

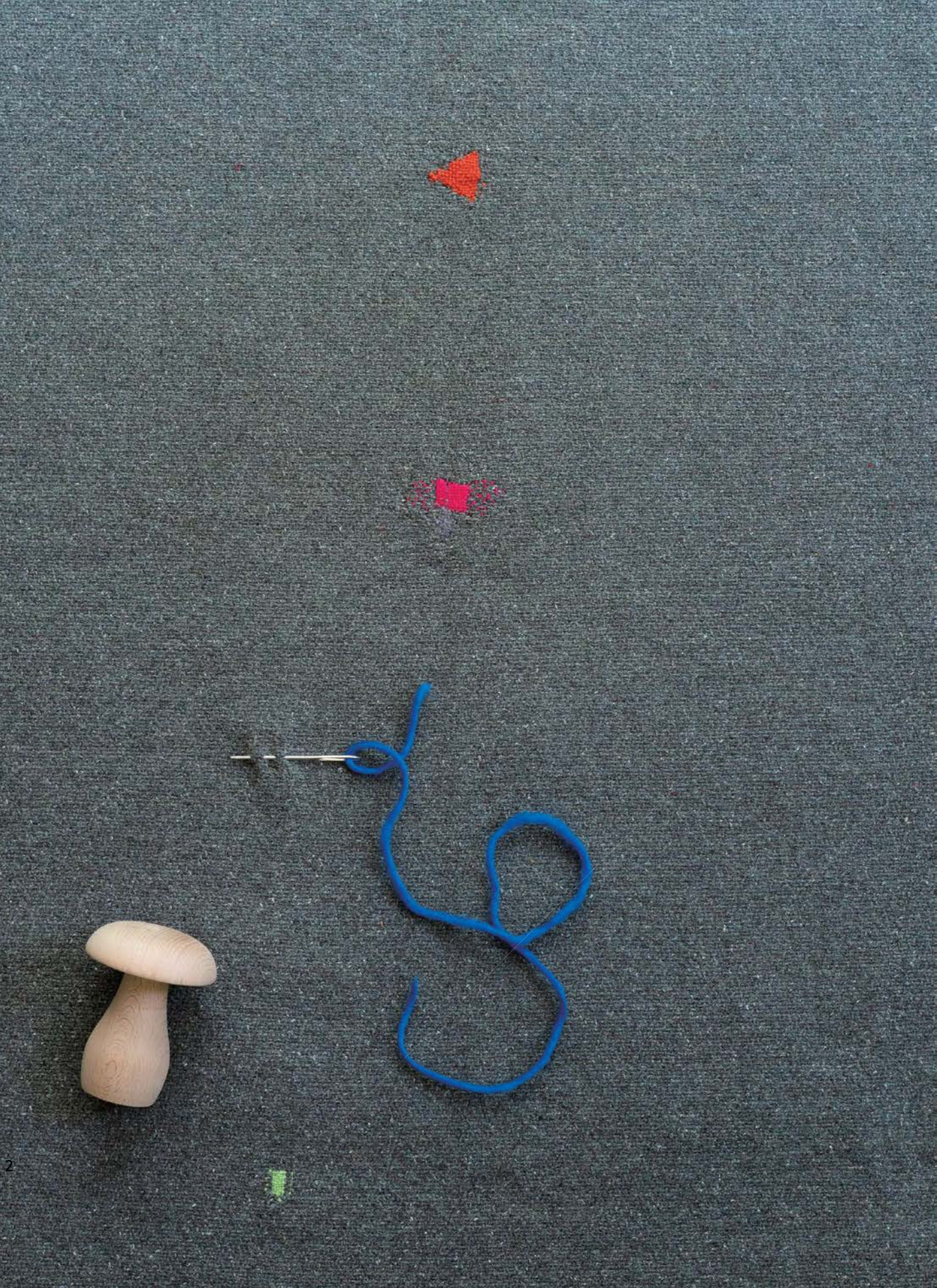
Hikaru Noguchi's Darning



repair
make
mend



QUICKTHORN



Foreword

When I was little, I was surrounded by old things. My grandfather's hobby was collecting antiques and art. My mother, who taught knitting, used to unravel old sweaters and make skeins. When my father was young, he bought a car that he continued to use for 40 years. I grew up knowing the fun that repairing and continuing to use things could bring. During school, Miss Chandler, a missionary and English conversation teacher from England, wore summer dresses and jackets with black spots where the darned repairs were. I would look at her and think, 'Why don't you buy new clothes?', but I also knew that she was 'chic'. This was my formative experience of darning.

When I first travelled to England at the age of 19, I felt at home with the British way of life where the 'preservation of old things' and at the same time 'new values' were norms of society. I lived in England for another 15 years with this comfortable feeling.

But now times have changed. In the blink of an eye the world has become a place where it is cheaper to replace most things than it is to repair them. As a designer, who for more than 25 years has proposed new designs and products, I have come to question the contradictions of the fashion and design industries. What I found when I first came to England was a form of needlework, darning, in which the mended parts stand out; this suggested a way to solve some of those contradictions.

As time passes, you become attached to things and less keen to keep buying more stuff. So the purpose of darning is not simply the craft. If you think 'Is it okay to mend it myself?' then just go ahead and do it.

My wish is that many more items will be used to the full and when, finally, they can no longer be used they'll return to the soil. Then maybe darning will really become 'part of the world' again.

Hikaru Noguchi



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by Kumi Saito; others by Hikaru Noguchi

Darning in England

I had never heard the word 'darning' in Japan. In English it means 'mending,' as they used to do back in the day. It is a simple way of mending at home.



A, B: The landscape of Rachael's home in the Lake District. The bridge was designed by her father, an architect. C: A sweater that Rachael has continued to darn. D, E: The yarn that Rachael chooses is colourful. Hers is a method of mending that challenges preconceptions. F: The shop 'Prick Your Finger' that Rachael used to trade in. G: The shop sold craft tools and kits as well as wool. H: Rachael's tools are carried in a pencil case. I: Trunks and branches of trees that fell in a storm,

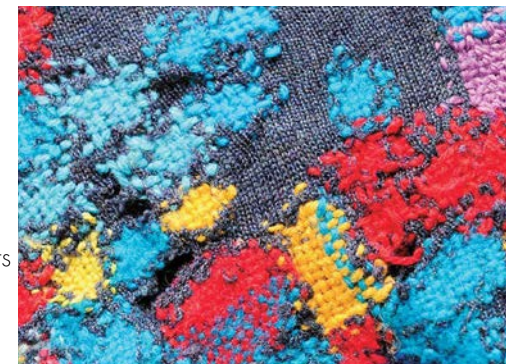
being used by Rachael's father for kindling and woodwork. J: A darning mushroom's head and handle are made separately before being combined. K: Rachael's father working at the lathe.



Clothes used to be precious. During Queen Victoria's era, most people sewed their own clothes at home and continued to wear and mend them carefully. If you look at the beautifully decorated darning tools and sewing boxes in museums, you can see that mending was an integral part of the culture. During World War II, when there was a shortage of supplies, the government encouraged simple living and recommended darning using a mushroom. You can still find old darning mushrooms in flea markets and sewing boxes from the war generations, stored with small rolls of yarn, like bandages in a medicine chest.

I had my life-changing moment in England when I visited the yarn shop 'Prick Your Finger' run by knitting and textile researcher Rachael Matthews. There I found a darning mushroom and received instructions in its use right then and there. This was when I saw the

sweater in the picture. Although the sweater' was mass produced, it was a present and much cherished. After it has suffered repeated washing and many holes, a new mosaic-like stratum was created by darning using colourful wool. I – who used to say, 'Make it look as good as new' and 'I promise mended



holes won't be seen' – have realised that this simple method of visible mending can be a means of expression. A shocking experience for me. The darning mushroom made by Rachael's father, an architect and craftsman, was made from thick dried branches broken by the

wind from trees in his home in the Lake District. This is the spirit of ingenuity – making the most of the materials you find around you.

Currently in the UK, Rachael Matthews, Celia Pym, Freddie Robbins, Tom of Holland, Amy Twigger Holroyd and Sanae Kido are all active researchers in the art of darning.





The repair studio

For me, darning is an everyday thing – my work is usually on the dining table

When I was living in South Africa, in the morning at the weekends and during long holidays, when the children were studying at the dining table, I started 'dining table crafting' in order to see the children's reaction. On the table were textbooks, notebooks, dictionaries and next to them a sewing box. Soon we started making crochet blankets for the school bazaar and charity events and I would repair the family's clothes by reattaching buttons or altering hems. Hence, my darning workshop is my dining room table. Yarn and tools are put in containers, antique picture plates, silver bowls, baskets and sieves, vintage trays and biscuit tins, anything that looks good. Yarn types are also sorted into easy classifications such as silk-like mohair, wool and metallic lamé. There is also a sweet box for yarn ends that are unclassifiable. It is like a treasure box; it is so much fun to find remnants there. I'm not the type who can tidy up easily, but thanks to

this wonderful storage system I sometimes find an unexpected combination of threads and colours.

The beauty of darning is that most projects are finished within a few minutes to an hour. There's no need to take out a sewing machine; the tools are as simple as a darning mushroom, needle and scissors. You can darn just as quickly as sewing on a button. If you're set on darning a larger area, you can continue to enjoy the pleasures of sewing and working methodically, giving you a great sense of satisfaction in a job well done.

Darning is similar to sewing on a button. Even if it is not done in the 'right way' published in a book, you still somehow manage to do it. Although this book has 12 patterns from basic to advanced techniques, none of these needs to be followed exactly to the letter. It is fine if you just somehow manage to do it. Through repetition, the stitches will start to become your own original creation.



A	B	<p>A: A lot of mohair is produced in South Africa, where I lived for a long time. B: I pile up a myriad of colourful wools and place them beside my dining table. The more colours and materials, the greater the creativity. C: An African basket full of darning mushrooms. Even the decorative ones still get used. D: Absorbed in the moment for a few minutes when darning. E: My favourite mushroom and thread in a wicker basket for easy access.</p>
C	E	
D		



Vintage darning mushrooms

If you visit any museum about daily life in Europe, you can see displays of darning mushrooms and sewing boxes. I still see them frequently in European and American markets and antique shops. There are various types besides the basic darning mushroom. There's a darning shell in the shape of a cowrie, a darning egg, a darning lollipop, a darning foot for the lower part of the shoe, which looks like a shoe mould, and a darning stick used only for gloves. When I see the marks and scratches on one I think of who used it and what they were thinking as they darned.

A: Palm-sized mushroom with a painted rose design. B: Plastic mushroom with a marble pattern which stores needles and thread inside. C: Hand carved wooden mushroom. D: This mushroom has a metal ring to hold the material. E: This one is specifically for socks. F: The cabbage press is a kitchen utensil, but some museums say that it was used for darning too. G: Flower painted. H, I: Mushrooms with metal band. J: Plastic mushroom made in 1950–60. J: A simple mushroom bought in a flea market.



Original darning mushrooms

I wanted to make the ideal darning mushroom, so I worked with Hachioji woodworking factory to make prototypes. Apprentices at the workshop noted the daunting task of holding a darning mushroom in the left hand while sewing with the right and so we invented a standing mushroom that could be placed on a table. The idea is based on a carved figurine from South Africa that I use as a mushroom for darning big holes. We also offer original mushrooms unique to Japan, such as Kokeshi mushroom dolls made by a craftsman in Miyagi and marble mushrooms from Gifu.

A: Made with Nordic beech, this was polished with dark brown oil. B: Shaped like the mushrooms found in picture books about forests. C: Can be placed on the table or held in the hand. As it is lightweight, it is perfect for long periods of darning. D: Made from Gifu marble. Because it is heavy it is useful for darning denim and other heavy material. E: Produced in collaboration with a master craftsman from Miyagi. I had the waist made thinner so the piece is easier to hold and the head made oblong and flat. F: Especially for darning five-toe socks.

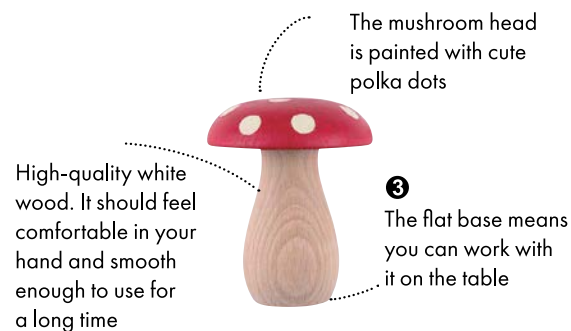
Let's start darning

What you need

As long as you have a darning mushroom you can darn with any sewing tools in the house. Once you have to hand an elastic cord, scissors, needle and needle threader you are ready to start.



HIKARU NOGUCHI Darning Mushroom



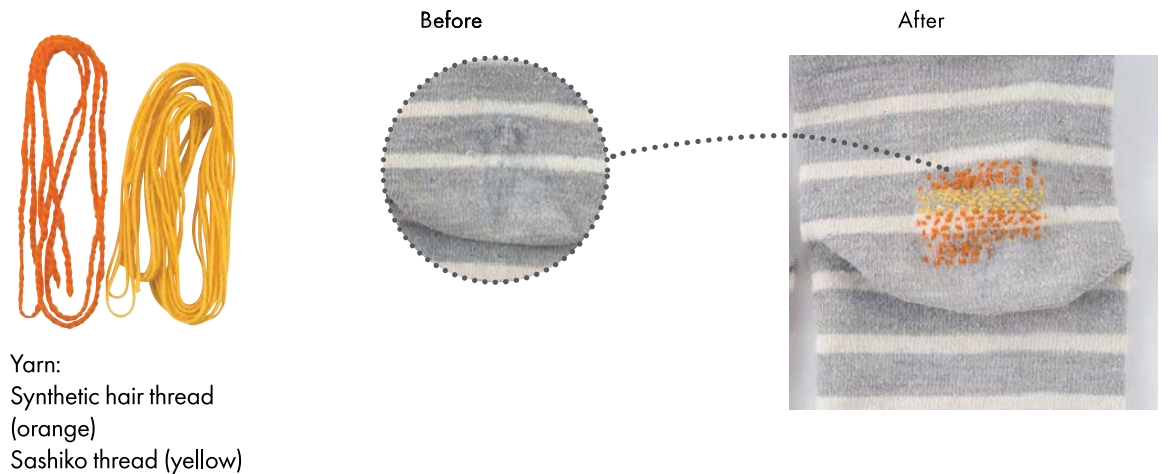
Ideal for five-finger socks or gloves, which both tend to wear easily. Use the thicker side for thumbs and the thinner side for fingers.

Darning Technique 1

Seed stitches are so named because they look like scattered sesame seeds on the surface of your work. It is a technique used to reinforce worn-out fabrics such as heels in socks.

<< When to use >>

When there isn't a hole but the fabric is worn or damaged



Setting up the darning mushroom



First row

