



Bienvenue au Mohair du Marais

ADVENTURES ON A FRENCH MOHAIR GOAT FARM

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Every yarn artist, like me, will always be looking with great interest for special fibers, furry animals and wool processing companies. Even during a holiday abroad.

One of my favourite fibers for art yarn is Mohair, the soft, warm, curly, shiny wool of the Angora goat. Mohair is an honest and comfortable fiber: soft, light, warm; it is dirt-repellent and it does not retain odors.

Great was my joy when on holiday in beautiful French Normandy I had the opportunity to visit the goat farm 'Mohair du Marais'. I was allowed to see the amazing Norman farm and the wool shop in the 17th-century family house, and had the privilege of meeting friendly people from the neighbourhood. Coincidentally, on the day of our visit, the goats were being shorn and I also had the opportunity to experience this.

The goat farm where Lydie and Didier Douesnel raise and care for their Angora goats is located in Rots, a village in Normandy, near Caen, in the Calvados region of France. The couple acquired this herd quite by chance in August 2013, when they visited a farm in Mayenne in order to learn about Angora goats. While there, what they learned was that the flock was for sale. They cracked, not knowing anything about it! Lydie had bred sheep for twenty-six years, but goats are different.





The 30 Angora goats in this flock are raised in the open air. Under their curly and insulating fur, the animals do not suffer from heat or cold and they spend most of the year in the walled Normandy pasture. The goats are selected for the quality of their wool. The kids are born in the spring. They are fed with mothers' milk for three to four months.

After arrival at the farm we were warmly welcomed and invited to sit down at the long table in the large kitchen along with the neighbours who are all here to help. In the region that is known for its apple cider and calvados, it needs no explanation that we enjoy the coffee and apple pie offered. After lunch, the group goes back to work.

For shearing, the goats have been brought into an impressive old barn. The shearer does his work with the help of Didier and the men from the neighbourhood.

The goats are shorn twice a year, in March and September. Because shearing can be stressful for the goats, the farmers bring in a professional shearer, an expert who takes care of the welfare of the animals. The goats deliver an average of 2 kg of wool per shear. The fleeces that come from the goats are carefully swept together and all the curls are gathered up!



Outside under a shelter, Lydie and her neighbours sort the fiber. The sorting is very thorough and very important. In order to be able to offer quality products, fleece after fleece is sorted by hand based on their fineness. The 'unwanted' fibers are thrown away because they are too coarse.

The fibers are sorted into 5 classes. of which the most beautiful (First Class) are from the first shear of each goat, Second Class consists of kid mohair, and Third, Fourth, and Fifth are fibers with a higher micron (coarser). After sorting, the unwashed wool is sent to a spinning mill in the 'Tarn' region of southern France. This region once had a thriving wool industry. After processing: washing, carding, dyeing, the fleece is mixed with silk in various proportions, then it is spun, knitted and woven into different items, after which it returns to "Mohair du Marais". It is made into things like sweaters, ponchos, scarves, gloves, hats, socks, plaids and so on.

Lydie and Didier have never processed their own wool into yarn. They were quite impressed by the lock-spun yarn that I made from their own mohair, a yarn spun in a way in which you can still recognize the goats. Lydie is definitely planning to learn how to spin in the future.

The "Mohair du Marais" products are sold in the associated store in the beautiful centuries-old building and at local markets. Together with other well-known French 'produits de terroir' (regional products), they make the French markets a feast for the senses.

All regional products must be certified in France. So also "Mohair du Marais". This certification is the guarantee that this French mohair is from a breeding company that respects its animals.

ANGORA GOAT FACTS

Angora goats are not only cute to look at, they are also calm, affectionate, austere and can be treated fairly easily. They are happy with a relatively small piece of land in exchange for proper care. Angora goats are very curious, they make very little noise but do have little tendency to break out of their enclosures. The lambs like to climb!

A big advantage of Mohair is that goats have very little smell, except in the breeding season.



The fiber shorn from an Angora goat is called mohair and is as soft as silk after a thorough wash.

There are around 7 million Angora goats worldwide. Most are found in South Africa, followed by the United States (Texas), Turkey, Australia, Canada, Argentina, New Zealand The Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, France, England, Scotland and Denmark.

An angora goat needs to be shorn twice a year. The longer the fiber grows, the less the fiber grows. so shearing twice a year actually increases mohair fiber production.

An angora 'kid' delivers about 1.5 kilos of mohair, and an adult goat about 3 kilos. Bucks deliver around 4 kilos.

Here are a few internet links if you would like to find out more about these lovely goats and the fleece they produce,

: <http://www.mohairdumarais.fr/>
<https://www.mohair.pro/>
<http://www.lelogisdumarais.com/>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJG2wppRKE0>

ABOUT NORMANDY

Normandy has been one of the most popular destinations in France for years. It is known for all the beauty and delicacies that Normandy has to offer; the coast, the countryside with its beautiful sights and special places, the beautiful chalk cliffs, the impressive D-day landing beaches, the historic villages.

Mont Saint-Michel (below) remains the largest, best-known and most visited attraction in Normandy.

The Chambre d'hôtes is a popular way to spend the night in Normandy. A Chambre d'hôte is a small-scale accommodation option often set up as a Bed and Breakfast. A Chambre d'Hôte always has fewer than 15 rooms.

The region is known for its many delicacies. Each region in Normandy has its own typical dishes and flavors. In the coastal towns, you will find products from the sea, such as fruit de mer, mussels and the Norman oyster. Further inland you will find crepes. These come in two types: a sweet version that is on the menu as a crepe and a savory version called a galette.

Normandy is the land of the cider and the calvados. Both made from apples from Normandy. And then there are the cheeses, the Pont l'Evêque, the Camembert and the Livarot are the best known in this region.



