozy studio in Manhattan's Garment District. "All of a sudden this stuff is cool — not fuddy-duddy anymore."

The crafts have gained steam in the past year. The sagging economy has dried up fat personal wardrobe budgets and the cable design hit "Trading Spaces" has helped create a new wave of do-it-yourselfers.

Meyrich said her 2 1/2-hour introductory sewing class is overflowing. She teaches it several nights a week for \$70. Sales of her book "Sew Fast Sew Easy," which was published last summer, have picked up.

Mattie Kennedy, a 33-year-old executive assistant, took the class after she found a 1950s-era Singer sewing machine at a

streetside junk sale.

"I never wanted to take home ec in school," she said. "I thought I was going to have to stay home and have babies. But this is so creative."

With a boost from celebrity enthusiasts that include Julia Roberts and Cameron Diaz, knitting has also turned into more than warm-and-fuzzy scarves doled out at Christmas.

Suss Cousins, who makes custom clothing and costumes for television and movies, said her knitting class in Los Angeles is more popular than ever.

She's determined to make knitting more than a solitary, armchair hobby. She turns it into a social event, serving martinis and homemade dishes on Tuesday nights while her students learn the craft in comfortable, low-slung chairs.

And her students go beyond working up a version of grandma's cable-knit sweater. She teaches them how to knit ponchos, wraps — even knitted cell phone covers.

"They just come in, sit down and relax," she said. "They walk out of there, and they can do something they couldn't do when they entered my store. I love that."

She said her latest clients include actors Sandra Bullock and Katy Sagal.

Cousins traces the renewed popularity directly to Sept. 11, 2001. Since the attacks, she said, people are hungry to make meaningful things with their hands, and to connect with time-honored family traditions.

And she has all the evidence



— AP photo

SEW TRENDY — Sewing student Laura Burr, 40, watches Elissa K. Meyrich, sewing educator, as she prepares the lining of an elastic waist skirt for sewing during a beginner's sewing class in Meyrich's sewing studio in New York.

she needs of the new mainstream appeal of sewing and knitting when she looks at the faces of her students. Next week, eight new students will take up needle and yarn. They are all men.

"All of a sudden, I have guys in the classes," she said. "People are so hungry to keep things alive that used to be. It's an old craft, and now it's becoming so popular. It's inspiring."