

HOOKING SNOW

By Fritz Mitnick
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Each of us is drawn to different subjects for themes of rugs. I don't know why, but if you put me in the middle of a rug show, you will likely notice that I spend more time in front of rugs depicting snow or snow scenes. Upon reflection, I am very much a homebody and to me, the snow means the coziness of the home; a gathering in of family in one place; and protected from bad elements. I know I am not the only one who races outdoors the morning after a big snow, camera in hand. I do this yearly and because of the different types of snow and the different light, none of the photos are ever the same even when shot in the same location.

So what does all this mean to a rug hooker? Is this finally a reason to use pure white wool? Most rug hookers learn early on that using pure white wool is forbidden. But this rule can be ignored when hooking snow, if you use it sparingly as a highlight.

Though I have hooked several snowy rugs, for this article, I consulted some women who I thought hooked snow in outstanding fashion, and I came up with some guidelines. Snow can be any color! For my first rug camp, I designed a snowman with a border of mittens. I stupidly told the teacher I would use my stash for all but the snow. I thought I had a great stash. Little did I know how poor it was. She dyed beautiful snow but it did not reflect the odd colors I chose for the rest of the rug, based on my lousy found wools. The colors of the snow should have been the light tints of the colors used in the rug. Another lesson learned but snow continues to challenge.

Rug hookers lucky enough to see snow regularly should make an



Rug 1 above, *Whistlestop*, hooked by June Bigalow, Heirloom #771, 36" x 24"

Rug 2 right, *Pittsburgh Nocturne*, designed and hooked by Fritz Mitnick. 31" x 42", 2004

effort to study the colors they see in the snow. Light gray was the common answer I received when inquiring of my local guild members. Well, I live in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and we get loads of gray days in the winter so that did make perfect sense.

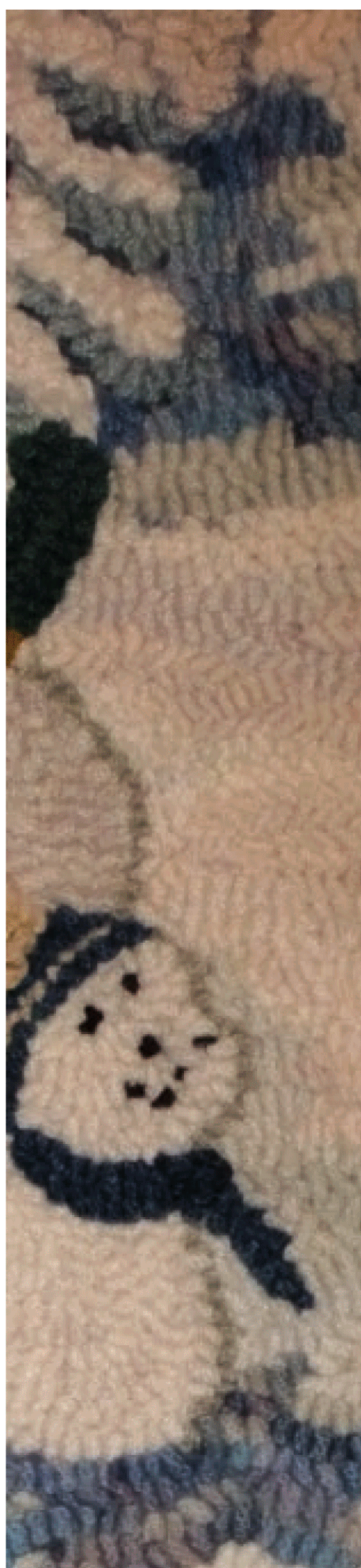
See Rug 1.

For my own version of Pittsburgh on a winter evening, I used a diluted ProChem black for the snow on the roofs of the rowhouses. I would not be using that pure white wool as a highlight on our gray days. **See Rug 2.**

Another problem is differentiating a snowman from the snow surrounding it. Joyce Krueger (she has Wisconsin snow experience) challenged herself. She had started with all different light blues, pinks,



grays and tans. Though they looked different as yardage, hooked the values were the same. She ended up outlining all of the snowmen with the darkest value of wool, in a 2 cut and pulled lower than the rest of the snowman and the surrounding snow. To achieve a natural effect for banks of snow, she put in a couple of darker lines but these are not all the same length. She has the hint of an outline



Rug 3 detail left, Joyce Krueger's snowman outlined with grey in a 2 cut.

Rug 4 right, Kris Kringle, hooked by Floss Stillman, and designed by Jane McGown Flynn, House of Price PT1591



and hooks in the direction that she would like the snow to lie. **See Rug 3.**

Determine the mood of your snowy piece. Is Santa slogging through the snow? Does the moon add a yellow cast to the snow? What time of day is it? Are the shadows long? Where is the light source?

I love Floss Stillman's snowy Santa! She wanted to have Santa trudging in a flurry of snow and after the pattern was hooked, she added a loop of a fine nubby white yarn between the rows at irregular spaces. Floss must have gotten carried away and Santa was caught in a storm!

Della Griffiths has concluded that the bluer the snow, the colder it is. Her WinterMagic, seems to bear that out. I do note that ice usually has a slight green to it. **See Rug 5.**

Rug 5 right, Winter Magic, hooked by Della Griffiths, designed by Jane McGown Flynn, House of Price, 40" x 20½" photo courtesy of Fox Chapel Images.



Nan Newell's Mary Deer has horizontal lines of pale teal in the snow. The reindeer seem to have stomped in the icy ruts of the sleigh's runners. **See Rug 6.**

Rug 6, left, Mary Deer, hooked by Nan Newell. Designed by Judy Cripps, Rustic Rugs, 42" x 22 ½" photo courtesy of Fox Chapel Images.



Rug 7 above, *Mighty Moose*, designed and hooked by Fritz Mitnick, House of Price, 2010. 18½" x 42"

The subject of my Mighty Moose rug hardly looks cold at all, thanks to the warmth of my plum-colored snow. My inspiration was spending Christmas in Alaska. I had to move fast to get a picture when the sun finally appeared but the colors on the snow were unlike any I had seen in the lower 48. I mixed up one batch of plum dye and used it over a variety of light wools. *See Rug 7.*

Directional hooking-

Snow often drifts. Wheels leave ruts. When snow falls it catches in places. Is there snow on evergreen branches, roof tops? How is that roof insulation working? The snow along a shoveled path is lumpy and uneven and would not be hooked in the same rather flat horizontal lines as would an open field.

Dyeing snow-

Treasured teacher Betty Krull always says to keep a spare piece of natural wool at the ready when dyeing. Dye residue in the water can add just enough color to that natural to make it useful. I recall trying this once early on and getting a purply brown mess. Ah well, it was light and I can overdye it at some other time. The other time never came as I found that 'mistake' the perfect solution to shadows on snow.

Now if you are a rug hooker who uses swatches, you can use the very lightest values of the swatches you used for motifs in your rug. If your red barn has a blue roof, you can use the palest blues and pinks in your snow. Snow in the foreground is usually lighter than snow in the background which is duller.

And finally, if you've heard it once, use a very light hand when adding dye to wool for snow. Mix a very small amount of the dye solution (dye already combined with water) into additional water unless you want really splotchy snow.

Wide cut-

I am always surprised when I get mailers of textured wool samples that have suggestions for uses of each sample. The fairly dark grays and beiges suggested for snow always look so dark on the white paper to which they are affixed, but when used in a rustic application, the colors appear perfectly fine. *See Rug 8.*



Rug 8 above, *Frosty Friends*, hooked by Sue Milanak, design by Barbara Carroll from artwork by Carol Endres, Woolley Fox. 52" x 23½", photo courtesy of Fox Chapel Images.

I know many of us are moved to hook based on the season. If you are blessed with snow, look upon it as a beautiful challenge, to hook and to shovel.

Rug 9 right, *Ho Ho Ho*, hooked by Susanne McNally, designed by Gail Hill, Primco/House of Price, 9 x 15", photo courtesy of Fox Chapel Images.

