

Charting a Course

In lieu of a blog entry, for the past two weeks, I've been charting up design ideas and playing around with some new concepts, in particular that Christmas Fair Isle pattern that I've had in my head. I use [Knitting Software's Stitch Motif Maker](#) (SMM) primarily, but I've found that it falls sadly short of my needs lately. So off I went to check out two other charting programs, [Cochenille's Stitch Painter](#) (SP), which I once owned when I had a Mac G4 and [Knit Foundry's Knit Visualizer](#) (KV), which Ted put me onto.

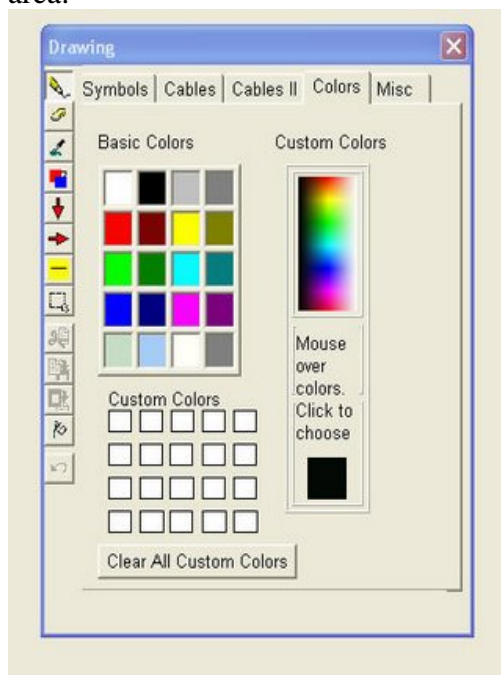
So, how do they all compare? Well, I broke down each program into color capability, general symbol capability, stitch symbol capability, value-added features and drawbacks. As far as user friendliness is concerned, I tested the Windows version of each, so you have the usual menus. If you are familiar with simple paint programs, you will have no problem navigating. Here's what I discovered.

Common denominators

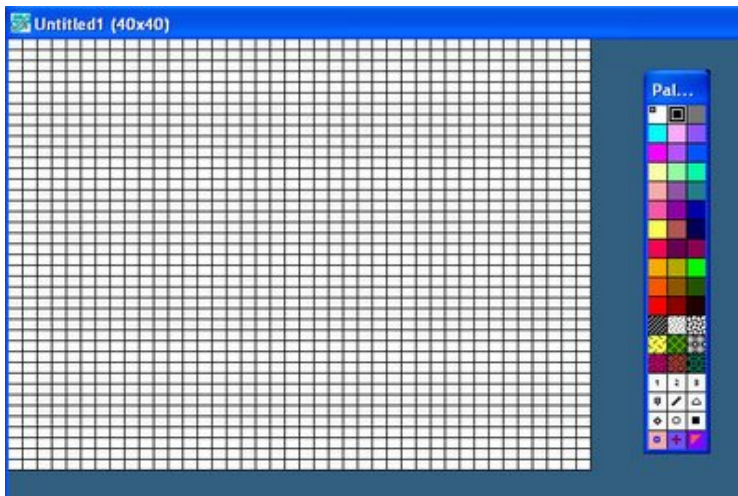
All three programs allow you to configure a grid size. All three work on a palette system, which means you choose your color/stitch symbol from a window that displays available options. All three allow you to save or export your chart into a format other than the one the program generates.

Custom Color Capability

- SMM--Basic colors are the default. The palette's custom colors are limited to a very small area.



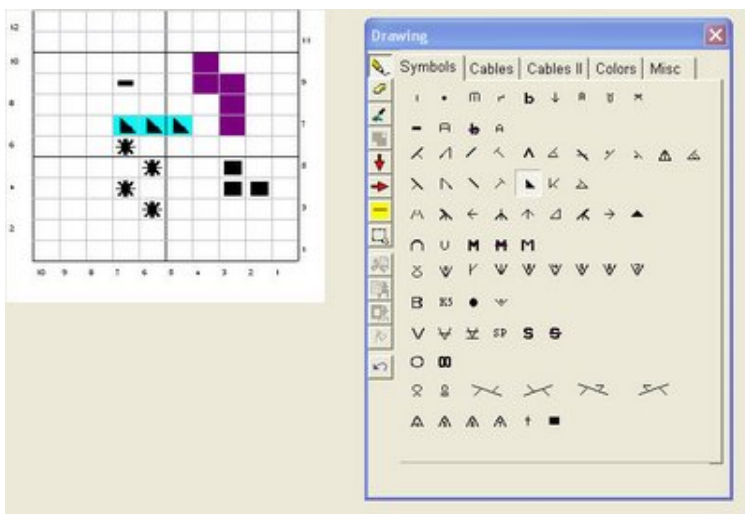
- SP--Default palette contains both solid and patterned colors, along with selected symbols. You can customize the colors.



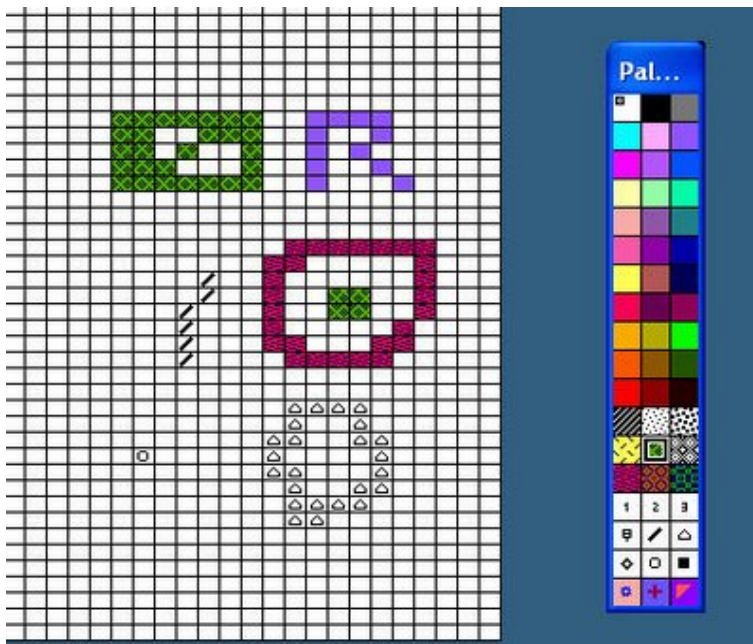
- KV--no color capability at this time; however, Knit Foundry will be releasing an upgrade soon that will include color.

Symbol Capability

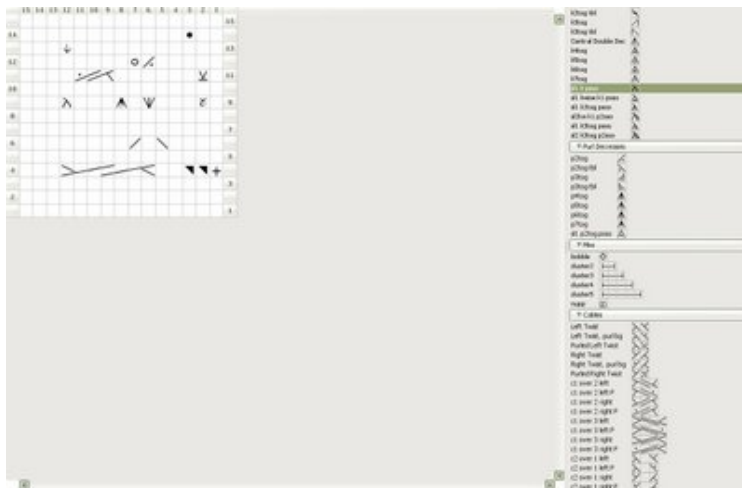
- SMM offers palettes of both knitting and unspecific symbols that can be used together with a color or alone. Using a symbol with a color is a two-step process that tends to be a bit time-consuming and clumsy.



- SP--Palette can be customized with a large variety of symbols, including those used for beadwork, crochet, embroidery and other fiber crafts.

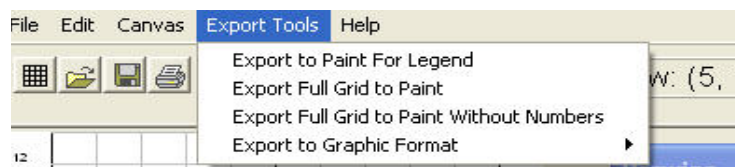


- KV--Here is where this program shines. An extraordinary palette of knitting stitches, particularly a large assortment of cables that can be placed with one click. I could not display the extent of the palette's selections in one screenshot.



Value-Added Features

- SMM doesn't have much. Arguably, its best extra feature is its ability to export to Paint, a program that comes with Windows.



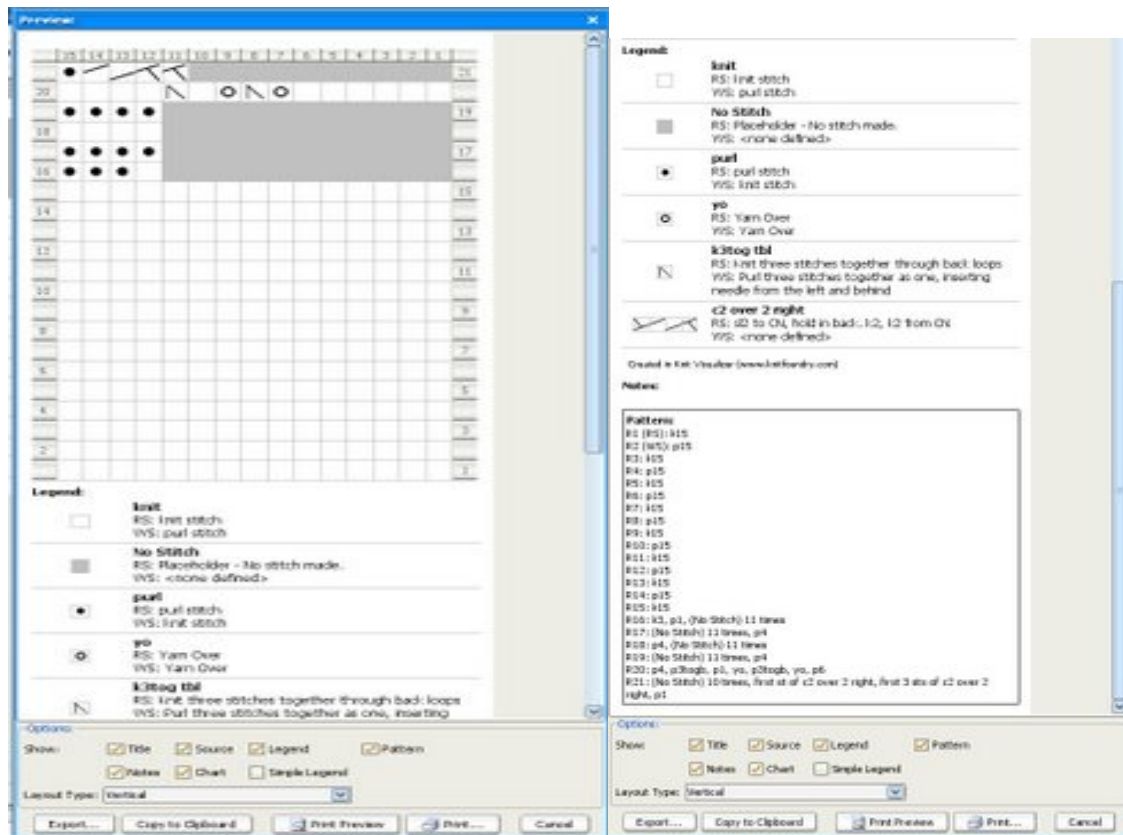
- SP has a range of extra features, which include a stencil function, handy for creating and copying large motifs, an importation feature that allows you to grid a photograph (more for needlepointers and machine knitters than for hand knitters), a palette merge function, color blending, Design-A-Knit export, and a bunch more that are fairly complex for the average user. Unfortunately, SP's demo is so limited that I can't show you a screenshot of these features. Why this is, I don't know, because all they needed to do was disable the Save As and Print functions to keep the program from being active, thus letting potential buyers really sample what they have. Stupid.
- KV has something so unique that it's mindblowing: The Parser. What this feature does is allow the user to create a chart from typed directions. Whoa! Take a look at this:



You enter the text--the program allows you to select flat or circular knitting and the number of stitches per row (great for those lace patterns where stitches disappear and reappear). Then you click the Add Row #X and...

	4	3	2	1	
4	●	●	●		
					3
2					
					1

Somehow I think I managed to reverse the symbols but you get the idea. And then, the final coup de grace is you get this when you print out:



Took me two screenshots to fit this all it. In the Preview Window, you will see not only the chart but the legend AND your written directions. You can then either export to .png ([Portable Network Graphic](#)) format, which is superior to .jpg, copy the whole thing to your clipboard, view the Print Preview or just print it.

Drawbacks

SMM's palette can be clumsy to use and it's a bit limited. The cable symbols are a pain in the ass to use. Custom color selection is difficult, given the tiny area on the palette. Adding and deleting rows/stitches is a bit tiresome. The copy function is weird. In general, SMM has too many steps to accomplish a number of functions that should only take one click.

SP is almost too complex, in a way. The manual is a nightmare--this coming from a technical writer. They'll sell you "Cheat Sheets" that should be superfluous if the manual were better. And SP also relies on specialty plug-ins that must be purchased separately, like the Full Color Import module. Feh.

KV's biggest problem, and one that they are fixing (because I asked, since I wouldn't buy it unless it had color selection), is that of color capability. In order for this program to be truly useful to the knitter, it has to have that, no question.

The Final Word

No program can be all things to all people. So based on my little bit of research, I would say that if you need something easy to use that will create very basic, simple charts for your own use, Stitch Motif Maker is just right. If you're a power user and you do multiple fiber crafts, then SP is fine--they offer a Standard (color only, no symbols) and Gold version of the software, so you can dumb it down if you wish. Knit Visualization, with the addition of color functionality, is a

professional-grade knitter's charting program. The high-quality graphics, the ease of charting and the incredible stitch symbol palette, along with the parsing, make this my choice.

SMM has good online help within the program. They also have a very good, [readable manual](#) in .pdf format, available if you click that link or downloadable from their site.

As mentioned before, SP's manual is too much and too confusing for the average user. And not downloadable from the site for free. Just some hints and tips.

KV's manual is exceptional. Clearly written by a software technical writer who is a knitter. You can download the [manual](#) and read it for yourself.

Read the manuals, visit the sites and see what you think. Doing this will help you make an informed decision as a consumer. Yes, there are other options--you can use Excel. I did a mini-tutorial on this last year. But if you want to do some serious charting, check out these applications.

And here are your costs:

Stitch Motif Maker V.3: USD\$89.95

Stitch Painter Standard: USD\$85.00

Stitch Painter Gold: USD\$165.00

Knit Visualization: USD\$135.00

So pick yer poison.

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