

# DESIGNING FROM THE STASH

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The Stash. We all have one. It breeds while you are asleep. We tuck it under beds, in closets, in every available nook and cranny. We gleefully attend guild yarn sales, especially the ones where everyone brings what they don't want and we get to go home with someone else's cast-offs at bargain prices. Our family members bitterly complain about the debris that overflows our designated weaving spaces. We buy cherry looms so they look nice in the living room but the cones of yarn and piles of fabrics (if you sew too), and bags of fleeces (if, heaven forbid you are also a spinner) have no respectable place to reside. And yet, we can't seem to stop buying and use what we already have instead.

## GOAL VS PROCESS

Many of us tend to be goal oriented. We see a wonderful project in Handwoven, or we need a gift for a wedding, a tallit for a Bar Mitzvah, swatches for an exchange, fabric for Christmas cards. We cast barely a glance at our Stash, and off we go to visit the local yarn store or to call our favorite mail supplier. We buy what we think we will need, plus maybe a little extra, and we follow the project directions carefully. Whatever is left over is of course added to the Stash. This is certainly an acceptable way to work but hardly an artistic one. The journey of creation, the evolution of a piece, is the gift, not the end result.

Each step on the way to a final product can be thought of as

a process in itself. The steps may even be completed years apart from one another. I shop to shop, design to design, weave to weave, and sew just because I am in a mood to sew. But for this method to work, you have to have something on hand to work with when the mood strikes. Hence -- the Stash.

## GOING SHOPPING

Remember this article the next time you are in a place that might have something you can add to your stash. This is permission to whip out that credit card at the next conference and “Shop ‘til you Drop”. When others in your household say, “But you have so much yarn! When are you going to use up what you have?” show them this article.

How much to buy? Choose yarns that feel good to you, a pound of this, two pounds if you really love it. Buy several colors of each; don’t try to match the colors. Buy different textures, fiber contents, hues that aren’t necessarily your favorites. Look especially for bargains. The point is to have no preconceived notions about what you will do with what you buy.

## THE STASH IS THE LIMIT

There is a catch. When I design, I allow myself to use only what is in the Stash. I will not except in extreme emergencies, purchase something for a piece I am working on. Everything from the yarn to the buttons must come from the Stash. This requires you to listen to your materials -- they will talk to you.

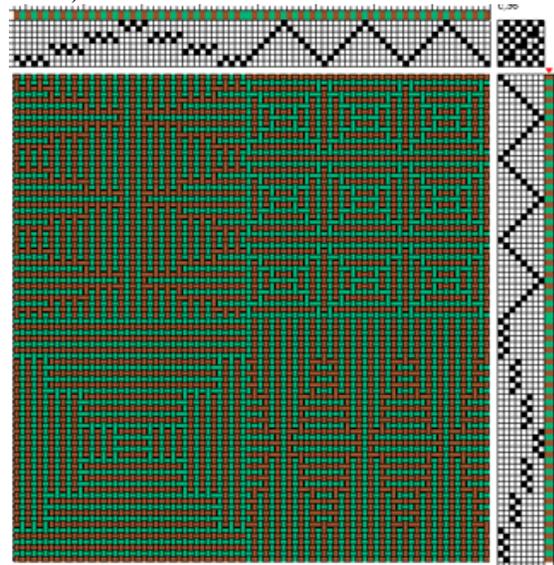
Your life experiences, the Stash, and your equipment and skills are all a part of what you create. Each piece is like a new relationship: You meet someone new, you have a wonderful time finding out all about him or her. You become obsessed, letting all other responsibilities fall by the wayside. You fantasize. You go to interesting places, do new and exciting things, and then, when the relationship is finally over, there is a mourning period, until the next new idea comes along!

## FROM MY STASH TO A VEST

After a crisis in my life, I found myself in my studio with a healing urge to create, and a length of yardage seemed to be crying, “Pick me, Pick me!”

I had woven the fabric the year before, when a shadow weave draft in a magazine sent me

to my Stash where a cone of aqua and one of taupe that I barely noticed before nearly leapt off the shelf. (yarns are equivalent to approximately an 8/2 cotton)



I am the type of person who enjoys balancing a check book, so calculating what I have and what I can make from it is a fun process for me. Since I have no idea where the yarn came from, how much I have, nor what it is made of (unless the little label inside the cone is correct, which it often isn’t for bargain yarns), I need to get out my trusty McMorran yarn balance (a must have for any weaver with a stash) and my digital postal scale. (available from office supply stores).

I carefully calculate the yards per pound with the balance (a rule of thumb is to measure three times and take an average) and then weigh the cone to figure out how much yardage is on the cone (yards per pound times number of pounds less the weight of the cone). An easy way to subtract the weight of the cone is to zero out the scale with an empty cone first if you have one.

This is where the fun begins. After you have figured out how much yarn you have and how many ends and picks per inch are suitable for your structure (in this case 20 epi and 20 ppi), you can determine how much fabric you can weave.

When I weave, I usually weave yardage to add to my Stash for future creative relationships. My yarn amounts, the shadow-weave structure, and my warping reel (for which each revolution is 3 yd) helped dictate a 6 yd warp 25” wide (for about 4 ½ - 5 yd of 22-23” wide finished fabric).

When I finished weaving the fabric, I had about 50 yards of taupe yarn left over! I was pretty

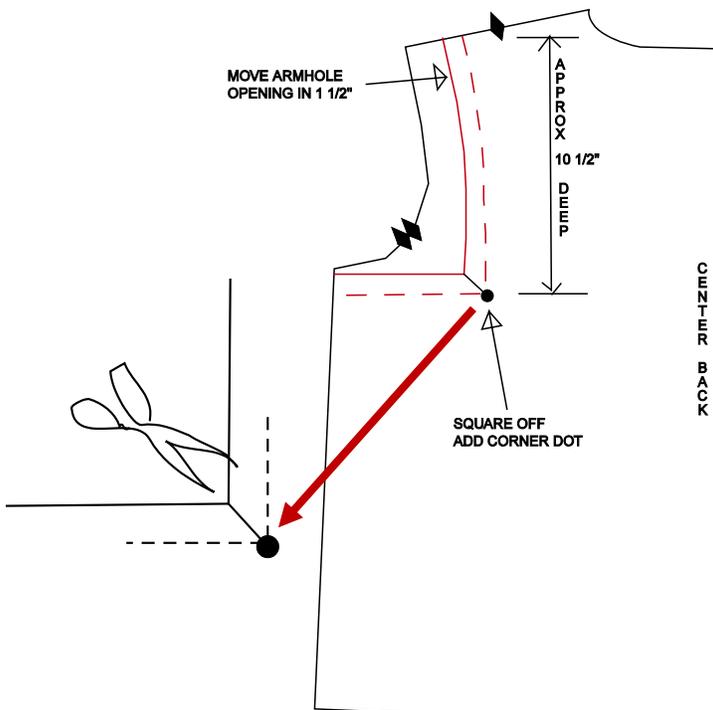
proud of how closely I had calculated. Then I put the fabric away.

### THE FIRST CHALLENGE: THE PATTERN

When the shadow-weave fabric cried to me a year later, I had just finished reading a catalog that featured long vests from faraway lands, especially appealing at that difficult moment in my life. I took out my favorite jacket pattern and lengthened it, and then realized that my fabric was not wide enough for a full back nor long enough for two fronts and two backs. Hmmm. It then occurred to me that I could shift the side seams toward the back until the back could be cut from the full width of the fabric. In this case there might just be enough fabric for one narrow back and two fronts with their now extended sides.

I drafted the pattern, using Red Dot Tracer from HTC Corporation <http://www.weaversew.com/shop/index.php> which allows me to sew together the pattern pieces and try them on like a garment. I made the vest pattern as long as my fabric length would allow.

Just then, my inkle loom, which hangs in my studio from hooks on an upper shelf, began waving to me. I decided inkle – woven bands must embellish armhole and center front edges. I altered the armhole of the jacket front and back to allow for the bands; see below.



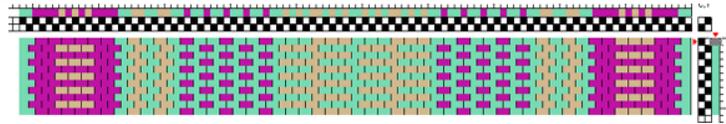
### THE SECOND CHALLENGE: THE BANDS

But I only had 50 yards of taupe! How could I weave bands that would coordinate with the



fabric (remember, no additional purchases!)? With a lot of graph paper and my niddy-noddy to measure exact yardage, I figured out how many ends of taupe I could include. I made several designs and began weaving. Two yards later, I thought – boring!

I carefully unwove (remember I am into process here), so I could salvage the precious taupe to use again, and added a raspberry. I set up a different design and this time I hit pay dirt. Only 18” of taupe yarn was left when I finished the band.



### THE LINING

As I began to sew, it became apparent that the vest would need a lining. Back to the Stash! A fabric I had silk screened in college twenty five years ago, begged to be noticed. (And since it really wanted to be part of this particular piece there was exactly enough of it. I found that if a particular raw material gives me too much trouble it wasn't supposed to be in the piece in the first place.)



In another cabinet I discovered the perfect closure: a bauble on a beaded necklace I had picked up at a church rummage sale (you don't think I buy

only yarn for my Stash?) Hmm. It has to hang from something. In my box of odd buttons I found a large one for the closure and two smaller ones for the vents in the back of the vest to support additional baubles made of beads from the necklace and my trusty stash of jewelry findings.



## THE FINAL CHALLENGE: THE CLOSURE

Now for a cord of some kind to close the vest around the button/bauble. Crochet? Too bulky. Tatting? Perfect. An inexperienced tatter, I was able to manage the 3" loop needed and finished with only 1/2" left of taupe yarn! I titled the vest "Evolution", and I will be in a slight state of mourning until the next new idea comes along.

### Resources:

Rodin, Nancy. "Shadow-Weave Scarves."  
Weaver's Magazine, Spring 1999, pg. 48 (source for draft)