



Argyle Reimagined - A study in upcycling using piecing techniques

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Measurements: HPS length: 28.5", bust: 42", waist: 37", hip: 46", sleeve length from HPS: 24"

The purpose of this jacket was to upcycle two discarded wool jackets (one navy and the other gray) and two wool sweaters (a plain yellow and a brick-red and gray sweater with a diamond pattern) using cutting, piecing, and ironing techniques incorporated in patchwork quilts. Patchwork involves stitching together small pieces of fabric, called patches, to create a larger fabric (Leslie, 2007). In the past, I have enjoyed sewing patchwork and appliqué quilts but this is the first time I have used these techniques to make a garment. I used wool fabric instead of cotton and tried to create a look more mainstream fashion than craft fashion. I did not want the jacket to look like a traditional patchwork jacket while reusing fabric from discarded garments.

I started the process by stitching a fit sample of a basic princess seam jacket with raglan sleeves in muslin. The diamond pattern on the brick-red sweater inspired the zigzag diamond pattern on the jacket. I planned and drew the zigzag design with diamonds on the paper pattern of each piece connecting the lines on the front neck through to the sleeve and onto the back. I adjusted the paper pattern and manipulated the seams to ensure that the diamond shape fit accurately and the flow was smooth. The strips of yellow and navy were parallel to each other in most cases except on the center-front hem where I engineered the design to allow the diamond shape to turn the corner.

The main challenge was to design seam lines in the jacket that enabled pattern pieces to fit in the discarded garment panels, while being cohesive with the zigzag diamond pattern and create a flattering fit, line, and silhouette on the female form. The seams on the back and side of the jacket, connected with the seams in the zigzag patches to make piecing easier and to control fit. I wanted these seams to look natural and not controlled. The wool fabric, especially the brick-red sweater, was bulky and 1/4" seam allowance, which is standard for patchwork quilts, proved somewhat challenging. I, however, decided to keep 1/4" seam allowance to piece patches as it allowed the most efficient use of fabric and reduced bulk. I maintained 1/2" seam allowance, which is normal for sewing garments, on side seams, center front, hem, and waist.

Both wool jackets, used for this project, were poorly constructed jackets discarded by students and the sweaters were old and well worn. To prepare the fabric for cutting, I ripped open the seams in the jackets and ironed them. I washed the sweaters in hot water and dried them on high heat, in the dryer, to felt them. I used strip piecing and chain piecing techniques to sew the zigzag pattern. In strip piecing, strips of fabric are stitched together to create a "strip-set", which is then cut into pieces and stitched together to create a patchwork design (Knott, 2018). I cut 1-inch wide strips from the yellow sweater and 1 3/8" wide strips from the navy jacket. The navy strip was sandwiched between two yellow strips and stitched

together at  $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance. Seams were pressed open. This strip-set was laid at an angle of 110-degrees, on the cutting mat, and cut straight following the grid on the mat, into  $2\frac{1}{2}$ " to  $2\frac{3}{4}$ " wide sections, depending on the seam allowance required.

Chain piecing is a technique used for faster sewing where a pile of two similar sections are stitched together one after another, with one continuous length of thread, without stopping in between pieces (Burt, n.d.). The triangles were chain pieced to the cut strip-sets and then ironed. These sections were chain pieced to the gray fabric and then the panels in back and side were stitched together, matching seams. This technique was faster and enabled sharper points without having to turn corners.

On the sleeves, I cut diamond shapes instead of triangles for the patches because I did not want to cut into the pattern of the original sweater. This meant that I had to turn corners and the sewing process became slower. Each sleeve was composed of 102 individual pieces and was the most complex part of the jacket.

There is tremendous scope in using cutting and piecing techniques used in patchwork quilts to upcycle garments. Quilters have developed ingenious methods of cutting shapes like triangles, diamonds and hexagons and piecing these shapes together to create blocks. These techniques are perfect for upcycling because the fabric is cut into strips of various widths. As this eliminates the need to fit new shapes into existing shapes for the purpose of upcycling, it enables effective use of fabric. A quick google search of patchwork garments and upcycled jackets revealed that this method of design and construction has been neglected. By combining techniques of upcycling with cutting and piecing methods used in patchwork quilts, I was able to transform the initial four discarded garments into a jacket that does not look like a traditional pieced and patched garment or an upcycled garment.

#### References:

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