



# Mulberry Alpacas

Wool, alpaca or otherwise, is woven into English idioms in intriguing ways.

*Even dyed-in-the-wool optimists, when fleeced by a wolf in sheep's clothing who has pulled the wool over their eyes, feel as defenceless as a newly born lamb.*

A bellwether was the lead sheep in a flock, while shoddy was the term used for poor reused wool in the Civil War.

Wool is the fabric of our history and is threaded through our literature with legends of Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece, Odysseus escaping from the Cyclops' cave by hanging onto the woollen underbelly of a giant ram, and Penelope nightly unravelling her weaving to delay suitors until Odysseus's return. Salome's veils may have been woollen, and so probably was the carpet that Cleopatra used to smuggle herself in to see Caesar.

## The Language of wool...

In the vernacular

CLOSE-KNIT held tightly together either socially or culturally.

Colour added to wool before weaving is DYED-IN-THE-WOOL; strongly held opinions.

Taking FLEECE from sheep; swindling a gullible victim.

Newly woven cloth was hung ON TENTERHOOKS; a state of nervous apprehension.

PULL THE WOOL OVER ONE'S EYES; to hoodwink someone.

Fabric made of reclaimed wool is called **SHODDY**; inferior.

Wandering about collecting tufts of wool caught on bushes is **WOOLGATHERING**; daydreaming.

To **SPIN A GOOD YARN**; To tell a good story.

**SPINSTER**; colonial women who were unmarried were often consigned to operate a spinning wheel to produce home-spun yarns.

## Woollen terms

**ALPACA**; a South American camel like animal whose family boasts some of the finest and most interesting fibers in the world. Family members include the alpaca, guanaco, llama and vicuna. All four produce hair for men's topcoats, suits and jackets. The llama and alpaca are domesticated and their hair is fairly plentiful. The guanaco and vicuna are wild (although some are being domesticated) and harvesting their hair is very complicated. The vicuna is protected by international law, and its fiber is the most expensive in the world. Limited quantities are sold in Europe, Asia and finally in the U.S. The Loro Piana Company of Italy has worked closely with the Peruvian government to protect and commercialize vicuna and the company is the major source of vicuna fabric.

**BIRDSEYE**; a fine worsted wool fabric with a weave effect and color resembling a bird's eye

**CARDING**; to untangle fibers.

**CREPE**; Worsted fabric with a crinkled or pebble surface, usually produced with tightly twisted crepe yarns in one or both directions of a loose or plain weave.

**CROPPING**; to cut the pile to uniform height.

**DYEING**; the coloring of a fabric or yarn. Yarn dyes are dyed after being spun and are noted for deep, rich colors and can be used to create interesting effects in weaving. Disadvantages are that they must be stored and an unpopular color can be costly. Most fabric is piece dyed, i.e., the whole fabric is dyed after weaving and this gives market flexibility, because dyeing can be done after the order is in.

**FELT**; wool matted using moisture and pressure.

**FLANNEL**; a soft woollen or worsted fabric in either a plain or twill weave and slightly napped on one side.

**FLEECE FABRIC;** a cloth with a deep, thick-napped surface.

**FULLING;** to shrink and thicken cloth by moisture, heat and pressure

**JACQUARD;** a loom attachment invented in 1801 by Joseph M. Jacquard. Used today in a modern form, it allows for an almost unlimited range of intricate designs in woven and knit fabrics.

**LAMBS WOOL;** from lambs younger than 7 months

**MOLESKIN;** an old fabric now popular again, especially in menswear. A soft, smooth, usually napped twill used in pants and jackets.

**NAP;** fibre ends are raised to give cloth a soft finish

**NATURAL STRETCH;** results from the combination of yarn treatment and special weaving—does not involve spandex or other stretch yarns. Certain mills refuse to divulge their formula.

**PILLING;** an appearance problem created when fibres gather into small balls on the surface of the fabric. The stronger the fiber, the more difficult it is to get rid of the pill once it has formed.

**RASCHEL;** fabric produced on a warp knitting machine using latch needles.

**ROVING;** bundles of fibres in untwisted strands

**SATEEN;** a woven fabric with a smooth surface and a lustrous finish. Warp-faced sateens are strongest, but filling-faced versions are softer.

**SERGE;** Smooth, durable suiting fabric made with a 45-degree twill weave and tightly twisted yarns. Has a flat twill line on both sides, running from the lower left to the upper right.

**SLUB;** imperfections in a yarn producing knobby balls or uneven strands. Often done deliberately to create a decorative effect.

**SPINNING;** using one of several processes, spinning shorter staple fibers together to form a spun yarn. One of the oldest means of making yarn.

**THE SUPER WORSTEDS;** with selective merino sheep breeding and advances in spinning, weaving and finishing, a whole line of very fine worsted fabrics have been developed. They are determined by the delicacy of the fiber used, measured in microns, equal to one millionth of a

meter. The first were super 80's, which were just under 20 microns in diameter. This was followed by finer, super 100's at 18.5 microns. There has been a movement to get finer and finer worsteds (with reports of some cheating) and there are now super 110's (18.0 microns), super 120's, 140's and 150's (16 microns). In recent years this escalated to super 180's (14.5 microns), 190's (14), and then 200's (13.5) and even super 210's at 13 microns. Size alone does not do the job, as Madonna said. Spinning of the yarns is very important, the weaving and

the finish are also key. It takes a long time to do this right. Very few mills are successful.

There are complaints that some fabric sales organizations have made false claims. And the reputation of the supplier is very important. The finest worsteds, super 150's and up, are usually reserved for custom tailoring and made-to-measure suits.

**TROPICAL WORSTED;** Lightweight worsted cloth woven from especially fine yarns, usually with a plain weave. Has a smooth, clear finish, making it ideal for warm weather suits.

**VIRGIN WOOL;** unused raw wool

**WARP AND WEFT;** warp yarns are the lengthwise yarns in a woven fabric. Important blends are often based on a warp yarn of one fiber and a weft yarn of another fiber, such as alpaca/silk or alpaca/cotton. Weft yarns are the crosswise yarns in a woven fabric and often called the fill yarn.

**WOOLEN AND WORSTED FABRICS;** Worsted wool is most popular for men's suits (see supers) because it is made from the long straight fibers and is stronger and weaves into a tight smooth fabric. Woollen yarns are shorter and curlier and are woven into softer fabrics.

**WORSTED YARNS;** Yarns are made from longer fibers of 3 to 6 inches, which are combined to lie parallel to each other, producing a smooth, clean look. They are usually 2 ply yarns, and are finer and more tightly twisted than woollen yarns. Fabrics made from worsted yarns are smooth and cool to wear, such as gabardines, crepes, tropicals and suitings, and can be worn comfortably in moderately warm weather and climates.

**YARN;** twisted strands of roving