

TACO COAT

A Method Description

© Kim Salazar, 1997, 2012; <http://www.string-or-nothing.com>



I'm working on a cardigan sweater inspired by a teeny black and white photo of Falkenberg's Lastrada appearing in a recent Patternworks flyer. I've never seen the Lastrada pattern. Since posting about it on the KnitList, I've been told that the Lastrada is similar in technique to Elizabeth Zimmerman's classic "Surprise Jacket." I've never seen the pattern for that one either. My interpretation of the same basic theme - a cardigan knit from the edges in - is a big, boxy jacket with full sleeves that can be made almost dolman-width, or narrower as the knitter desires.

The Taco is knit in an unusual manner. Take your finger and starting at your collarbone, trace the line followed by a button band that goes down the front of a cardigan. Once you get to the bottom, trace your finger across the bottom edge of your imaginary cardigan. Go completely around your body. If you are a contortionist, you can follow around until you reach the center back, then trace an imaginary line up your spine to the base of your collar.

The Taco is cast on in a long strip that follows this line. Corners formed by double decrease miters define the bottom center corner at both front and back. The two halves, left and right are knit one at a time. They progress from this defined outer edge to armscye, and march from there out to the sleeve's

cuff. The mitered corner decreases form the garment's basic shape.

I chose to knit mine with no seams whatsoever. After the initial collar shaping, I joined my rounds and knit circular fashion. When time came to start Side #2, I picked up the stitches along the spine line of the existing half.

Although I originally intended to finish off the piece with I-cord or a bias-knit trim, I found that it did not need it. I ensured that the outermost stripe on all edges was the smoother of the two black yarns I used. The garter stitch texture was robust enough not to need any other reinforcement. For my closures, I bought some Norwegian-style pewter clasps and sewed them on.

This method will work for any yarn in any weight, provided all of the yarns used for the garment can be knit at the same gauge. It would be great as an "oddball" project to use up all those stash leftovers. I do not give exact stitch counts in this recipe. You MUST swatch to determine your gauge. Without a swatch it is impossible to draft up this garment..

Materials

I used approximately 3,650 yards total of three worsted weight yarns knit a bit tightly at the DK gauge of 5.5 st = 1 inch in garter stitch. My Taco is

Taco Coat

approximately 30 inches long - fingertip length on my 5-foot, 8-inch person.

YOU CAN USE ANY YARN AND NEEDLE SIZE YOU WISH, PROVIDED YOU GAUGE FIRST AND DO THE MATH ACCORDINGLY.

My yarn consumption estimate is provided so you can extrapolate how much you will need. (Rough estimate - about twice as much yarn as a standard fit pullover).

- Lana d'Oro - Wool/alpaca blend, Worsted, 12 110-yard balls, black
- KFI Kureopatra Plus - Cotton/wool blend, Worsted 12 127-yard balls, a screaming jewel tone variegated with a loonnggg repeat
- Reynold's Toulouse - Wool/nylon, slub Astrakhan, 10 approx. 80-yard balls, black
- 36-inch circular US #5 needle
- 24-in circular US #5 needle
- two sets 6-inch DPNs, US #5
- 4 markers in different colors to mark the miter points
- A scad of safety pins to mark sleeve decreases
- 4 Norwegian-style pewter clasps

Swatching

To start, I knit a rather large swatch that incorporated the double-decrease corner miter. In fact, I knit several until I found the most pleasing combination of needle size and yarn weight.

I also experimented with several different styles of corner decrease, including a couple three-stitch double decreases, and several different combos of paired single decreases. I settled on using a pair of ordinary single decreases - a k2tog followed by a ssk.

For my swatch, I cast on about 30 stitches, placed a marker, then cast on another 30 stitches. I did swatches in stockinette, in several two-color slip stitches and in garter stitch, working my paired decrease around the marker (k2tog [marker] ssk). I knit my swatches until I had only 2 stitches left. Of all the tries, I liked the plain old garter stitch one the best. Using it, I confirmed that the angle formed by the miter was 45 degrees. (This will work with other angles that are formed by other pattern stitches, but the drafting will be more complicated.)

I also experimented with my stripe width progression. I ended up using the following (expressed in right-side garter stitch ridges):

- 2 Lana d'Oro (the smooth black yarn)
- 4 Kureopatra (the variegated smooth yarn)
- 3 Toulouse (the bumpy black Astrakan yarn)
- 3 Kureopatra

- 3 Lana d'Oro
- 2 Kureopatra
- 4 Toulouse
- 1 Kureopatra
- 2 Lana d'Oro
- 4 Kureopatra
- 3 Toulouse
- 3 Kureopatra
- 1 Lana d'Oro
- 2 Kureopatra
- 4 Toulouse
- 1 Kureopatra
- 3 L d'Or,
- etc.

This sounds more complex than it is. I did 4, then 3, then 2, then 1 ridge of Kureopatra. In between the Kureopatra stripes, I did a stripe of one of the two blacks - Lana d'Oro or Toulouse. The Toulouse alternated between 4 and 3 ridges; and the Lana d'Oro marched from 3 ridges to 1 ridge. I repeated each cycle independently. As a result, the stripe pattern looks random as thin stripes abut wider ones and textures alternate.

Use your swatch to play with your stripe progression. Narrow? Wide? Alternating? Marching in mathematical progression (Fibonacci knitters take note!) - the choice is yours. Just be aware that the proportion of the number and width of stripes of the various yarns used should relate to the proportion of the yardages at hand.

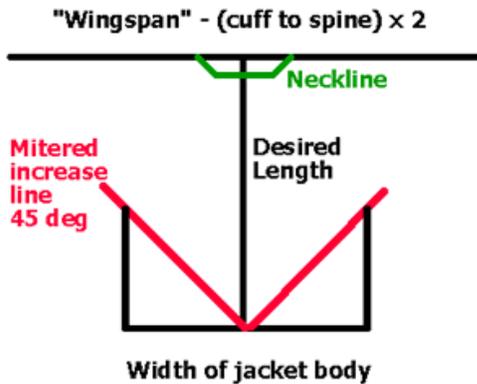
Drafting and Measuring

I found that I had to resort to a bit of drafting before I began knitting. I took a "half-wingspan" measurement of myself from my spine to my wrist, and measured the width of my favorite jacket. I also determined a range of acceptable lengths for the jacket - anything from 26 to 32 inches would work for me.

Using graph paper (and later a drafting program on the computer) I laid out a "T" with the top bar representing the cuff to cuff measurement (twice spine to cuff). The vertical was the garment's target length. Then I drew a line at the bottom of the T - representing my desired jacket width.

After I had this framework laid out I put in the verticals for the sides of the garment and drew a 45 degree angle up from the bottom edge of the T. This represented the corner miter. I wanted the sleeves to begin at the point where the corner miters (front and back) met. I played with the jacket length, riding the attached 45 degree angle up and down until I the proportions of the depth of the pseudo-dolman armhole were pleasing.

Taco Coat



I didn't think too closely about the sleeve shaping at this stage. I planned on continuing the 45 degree decreases until I reached a reasonable sleeve width, then knitting out with no decreases until my spine to cuff length was achieved. More discussion of the sleeve is below.

The last step was to add a roughly 8-inch wide 3-inch deep centered neck cut-out for the front.

Knitting

Now I was ready to cast on. I did the gauge math, and using a half-hitch cast-on and a 36-inch circular needle, cast on a strip equal to the length of the center front (put a red marker) the length of the bottom edge from cardigan edge to side center (put a blue marker), the length of the side center to the "spine" (put a green marker), and the length from bottom edge to the nape of my neck. This meant I had A LOT of stitches on the needle to begin with.

In my particular case, I had 154 stitches down the center back (marker) 72 stitches for back bottom (marker) 72 stitches for front bottom (marker) and 138 stitches for the front cardigan opening edge - 436 stitches total.

I knit away happily in garter stitch, decreasing once on each side of the red and green markers on every row that "began" with a green marker (the reason why I used different colors). When the long wormy strip was approximately 3 inches wide, I began increasing one stitch at the edge of the red marker end every other row (the front neck edge). When the cut out looked wide enough and the stitch count on the front was 7 fewer than the back, I did two rows where I increased two stitches at the end, then one row where I increased three stitches at the end. Every time I made an increase I marked it with one safety pin per increased stitch so I would know where to put comparable increases when I worked the second side.

With my back and front lengths now equal after the completion of the neck cut-out, I joined the thing into a circle and finagling my way around a jog-less

jog began to knit circular fashion, alternating rows of knit and purl to maintain the garter stitch texture.

I kept going. When the corner miters met at the center side marker, I was at the point where the sleeve started. I continued the paired decreases. I marked each decrease with a safety pin. To be truthful, I don't care for the fullness of the sleeve produced by sticking to the paired decrease, one on each side of the center side marker decrease scheme. I think slightly more of a taper at the beginning of the sleeve might be more flattering to me. The present sleeve is o.k., but not perfect...

To remedy this sleeve fullness problem in future Taco-type projects, I'm thinking of knitting my sleeves differently - perhaps upping the rate of decrease to once EVERY row instead of alternate rows. I'd do this until I'd made approximately 10 paired decreases (20 stitches) then revert back to the alternate row plan. This should eliminate some of the near-body sleeve bulk, yet leave the sleeves full enough to preserve the garment's line.

I decreased until the sleeve was approximately 12 inches in circumference (66 stitches in my gauge), then continued out until my desired length was achieved.

The Second Side

At first I intended on knitting the second side separately, then seaming the two halves together. I'm lazy. I hate seaming. Instead I picked up stitches down the center back, then used the half-hitch cast on to form the remaining side and front stitches. It was a tad awkward to knit the second side this way because the thing is big and heavy, but was happy to avoid precision seaming.

For the second side, I replicated the exact pattern of stripes I established in the first side. This ensured that I used the same amount of yarns as the first, and that the decreases (marked by pins on the first side) happen in the same spots.

Finishing

Holding the sweater with the outside towards me, I picked up stitches around the neck and knit a vertical collar strip in plain stockinette for about an inch and a half. Then I did two rows of reverse stockinette. This formed a fold line. Then I continued in stockinette. When the length of the two stockinette areas were the same, I cast off loosely. Then I folded my collar along the fold line and carefully stitched the bound off edge to the inside of the neckline, encapsulating the edges of the original neckline hole.

At first I had intended to use applied I-cord to give the thing a Chanel-type edge, or doing another similar knitted-on treatment. I didn't need to do this. The garter stitch fabric I had produced was robust

Taco Coat

enough to drape nicely without reinforcement.
Instead I opted for the most simple finish:
Norwegian-style pewter eyelet clasps sewn on the
upper body.

