

# e**ducation**

## Basics: Seam Finishes

by Sheri McKillop



All too often, seam finishes aren't even a question when you're constructing a new garment. We whip every seam up and down the serger or, if you have a conventional machine, zig zag and trim close to the stitches. Granted, sergers are very efficient finishing tools. They are fast and the results are professional - just like ready to wear. But sometimes the look you are going for is more than ready to wear - it's custom made. If so, consider other seam finishes. There are some wonderful alternatives that are not only effective, but can actually become a design element of your garment.

Consider the unlined jacket. Serging stitches would be fine but if this jacket is going to be removed you may want something that appears more professional. Hong Kong Finish is a great choice. Construct the seam as usual and press the seam allowances open. Cut some strips of matching fabric, or for a colorful effect, contrasting fabrics. If the strip you cut is too wide you will trim it eventually so accuracy is not essential in cutting. Right sides together, place the strips on one side of the seam allowance. Sew a 1/4" seam. Wrap the strip around the seam and to the underside of the seam allowance. Stitch in the ditch. This is a technique used to camouflage topstitching. Place your stitches directly in the seam you just sewed, they will appear to sink into the ditch of the seam. Trim off any excess fabric on the underside from the strip close to the stitching. Repeat for the other side of the seam. By now you're thinking, "this will take forever!" It will take longer than you're used to, but it's not a finish you will apply to every garment.

If you've ever constructed a garment from sequined or metallic fabric you will be familiar with the countless broken needles and will have experienced the massive ravelling. By the time you're ready for seam finishes you're looking for an alternative to running this fabric through a sewing machine. Hand Overcasting the seam allowance is a great choice. Now, if you thought the Hong Kong finish took time, this will take even more. The saving grace is usually that these garments have simple lines so there are not too many seams to finish. You will need some waxed thread to make this job easier. Simply whip stitch all the seam allowances that will be exposed. If the fabric is not too bulky and allows you to turn under a small bit before you overcast, all the better. This is more than likely the seam finish your grandmother would have chosen and the one that occurs most often today in haute couture houses of the most famous designers. No wonder their gowns cost so much!

Enclosed seams are another alternative. Instead of seaming the fabric then treating the seam allowance, the garment is seamed

in a method where there are no remaining exposed seam allowances. One such seam is the Flat Felled Seam. This seam is often found in jeans that have topstitching on the outside. Some try and mimic this by serging the seam allowances together, pressing to one side and then topstitching. This is not quite the same as a traditional flat felled seam but still looks great from the right side of the fabric. In order for the seam allowance to be enclosed you must seam the fabric with **WRONG** sides together. Trim one seam allowance to  $1/8"$ . Wrap the remaining seam allowance around the trimmed allowance and tuck it under. Now topstitch along the fold through the seam allowance and the main fabric. Flat felled seams are very strong and work well in denims where there is a lot of wear and tear.

Another enclosed seam is the French Seam. This is a beautiful seam for fine and extra fine fabrics. It works especially well on sheers where the seam finish would be visible from the right side. **WRONG** sides together, seam two layers with a  $1/4"$  seam. Press flat to set stitches. Now turn right sides together and press the seam flat. Seam at  $1/4"$  for a total of  $1/2"$  seam. If your original seam allowance is  $5/8"$  stitch the first seam at  $1/4"$  and the second at  $3/8"$ . The seam allowance is totally encased in the second seam. This works very nicely on lingerie or very ravelly fabrics as no raw edge is left exposed.