Slice & Dice

those old castoffs for a new look

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So, you've been weaving for fifteen years and you've wondered what to do with those early pieces. You know, the ones that never looked right or that you never got around to finishing or that turned out to have colors you hate or - worst of all - that don't fit anymore!

Even if you are new to weaving you have probably had some regrets about choices in yarn or structure, not to mention an inconsistent beat or bad selvedges. This is an article for those who have woven something they aren't crazy about and can't figure out how to use. Chopping up handwoven fabric and reassembling it can make the most ordinary, badly woven, out-of-date piece into something very spectacular.

Of course, if you are like most weavers, sewing isn't your strength. As a matter of fact, you probably swore you'd *never* sew handwoven fabric into clothing. Here is your chance to try a little sewing with fabric or scraps that you've no use for anyway. After all, how many throws and placemats and runners and scarves can you use? Make a garment from leftover, cast off, handwoven fabric, and when someone compliments you on your jacket or vest you can truly say, "*This* old thing?"

The pattern

Most of the major pattern companies now have online shopping if you don't have access to a local fabric emporium. In addition there are many alternative pattern companies who advertise in magazines. No matter what pattern you choose, there are two very important things to remember.

- Always buy by your measurements, never buy by your dress size. Ready-to-wear and pattern companies do not use the same standards even though the sizing numbers are the same (size 12, 14, 16, etc.) A size 12 in ready-to-wear has no relationship to a size 12 in a pattern. Also, if your cup size is larger or smaller than a B cup, buy according to your chest measurement and then use a resource like the *Vogue Sewing Book* (newly reprinted, hooray!) to help you make alterations to garment cup size (see Resources). All major pattern companies draft all pattern sizes to a B cup! To view pattern company size standards, go on-line to Butterick's website www.butterick.com or use the chart at the back of the pattern book.

- Always make a "muslin". That means, take a length of muslin, a junky piece of fabric, an old sheet or well-worn towel and make up the pattern in it first. Although this is a "simple" vest pattern (Butterick 5552), vests are actually difficult since they are fitted and often require darts. Gaping armholes are probably symptomatic of an incorrect cup size or an incorrect shoulder angle. I have often made up to six muslins to get a vest to fit just the way I like it. Once you get a pattern you like, you can always reuse it.

Press the pattern pieces with a dry iron on low heat to remove wrinkles. Mark the seam allowances (5/8") with a colored pencil, and pin the pattern pieces together on the seam lines for a preliminary fit (see Photo). Make pattern adjustments using the *Vogue Sewing Book* for guidance in hard-to fit-areas.

The muslin

To make the muslin, cut out the main pieces (front and back) and sew them together at the shoulder and side seams. To stabilize all other edges, staystitch the front, hem, neckline, and armhole along the seam lines (5/8" from the cutting line) and then trim next to the stitching. This way I can visualize all the finished edges and hems without having to actually do them, and the stitching prevents them from stretching out of shape during fitting and shaping.

Mark key areas like the center front lines, waist markings, and button placement lines with bold tailor's chalk on the right side. Try the muslin on to check and adjust placements (see Photo). Transfer any alterations to the original pattern.

If the pattern side seams are relatively straight, that is, almost parallel to the center back or front, I like to overlap the side seam allowances and create a one-piece seamless vest. Pinning the side seams together will throw off the center front grainlines, but this is okay in this rare since this vest is a pieced garment fused to a knitted interfacing, and the grainlines of the pieces are all over the place anyway.

The foundation

Next, cut the vest pattern from a fusible knit tricot interfacing like **Fusi-knit** (see Materials and Supplies). Most interfacing manufacturers make a similar product. The interfacing acts as a foundation cloth for the pieces. If the interfacing is not big enough to accommodate the pattern, piece the interfacing by overlapping two selvedges ½" and stitching down the center of the overlap through both layers; **stretch slightly** as you go. Fold the interfacing in half crosswise (cut edges and fusible sides together), and place the pattern's center back line on the fold of the interfacing (see Photo). This type of interfacing is a knit construction with a crosswise stretch; the give will therefore run lengthwise in the finished garment.

It is very important when cutting the interfacing or foundation cloth, to overcut by 1" all the way around the pattern piece. Any quilter can tell you that surface embellishment can cause the outer fabric to have considerable take-up (similar to what happens when weaving). When all the piecing is finished you will trim the garment using the original pattern before actually doing the construction.

The next step is to lay the interfacing **fusible side up** on a large heat resistant surface like corrugated cardboard or an old cardboard cutting board. DO NOT USE A ROTARY CUTTING BOARD as your surface since it isn't heat resistant (I found out that little piece of information the hard way!) When you finish assembling your pieced surface you must be able to move the whole thing intact to the ironing area. The cardboard allows you to transport everything without the danger of anything shifting.

Outline the original pattern on the foundation with chalk. Then draw the division lines where you'll place your pieces. Division lines can run horizontally and vertically or diagonally or anyway you like. Use a contrasting color tailor's chalk and a large gridded ruler (see Photo).

Piecing

If your handwoven fabric has a very distinct warp or weft pattern or striping, it's most interesting to place the pieces with the grainlines crashing into each other. I use my chalk to mark each rectangular shape with a directional arrow indicating which way the grain runs, being careful that no two adjacent pieces run the same way. For those of you who haven't a clue as to what grainlines are all about, substitute "warp thread" for grainline.

Grab those shears and go for it! I can hear the shrieks of dismay all the way to New Jersey as you begin hacking away at that fifteen-year-old throw. Remember, you didn't like it. That's why you are doing this. The first cut is the hardest. And don't worry, it won't unravel!

Cut out shapes and carefully place them on the chalk-marked foundation (see Photo). The edge of each shape should butt tightly against its neighbor. No overlapping and no gaps. Every bit of handwoven fabric should touch the fusible foundation. Keep cutting and building until you have covered the entire foundation. Pin frequently to hold everything in place. Do not use ball headed pins since you will want to press over the pins for the initial fuse and the plastic balls will melt.

Fusing

When foundation interfacing is completely covered and secured with pins, carefully transport the work surface to the ironing area. You will need a good steam iron on a wool setting. It is important to test the iron first. Take a scrap of fabric and a scrap of the fusible knit interfacing. Note which is the fusible side of the interfacing and make sure it is facing the wrong side of the fabric, not your iron! Iron temperatures vary greatly as do fabrics and fusibles. Find the heat

setting that gives a correct fuse without damaging either fabric. Use a press cloth if necessary. Press firmly for 10-12 seconds. The heavier the fabric is, the longer it takes, so adjust your timing accordingly. Do not glide iron back and forth-use a lift and press motion.

Once you have determined what is best for your fabric and equipment, begin fusing the actual garment. Working from the right side, lift and press until you have covered the entire garment with the iron. (This of course won't be the final fusing-that will be done from the wrong side-but it will tack the two layers together enough to allow removing the pins and turning the garment over.)

After the temporary fusing is completed and all the pins are removed, turn the garment over to lift and press from the wrong side. This is the boring part. Call a friend and have a good chat while you work. On this side, use a press cloth, lots of steam, and leave the iron at least 10 seconds in each position. Check while you are working to see that the backing is completely fused.

Binding

You will need a length of contrasting fabric, ribbon, Ultrasuede®, or other trim- in one case I actually wove twelve yards of narrow trim on my inkle loom-now there's a project! If you're not that ambitious, a fabric remnant can be purchased and used for a bias binding.

Always cut the strips on the bias. For the sewing challenged, the bias is the 45° angle created by bringing the warp to the weft of a perfectly squared piece of fabric. (Note that the folded edge stretches unlike the lengthwise or crosswise grain. That means your binding will give slightly when applied to the garment-and that's a *good* thing!) Incidentally, if you are using Ultrasuede® remember, it doesn't have any grain. It is a pressed composite fabric so you can cut crosswise strips. Since its edges do not ravel, you do not need a seam allowance for turning.

Cut 1 1/8" strips for 3/8" finished binding (see Photo). Fold each strip in half lengthwise and stitch 3/8" from the folded edge. Then drive to the closest Home Depot or other building supply store and buy an inexpensive 3/8" cable tie to use for a press bar. You'll find it in the electrical department. (An alternative is to purchase a set of bias press bars from a notions supplier –see Resources- but these are more expensive.) Cable ties are long nylon strips pointed on one end with a box on the other. Cut the box off. (Do not use your good fabric shears!) Insert the press bar into one of the sewn bias strips and shift the seam and seam allowances onto the back side of the press bar so they won't show once the binding is stitched down. Press the binding with a steam iron. Keep pushing the bar through the strip until the entire tube is pressed (see Photo).

Then take the pieced garment and the pile of binding to the sewing machine. Center the binding over the butted edges of the fabric pieces and topstitch both edges of the binding in place (see Photo). Use a straight, zigzag, or other fancy stitch like blind hemming if your machine has the capacity. I use a stretch stitch on my machine called a pine-leaf stitch with a contrasting, decorative rayon thread.

Look carefully at the pieced garment to determine the order in which to place the binding strips. Identify joins that start and end without any other joins interfering. For example, if the pieces butt in a T-formation place the binding on the vertical line of the T first and then place the binding on the horizontal top of the T covering the end of the braid from the vertical line (see photo). Stitch until all edges are covered.

Assembling the vest

Place the original pattern on the garment and trim exactly according to the pattern. I chose to finish the construction of this vest in a different way from the pattern directions, which call for facings instead of a lining. Facings in handwoven fabrics can very bulky.

This vest is lined with an old yellow / gold Jacquard pineapple patterned fabric probably used in the 50's for drapes; a binding tape covers the edges of vest and lining fabric.

To cut the lining, unjoin the side seams of the pattern pieces. The lining should be cut according to the original pattern pieces so that it is on grain. Sew the side seams together. Cut off the $^{5}/_{8}$" seam allowance around the pieced vest (these edges are bound so no hems are necessary) except at the shoulder seams. Lay the vest on the lining, which is $^{5}/_{8}$" bigger all the way around except at the shoulder seams (see Photo). Pin carefully, and then sew the shoulder seams right sides together, handwoven to handwoven, and lining to lining. Baste the the lining to the handwoven around all edges, and then trim the lining to match the vest.

Simple fabric loops are made of the binding strips instead of buttonholes for this vest. Turn a long piece of binding strip inside out using a tube turner like the FASTURN® (see Equipment). Cut four 9" lengths, folded each in half, and put an overhand knot in the folded end. Pin the cut ends to the edge of the right vest front. They will be caught in the binding and will make a great closure with very little fuss!

For the edge binding, cut about 5 yards of bias strips about 2" wide in the same fabric used for covering the butt joints. You will have to piece the strips together for continuous bias (see illustration). Then, beginning at the lower center back, place binding and vest edges right sides together. Stitch ½" from the cut edges all the way around the entire vest, mitering the corners. End by overlapping the final end of the binding over the starting end (turn up the edge of the starting end). Press the binding away from the garment. Fold the binding over the edge of vest and turn under seam allowance. Hand stitch the binding in place to the lining. Repeat for each armhole, starting and ending under the arm.

This piecing method makes a very stable fabric that doesn't have the bulk of traditional patchwork. Since fabric edges are butted together instead of seamed, the garment maintains the drape of the original fabric with a slightly firmer hand. If sewing clothing still isn't your forte, try the technique on placemats or other items. To see more examples of this technique, please go to my web site and click on the gallery. www.weaversew.com

Equipment

Sewing machine, a good iron, cable ties (hardware store) or press bars (Nancy's Notions or Clotilde), long ruler or straight edge, corrugated cardboard or other portable heat-resistant work surface, tube turner for button loops (Nancy's Notions), tailor's chalk, colored pencils, straight pins, scissors, and other usual sewing supplies.

Materials and supplies

About 1½ yd x 1½ yd handwoven fabric to cut into pieces; Butterick vest pattern #5552; 3 yd x 20" or 1½ yd x 60" Fusi-knit (FUSI-KNIT™ by HTC, Inc.) tricot interfacing; 1½ yd x 45" scrap fabric for muslin; about 5/8 yd x 60" fabric for binding pieces and vest edges; four buttons.

Resources

Clotilde Inc., B3000 Louisiana, MO 63353-3000, (800) 772-2891, catalogue available; www.clotilde.com

Nancy's Notions, 333 Beichl Ave., PO Box 683, BeaverDam, WI 53916-0683, (800) 833-0690, catalogue available, www.nancysnotions.com

Vogue Sewing Book, New York: The Butterick Publishing Company, 2000

Daryl Lancaster is a fiber artist, teacher, writer, and mom living in Lincoln Park, New Jersey. She loves using handwoven fabrics in innovative ways for unique clothing.