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Notions

Coat Tales

by Anne Marie Soto

With today's easy silhouettes, making a coat is a creative endeavor that can be undertaken no matter what your level of sewing expertise.



Gone are the days when sewing a coat meant handling multiple layers of outer fabric, underlining, lining, interfacing, and facing. Many of today's coats are unstructured beauties with soft collars or no collars at all. Fabrics such as fleece, double knit, wool melton, and real or synthetic suede can be fashioned into lining-free toppers that are easy to toss on. Even facings can be eliminated in favor of bound or serged edges. Closures can be minimal—wrap coats, color-matched buttons, hidden snaps or hooks and eyes, or a single toggle. These are coats to sew today, but to wear for a very long time.

Color and Texture

The season's simple shapes are a great canvas for some color and texture blocking. Take a cue from J. Crew and pair a tapestry fabric from the upholstery department with a coordinating wool. Or add an insert of color to your coat sleeves. Or mix and match textures: crunchy knit sleeves next to a smooth wool coat body. Shiny or novelty faux leathers that can be overwhelming in a full garment make great textural blockings when paired with coat-weight fabrics. A tweed with a double knit in the same color family provides subtle interest.



When mixing colors and textures, you can simply switch up the fabrics on the existing segments of your garment. Yokes, sleeves (especially two-piece sleeves), cuffs, princess lines, and patch pockets are all fair game for color/texture blocking. You could also get creative and add some new design lines on your pattern. Just cut the pattern apart along the desired lines and add

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the appropriate seam allowances. Or you could go the fabric collage route. Koos van den Akker is a master of this technique for adding color and texture to a garment. Or an inventive trim technique, like mating colorful bias strips with a contrast piping, can add just the right shot of color.

Flexible Looks

In many areas of the country, winters are shorter or far less intense than they once were. Layer-friendly looks are fashion's answer to climate change. For dressy times, consider two unlined coats in complementary colors that can be worn separately or as the ultimate dynamic duo. These twinned coats have an extra bonus if you are travel-bound this winter. Two lightweight coats are more versatile than one heavy one, allowing you to adjust your coverings to changing weather conditions. For ultimate versatility, a rainwear fabric for your "top" coat will keep you protected from rain or snow. Frequent travelers might consider fleece for one of the coats. It's readily available in a wide range of colors, is easy to sew, light to carry, and it can double as a blanket when the airline won't pony up!

For daily wear, pair a short, sporty jacket (think bomber jacket, varsity jacket, motorcycle jacket, flight jacket) with a full-length coat. Generally, the proportion is more pleasing if the jacket lands at high hip. Consider a shiny leather jacket over a camel wool coat; an edgy quilted jacket under a duffle coat; a letter jacket over a slim one-button dress coat. It's a look that younger fashionistas will readily embrace... and one that happily multiplies one's outdoor wardrobe.

The Zip Line

Zippers are a detail of choice. One high-end fashion line (Comme des Garçons with jackets and coats costing well over \$1,000) embellished a

classic trench coat with no less than 18 bold 6" zippers, set at angles on the coat body and sleeves. Except for a few on pockets, most were purely decorative. But another high-end label, Max Mara, combined the decorative and the practical with a coat that converts to a jacket thanks to some cleverly installed separating zippers. Matching zipper tape can replace piping along the outer edges of your coat.

Zip Tips

If you are putting a zipper in your coat—either as a functional or a purely decorative touch—Ghee's is a wonderful source for the bold zippers and zipper tapes that are so much a part of today's fashion scene.

www.ghees.com

Owner Linda McGehee offers her basic separating zippers in a range of colors, in lengths up to 36". If you want to cut them up into shorter lengths (or use any leftover tape for another project), you can purchase extra zipper pulls. Her zippers are perfect for our adaptation of McCall's 6656 into a convertible coat. However, because the longest zipper is 36", you won't be able to use one continuous zipper around the circumference of the coat. Instead, you'll need to break your zipper installations up into shorter segments that meet at the side seams. This takes a bit of pre-planning but the results are definitely worth it. If you are adding zippers to your pattern, be aware that separating zippers, which are designed to show, can add a ½" or more to your project. This will change either the length or the way the garment sections fit together. Before cutting out your garment, do a test zipper installation on scraps of your fashion fabric. You don't need to cut your zipper; just work off one end of it so you can reuse it in your garment. Use this zipper sample to determine how much extra "space" the zipper will add to

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your garment. Adjust your pattern pieces as necessary and then cut out your project.

Here are a few of Linda's favorite installation tips:

- Many times the zipper pull is in the way of accurate stitching. To maintain a straight stitching line, stop before reaching the zipper pull, leaving the needle in the down position. Lift the presser foot, unzip the zipper a few inches, and stitch past the bulky area.
- Use a medium to cool iron setting when pressing the zipper area of a project. Do not press the zipper coil. If it's a polyester coil, you might melt it; if it's a metal coil, you could scratch your iron.
- To add a zipper pull to your extra zipper tape, insert one side of the zipper teeth into the slider portion of the pull and hold it with your thumb and finger. Place the other side of the teeth into the slider and give it a little tug. You will feel the teeth catch in the slider. Now pull the slider up to close the zipper. Be sure to stitch over each end of the zipper to protect it.

Koos Collage

Koos van den Akker's workroom in New York City is a regular stop on the ASG Sew Much Fun tours conducted by sewing experts Marla Kazell and Marsha McClintock. As a result of what she learned "hanging out" there, Marla has developed a workshop, Fabric Collage à la Koos, that she offers to sewers all over the country. She teaches an overlap method which can be adapted to adding color or texture blocking to a variety of projects. (www.marlakazell.com)

Add Collage to Vogue 1277 as Koos Would

1. Trim $\frac{3}{8}$ " from both the long curved edges of the following pattern pieces: #1 (middle back), #2 (middle

front and back), and #3 (lower front and back). Trim $\frac{3}{8}$ " from the inner long curved edges of pattern piece #5

(right side of coat) and #6 (left side of coat) and lower edge of pattern piece #4 (upper back). These edges will be overlapped rather than seamed together.

2. Leaving the center back neck seam open, stitch pieces 5 and 6 to the outer edge of the coat (piece 8 reverse side) like a facing, right sides together. Trim and grade the seam, then turn and press. Lift up the facing piece and using spray adhesive, glue in place, leaving the collar area above the armhole free. Koos uses permanent adhesive, but there are also temporary spray adhesives such as Sulky 2000 Temporary Spray Adhesive, Dritz Spray Adhesive, and 505 Spray and Fix Temporary Fabric Adhesive that will work.
3. Position pieces 3, 2, 1, and 4 into place, one at a time, matching outer edges at neck and armhole and overlapping the long curved edges $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Carefully lift and fold back each piece and spray with adhesive. Protect the other parts of the coat from overspray by temporarily covering them with newspaper. Glue a small section at a time and smooth out any wrinkles as you go. Allow the adhesive to dry.
4. Pin bias tape to the overlapped edges, just covering the raw edges. Edgestitch along each side of the tape.
5. Open out the collar sections at center back and stitch the center back seam. Press the collar into place and glue the layers together with spray adhesive. Topstitch around outer edge and as desired within the coat,



echoing the shapes of the collage pieces.

Adapt the Koos Collage Technique to Any Loose-Fitting Coat

1. Cut the entire coat from the base fabric, eliminating the facings and the hem allowance.
2. Make copies of all the pattern pieces, then draw your collage shapes on these pieces. Cut the shapes apart and add 1/4" to all the cut edges. Use these pattern pieces to cut out the collage sections. (Take your cue from Koos and use some of your base fabric for the collage sections.)
3. Stitch your base coat together.
4. Place your coat wrong side up on a large, flat surface. Position your collage pieces on the base coat, overlapping their edges. Working one section at a time, use the spray adhesive to glue each collage section in place. Allow the adhesive to dry.
5. Pin bias tape to the overlapped edges, just covering the raw edges. Edgestitch along each side of the tape. Topstitch as desired within the coat, echoing the shapes of the collage pieces.
6. Use bias binding to finish the front opening and the lower edges of the coat.



Anne Marie Soto is the editorial director of Notions. She has written articles for many publications and has authored a variety of sewing books, including "Simplicity's Simply the Best Sewing Book" (1988 and 2001 editions), "Simplicity's Simply the Best Home Decorating Book" (1993 edition), and "Good Housekeeping Stain Rescue." She was present at the birth of the American Sewing Guild, serving as its national administrator during the start-up years of the first nine ASG chapters.

ON THE EDGE



Gail Patrice Design (www.gailpatrice.com) offers a Shaped Hem Template Set which includes a single scallop, a three-step, and a triple scallop design. Although designer Gail Yellen created it to complement several of her panel skirt patterns, she also includes directions to adapt the finishes to other

garments. Her single scallop fits perfectly on the lower edge of the Petite Plus Patterns Swing Coat #250!



(www.petitepluspatterns.com)