

# Steven Be

## Minneapolis, Minnesota

BY DARYL BROWER

**W**hen someone who calls himself the Glitter Knitter decides to open a yarn shop, you can be fairly certain it's going to be something fabulous. And when that knitter already has one wildly successful store under his snake-skin belt, you can double that bet.

For the past seven years, Steven Berg has been on a mission to glam up the LYS world with the Yarn Garage, a 900-foot space in Rosemount, Minnesota. Located in a circa-1910 building and crammed to the rafters with high-end yarn and antiques, the shop quickly drew a crowd of devoted customers—and a little knitterly celebrity for the self-proclaimed “loud and brassy” owner whose look is more rock star than mom-and-pop shop. Opened in 2003, the Yarn Garage offers a slew of cutting-edge classes (cheekily dubbed Manic Monday or Wild Women of Wednesday), custom-design services and special events. But a few years into the venture, Berg, who sees the LYS as more of a creative experience than a cut-and-dried commercial venture, was already dreaming up new possibilities. “I call it my seven-year itch,” he jokes. “I decided I needed another shop.”

But not just any shop. “I wanted to reinvent the knitting experience,” he says. Enter Steven Be, a knitting gallery in downtown Minneapolis that hosts live music, wine-and-cheese tastings catered by local eateries and all sorts of other unexpected events.

Berg considered several properties before deciding on the store's location—an 1890s firehouse that had been a dance hall in the 1940s. Victorian houses with grand porches, coffee-shop combos and a few other sites were on his short list, but the firehouse had everything Berg wanted: a nontraditional look, plenty of room and, most importantly, a stage. “I really wanted to be able to host live music events and other performances at the store,” he explains. The building also had the good fortune of being situated in an up-and-coming arts neighborhood. “This street spent a lot of years down and out and in disrepair,” says Berg of the location. “But things are turning around. There's a real interest in turning this area of

Minneapolis into an arts center, and we're lucky and pleased to be at the forefront of that gentrification.”

It's not surprising that Berg, who claims to have outfitted Barbies with sequined dresses and mohair swing coats of his own making as a child, went for a less-than-subtle look with the interior of his shop. The ceilings are painted with reflective aluminum; zebra-stripe chairs sit in a circle in the center of the space; and a lavish chandelier decked out with ostrich plumes hangs from the ceiling. “It definitely doesn't look like your average LYS in here,” Berg says, noting that there's not a yarn cubby in (or out of) sight. “And that's the way I want it.”

There's also more than just yarn and needles inside the store. Jewelry, bags and finished garments (all of them artsy) share shelf space with hanks of merino and cashmere. Berg considers his store as much a gallery as a retail outlet; a jeweler, a sculptor and a fiber artist all rent studio space downstairs. “It's my way of helping out artists who can't afford their own studios,” he explains, noting that their presence also benefits his business. “I get different customers than I would if this were just a yarn store,” he says. “And my regular customers love it as well.” Design students from Twin Cities schools are a part of that crowd, and Berg encourages their patronage by selling their patterns in the shop.

Giving his customers what they love is Berg's mission, and he tries to create the ambiance of a knitting country club, albeit a funky one. “We bend over backwards for all our customers,” he says. In that vein, shoppers can benefit most from picking up a Steven Be membership: These loyalty-club-style sign-ups range from the Glitterati Day Pass (\$18 to sit and knit for the day, instruction and consultation included) to the Glitter Diva Lifetime mem-



“It definitely doesn't look like your average LYS,” says Steven Berg (shown top left) of his gallery-like retail space.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY TOM DUEVEL

bership (\$395 for perennial event and merchandise discounts, a private storage locker and 40 hours a month of private instruction). Members are also treated to snacks, drinks and a catered lunch every day. “That way they have no reason to leave,” notes Berg. “I want them to think of this as their own little creative clubhouse.”

For Berg, it's all about social networking, but the personal type, not the digital. “I want to encourage physical connection,” he says. “I think of Steven Be as what the coffee-shop was before everyone stopped talking to each other and started staring at their laptops. You can shop for yarn anywhere. But come here and you'll make friends, have fun and be introduced to all kinds of new ideas and opportunities.”

### Snapshot

**Steven Be**

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[www.stevenbe.com](http://www.stevenbe.com)

**Years in business:**

1 at Steven Be; 7 at the Yarn Garage

**Number of staff:** 5, plus 2 floaters who alternate between Steven Be and the Yarn Garage

**Square footage:** 2,700