

Men's jumper from Kihnu island (*troi*)

Until the 1880s, men on Kihnu island regularly wore woven knee-length tunics (*umbkuub* or *vammus* in Estonian). Men started wearing knitted jumpers in the second half of the 19th century. Nevertheless, the archaic tunic remained in use for decades to come as part of the winter attire for hunting seals.

It is thought the name of the jumper – *troi* – is a derivative of the Swedish word *tröja* (knitted jumper). The first Kihnu men's jumpers were knitted in a single natural sheep shade – black, grey, or white. However, the plain jumpers were still knitted using stranding because it gives a tighter and warmer fabric. The bottom edging, cuffs, and neckband had 4 cm long 2x1 corrugated ribbing worked using two strands of the same yarn.

The men's jumpers have been knitted in small all-over colourwork patterns in blue and white since the end of the 19th century. The blue yarn was dyed with indigo. A bit of red, preferably dyed with Northern bedstraw, was often added to the neckband, cuffs, and bottom edging. The bedstraw red was believed to have magic properties against illnesses and evil forces. Men wore their jumpers on daily basis as well as on special occasions.

In the 1920s, it became a fad among the young men to despise traditional items. The colourwork jumpers fell out of favour and were either dyed black or unravelled. The yarn was repurposed for women's stockings, mittens, and gloves. Young men were also reluctant to wear colourwork mittens and gloves. Thus, they wore mittens that were entirely black or had floral motifs.

Fortunately, this attitude subsided in the 1930s when the island was frequented by ethnographers who praised the uniqueness of Kihnu island culture.

Knitting men's jumpers was the first order of crafting for the women after the autumn harvest. The jumpers were tightly knitted in the round using 12–15 fine double-pointed needles. Sometimes, two or three knitters worked on the same *troi* simultaneously. The body was knitted straight up to the shoulders without any shaping, the armholes were cut later and the sleeves knitted from the top down. The neck opening was straight, often with a button closure on the shoulder. As children have proportionally larger heads, their jumpers were sometimes made with an open neck to make it easier to pull the *troi* on.

At the end of the 20th century, when the traditional jumper became fashionable again, it was made more comfortable for the wearer: the contemporary *troi* is knitted with a round neck opening for the head to fit through better.

The jumper, when knitted using traditional methods, has a dense and stable fabric, hence the nickname *Kihnu bulletproof*. Machine-knitted jumpers are softer and have more give, plus they invariably have side seams because these jumpers cannot be machine-knitted in the round. However, the edgings are knitted by hand on these as well.

The jumpers historically had dark patterning on a light background – the blue yarn was precious and was used sparingly. Nowadays, dark background is considered more practical and due to ease of care, natural brown or black are the preferred colours.

The stranded colourwork patterns used for men's jumpers were historically small and fine, often the same pattern used for the fingers of gloves. Contemporary jumpers make use of larger patterns as well. The patterns often include the eight-point star, which is a protective motif. Patterns with a small eight-point star are considered the prettiest.

My story of troi-knitting

I am a 47-year-old Kihnu woman. I was taught to knit by my grandmother when I was 8. I have knitted a variety of different items: hats, scarves, mittens, gloves, socks, bags, and jumpers.

In 2004, my brother-in-law requested a traditional Kihnu men's jumper. I was unemployed at the time and began researching jumper knitting. There was nobody who could teach me, so I examined the jumpers in the museum and experimented. The first jumper came out too large for my brother-in-law, so I knitted another one that fitted him well. I sold my first jumper for the price of a fridge. After that, the large-scale knitting commenced, for the wearer was often asked about the knitter and thus the orders started coming in. The waiting list for a jumper is currently two years. I personally meet and measure all customers, and then we pick a pattern together. There are a lot of patterns, although the eight-point star is the most popular. The patterns have different meanings: the eight-point star is a symbol of success and fortune, the cat's paw protects against curses, the clover leaf is love and then there are also crosses and anchors and so on. As I come from a family of fishers and seal hunters, I designed an anchor pattern and that has become very popular.

It takes me 200 hours to knit an average men's jumper. I have knitted 136 traditional colourwork jumpers to date. The jumpers I have made can be found all over the world: in the United States, Finland, Germany, Norway, France, Sweden, etc. My own son, Aleks, received the 100th colourwork vest for his 20th birthday and is now hoping for the 200th jumper for his 35th birthday. I knitted crosses, anchors and eight-point stars into his vest – faith, hope and success 😊.

I have taught how to knit these jumpers in Tallinn at the Estonian Folk and Craft Union and will teach on Kihnu island too, provided there is interest.

How I make my jumpers

I use yarn made of Kihnu landrace sheep's wool in their natural shades and add only a little dyed red into the edgings, for it is considered a joyous and protective colour.

At first, I used 15 double pointed needles. But then I have discovered circular needles. I use 2 mm needles (US #0) because I knit firmly and using a smaller needle would make the jumper too stiff.

The making process starts with measuring the wearer, choosing a pattern, and calculating the stitch count. 384 stitches were cast on for the jumper on the photo. A characteristic of the edgings are the herringbone braids. I knit my name into the edging too, as a guarantee. The guarantee period is 10 years, unless something extreme happens.

When the edging is finished, increases should be worked after every seven stitches, which results in a total of 440 stitches per round. Then the knitting of the colourwork pattern starts. The pattern repeat is 20 stitches, one round consists of 22 pattern repeats. The knitting now proceeds without shaping until the underarm. Historically, the body was knitted up to the shoulders and the armholes cut straight. These days, I divide for the front and back, so both sections have 220 stitches.

I proceed with knitting only the front flat and work a single decrease on each side on every other row. I do this 20 times, which leaves me 180 stitches. Now, the front is worked even until the neck opening. The shoulder straps start simultaneously with the neck opening. The shoulder straps use the same pattern as the bottom edging. The shoulder strap is set up over 60 stitches, the stitches on the middle are left on hold for the neckband. I work a knit decrease on the neck side of the shoulder strap on every other row until 50 stitches remain. The shoulder strap is bound off using a chain bind-off in alternating colours.

Then, the back is worked over 220 stitches. I shape the armholes the same way as for the front until 180 stitches remain. I knit even until the front (including the shoulder straps) and the back are the same length. I work a black and white herringbone braid over 50 stitches on the shoulder and bind off using the chain bind-off in alternating colours. The neck stitches remain live on the needle.

Now the shoulders can be seamed. Next, I pick up and knit the neckband stitches, one black, one white. The neckband uses the same pattern as the middle section of the bottom edging.

The sleeves are knitted after the neckband is finished. I cast on 88 stitches for a sleeve and knit the cuff. The cuff is followed by the colourwork. In the colourwork section, I work two single increases on every fourth round – one after the first stitch and one before the last stitch of the round. I work the sleeve and shaping as set until I reach the shoulder and then I sew the sleeve to the body.

After I have finished knitting the jumper, I machine wash it using a wool cycle and lay it flat to dry.

Five weeks have passed, and the customer can receive their jumper. 😊