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Your Sweaters Deserve Better

Winter Isn't Over, And Even Pricy Cashmere Looks Worn; Time to Fight the Pilling



All fibers and blends may pill.

Loose-knit sweaters may pill soon after wearing.

Long fibers woven tightly are more resistant to pilling.

Pills often appear first on the torso or arms.

Price isn't prevention. Even expensive cashmere pills.

Knitwear Care

Storage

◆ Always fold sweaters and store on a shelf. Heavy knitwear especially shouldn't hang on a hanger, as the weight will leave the garment misshapen at the shoulders.

◆ Clean sweaters before storing. Food stains, perfume and body oils attract moths.

◆ Fold with sleeves on the inside to maintain shape. Fasten zippers and buttons to avoid snagging.

◆ Store sweaters in a cool, dry place to avoid mildew.

Cleaning

◆ Follow care instructions to protect fibers and finishes. Washing sweaters that say 'Dry Clean Only' risks damaging fibers and felting, when the material shrinks and mats.

◆ Before washing a sweater, turn it inside out to protect the outer side.

◆ Wash sweaters by hand or on the gentlest machine cycle. Excessive agitation can stretch or shrink fibers. Use tepid water and a gentle cleanser.

◆ Air dry a wet sweater on a clean, dry towel or drying rack at room temperature out of direct sunlight.

Maintenance

◆ Try to leave 24 hours or more between wearings, so that fibers stretched during wear can recover.

◆ In the event of pilling, do not pull the pill off, because that risks snagging the sweater. Carefully use a pill-removing device.

Source: The Woolmark Co. and the Laundress



Get Stoned

The Sweater Stone, \$8, claims it won't damage a garment's 'halo.'



Smooth Operator

The Evercare Giant Fabric Shaver, \$12.99, is battery-operated.



Comb Over

The D-Fuzz-It Sweater and Fabric Comb, \$5, is precise and portable.



Triple Threat

The Gleener, \$19.99, has three edges for pills of different sizes plus a lint remover.

By ELIZABETH HOLMES

Hoping to add some polished knitwear to her wardrobe, Denise Anker spent several hundred dollars last fall on two Vince brand sweaters.

One, made entirely of cashmere, has held up well and Ms. Anker wears it regularly. The other, a wool-cashmere blend charcoal-gray cardigan—and at \$395 the more expensive of the two—has shown troubling signs of a vexing winter wardrobe problem: pilling.

"After two wearings, it became a ragged mess," says Ms. Anker, a 55-year-old resident of Big Oak Flat, Calif. Now she wears it only for ca-

sual occasions. It's the "I want to roll around on the floor with my dogs" sweater, she says.

The pesky yarn clumps known as pills can form on garments of all materials and prices, from a high-end cashmere sweater to a bargain-priced acrylic blend. Pilling tends to get worse with more wear, which is why it always seems to occur on your favorite wool turtleneck and not the ones at the back of the closet.

Pills form when yarn fibers in a garment break or become loose, or when the ends are exposed, and then tangle together. Sweaters commonly get pills because of their visible yarn, but nearly any knit or woven garment has the poten-

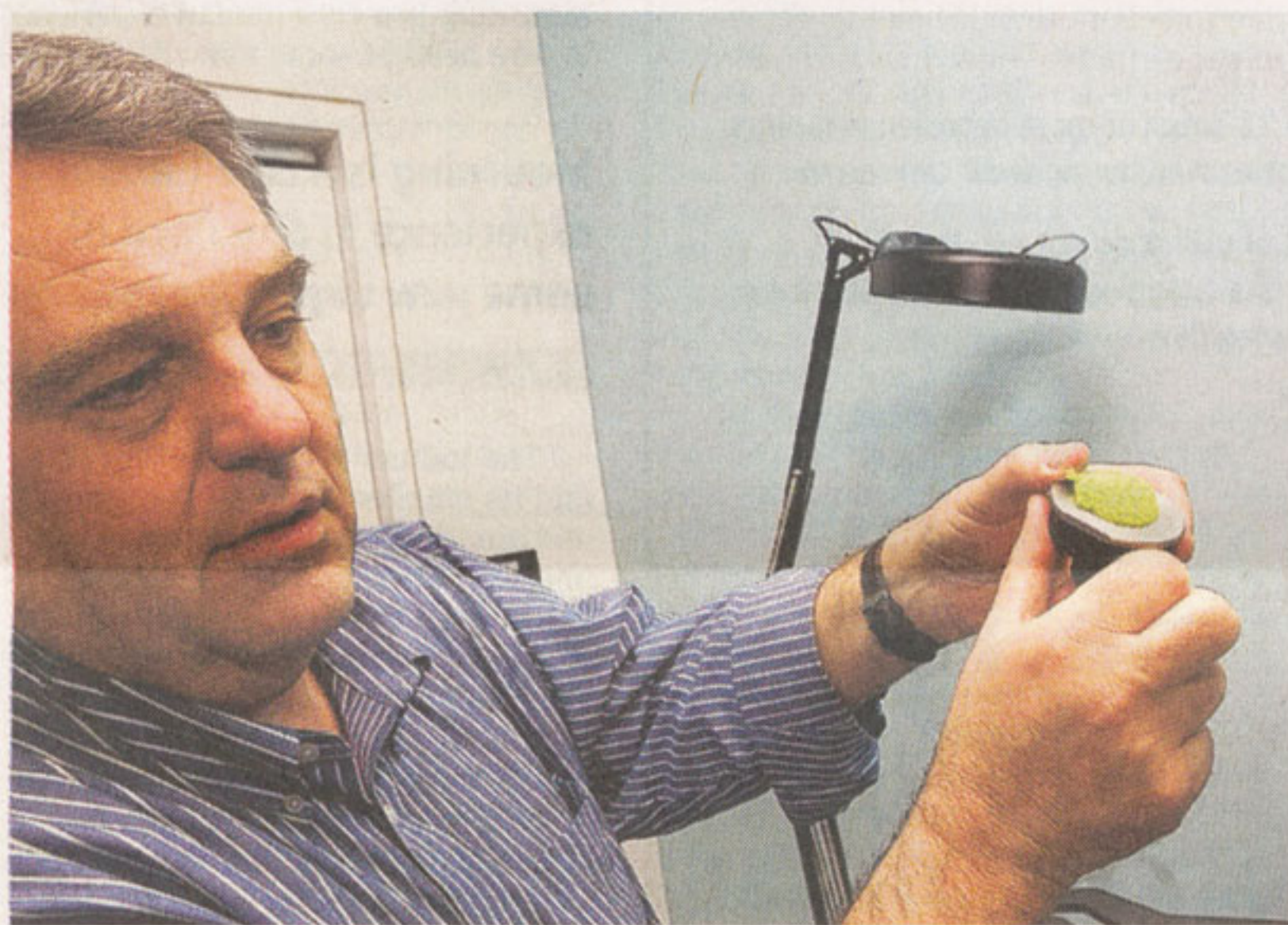
tial, says Sean Cormier, assistant professor at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York, who spent almost two decades in quality assurance at the former Liz Claiborne Inc.

The unfortunate truth is that it's very difficult when looking at a garment in a store to predict whether it will pill. Pilling is what's known as a "latent defect," a problem that appears only after the product is in use. "You don't see it until you wear it," Mr. Cormier says.

Because friction begins or accelerates pilling, garment areas that are prone to rubbing, such as the side of the torso and the inside of the fore-

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F. Marini/Barron/The Wall Street Journal. Styling by Anne Carstens (D)



Sean Cormier, above, Fashion Institute of Technology assistant professor, puts sweater samples through the Martindale Pilling Tester, right. Below, he compares 'very severe' pilling on a blue, merino-wool swatch with a grading scale. Samples of cashmere (gray), cotton (light blue) and blends (green, striped) show varying degrees of pilling.



Rebecca Greenfield for The Wall Street Journal (4)

Your Sweaters Deserve Better, Time to Fight the Pilling

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arms, are likely to pill first, says Cathryn Lee, category manager of apparel care, at the Woolmark Co., which represents Australian wool growers. Men and women who carry shoulder bags will notice pilling on the shoulders. Seat belts may cause pilling across the chest.

The material used in a particular garment may provide hints as to whether it will pill. Merino wool tends to be strong and when used in a tightly wound sweater would be less likely to pill than fuzzy, fine-gauge cashmere, says Gwen Whiting, co-founder of the Laundress, a New York fabric-care company. But nearly every garment, regardless of make or brand, is a candidate.

With natural raw materials like cashmere, the length of the fiber is particularly important. Longer fibers can be wound into tighter yarn, making it less likely the ends will come loose, says Karl Spilhaus, president of the Cashmere and Camel Hair Manufacturers Institute.

"Pilling is going to happen with any woven garment but there is a direct link to the length of the yarn

thread used," Thomas Ott, senior vice president for men's apparel at Saks Fifth Avenue, says. "The longer the thread, the longer it takes to pill."

Today's extremely price-competitive climate is pushing many manufacturers toward shorter, less expensive fibers, Mr. Spilhaus says. The finish of a garment also affects the likelihood of pilling. A cashmere sweater used to require several home washings before it "bloomed"—the industry term for the soft, full feeling of a broken-in sweater.

Retailers and shoppers are looking for sweaters with a "hand feel" of extreme, immediate softness. Mr. Spilhaus says manufacturers wash garments repeatedly to get the exterior that soft. The washing, along with shorter fibers, brings the ends to the surface more quickly, making pills more likely to happen sooner.

Retailers, regardless of price point, say they take steps to prevent pilling. Uniqlo, which sells moderately priced sportswear, says it uses a pill-reducing treatment on its worsted merino-wool sweaters. Luxury knitwear maker Brunello Cucinelli sends employees along with import-

ers to meet with Mongolian shepherds when selecting cashmere for its annual production.

Some retailers require suppliers to test sweaters for pilling, says FIT's Mr. Cormier. Certain stores require use of the Martindale Pilling Tester, a large, two-tiered oscillating machine that rubs two swatches of the same material against each other in circular and linear motions. Another option, often used for sturdier fabrics such as upholstery, is the Random Tumble Pilling Tester, a blender-like machine with prongs that rapidly spin three swatches in a cork-lined cylinder.

After testing, the samples are held at a 45-degree angle and compared under specified lighting with pilling images, and they are graded on a scale of 1 (total pilling) to 5 (no pilling whatsoever). Most retailers require a 4, which Mr. Cormier describes as "some pill balls beginning to form."

Once you buy the sweater, what can you do to prevent pilling? One option is to wear it sparingly—because the more a garment is worn, the more likely it is to pill, says Lor-

raine Muir, director of textile testing at the Drycleaning & Laundry Institute. The Woolmark Co. suggests letting clothing "rest" at least 24 hours before wearing again so the fibers recover from stretching during use.

Gale Senseny, sales manager of Sweater Stone Inc., makers of a pill-removing device in Issaquah, Wash., has a once-a-year trick to help prevent pilling on the sweaters that fill her wardrobe. She conditions them with lanolin, an oil that comes from sheep and is removed in the fiber-cleansing process. Ms. Senseny breaks down a small bit of lanolin in a dish of hot water and then fills a sink with tepid water. She pours the lanolin in, followed by a just-washed sweater. She rinses the garment and lays it out on a towel to dry.

The process helps smooth the scales on the yarn's fiber, making them less rough and less likely to tangle with one another to form a pill. "It's just like putting conditioner in your hair," Ms. Senseny says.

To remove pills, Ms. Senseny, not surprisingly, uses her company's Sweater Stone. The pumice stone resembles a bar of soap. When glided

over a garment it removes the pills, but it won't alter what Ms. Senseny calls the sweater's "halo" or "unique surface." An electronic pill remover, she says, can damage the halo of mohair and cashmere. "It's like shaving a beard," she says.

There are many tools for removing pills, such as the palm-sized D-Fuzz-It Sweater and Fabric Comb. The Gleener has three different edges—for big, bulky clumps, for medium-size fuzz balls and for delicate pills. President Kim Cole developed it with new synthetic fibers in mind. "They are inherently strong, so the pilling is actually strong" and harder to remove, she said.

The Internet is littered with do-it-yourself ways to remove pills that involve disposable razors or sandpaper. The Laundress's Ms. Whiting doesn't recommend any of these because of the potential for further damage, including snagging, harming the yarn or making a hole.

For anyone tempted to pull pills off with your fingers, Ms. Whiting says don't. "You are yanking the yarn it is attached to," she says. "You could end up making it worse."

After a Death, Finding a Way To Celebrate A Life Online

[Personal Technology]

By GEOFFREY A. FOWLER



We fret about how our worst moments can live forever on the Internet. So why, when loved ones die, is it so hard to memorialize the best parts of their lives online?

Recently, I opened an email that knocked the wind out of me: An old friend had died a few weeks earlier, long before his time. I ran to Google to search for news of his passing, but found nothing. My friend never joined Facebook, so there were no wall posts offering condolences, no obvious places to share pictures.

The online silence only added to my grief. The Internet is replacing the library, the newspaper and the photo album, so what does it mean if Google doesn't know you were here—and that now you're gone?

I volunteered to set up a site that friends around the world could visit as my friend's virtual gravestone. I wanted to allow people to share their digital memories—a big quilt we all could keep sewing together.

I tried a dozen online memorial services and most only frustrated me. Mourning is a core human experience in dire need of some new digital ideas.

Mourning is a core human experience in dire need of some new digital ideas.

The industry leader, Legacy.com, and its smaller rivals lacked smooth and simple interfaces for sharing photos, videos and stories. Even worse than the aesthetic failings, it was hard to tell which services would even be around in a few years.

I settled on ForeverMissed.com, one of the few services that met my minimum criteria: a one-time fee, search-engine visibility and zero ads.

Initially, my most basic requirement was that the site needed to stick around forever. But "forever" is a hard promise to make on the Internet. Legacy, which publishes about 75% of the obituaries in North America each year through tie-ups with newspapers, charges an annual \$20 sponsorship fee to keep memorial sites visible. I prefer to pay once, rather than every year.

This is, in part, a business-model problem: Your descendants probably won't pay to keep you online 150 years from now, nor would you likely pay thousands up front to keep a website of yourself or a loved one online for that long.

A number of sites offer a one-time fee of between \$50 and \$100. These require a leap of faith that the provider will continue to get new paying customers to keep the servers running. ForeverMissed says if it had to shut down today, it has socked away

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