

# Couture Collaboration

An artistic mother-and-son duo join forces to create one-of-a-kind shirts.

BY DIANE ERICSON & MILES FRODE

There's nothing like a joint project to celebrate the mother/son bond and stretch the parent/child relationship as adults. This collaboration was about exploring and combining our design preferences with the passion we both have for painting and drawing. The seeds were sown a long time ago, over large sheets of paper and baskets of crayons on the floor as we spent hours chatting and drawing, each

of us finding our way. Growing up in a creative family, we have been involved in art our entire lives. [Editor's note: Diane's mother/Miles's grandmother Lois Ericson was an artist, independent pattern designer, and author of many books on creative sewing techniques.] Recently, Miles has started creating surface design fabrics and sewing, and it has been an engaging way for us to share how the canvas of fabric works and changes to become a moving piece of shelter for the body. This new phase of his life has moved us to the roles of collaborators, something we both really

enjoy. Working together as fellow artists is one of the most fruitful ways to gain a greater appreciation for your own work. Creating a piece for someone else to work on, letting it go, feeling its absence, then having it come back anew allows us to have a different perspective. What you see here is the result of this partnership.

We enjoyed the challenge of working up some sophisticated, arty shirts from Vogue Patterns V8759 and Butterick B6177. Sharing our visions for them, we reached to express a raw, direct quality we both find appealing. We played an inspired game of hot potato, with Miles adding his art to the fabric and handing it off to me to fold his ideas into the construction. "When I finish my fabric and then pass it on, I get excited to see what is created. Building into and playing with what for my part, was already finished," states Miles. Design, color blocking, detail placement, shape, and fitting all become elements in creating successful pieces with Miles's graffiti-painted fabrics.

In the same way that we collaborated on the creation of the shirts, we also passed this article back and forth for you to see how the inspiration and process unfolded. Inspiration is everywhere but the challenge is: Where do you find it? What inspires you? A bold color? A dynamic shape? Nature? Maybe an era or culture? We hope that by showing you how we work you will find your voice to create your own unique fabric and garment.

*(continued on page 18)*



Miles Frode and Diane Ericson





▲ **DIANE ERICSON**

A long-time creative explorer, Diane Ericson is a designer and artist with a passion for working in cloth. Teaching plays a pivotal role in her artistic pursuits, as an art form itself. Diane works the process of creating just as deeply as designing and manufacturing the products that support it. As designer of Revisions and Diane Ericson Design, a line of inventive sewing patterns and stencils, she also publishes articles and a blog, holds Design Outside the Lines retreats and classes, and offers inspirational presentations. You can find her in her design studio and shop in Ashland, Oregon. [dianeericson.com](http://dianeericson.com)



Above: Katherine Tilton gives her stamp of approval to Diane and Miles' version of her design B6177. Left and below: Miles in creative and contemplative states.



▼ **MILES FRODE**

Son of designer and teacher Diane Ericson and grandson of Lois Ericson, Miles Frode is no stranger to creative design. Drawing since he could hold a pencil and spouting poetry since his mother felt the need to write it down, Miles has a unique overlap of creative outlets. His innovative surface design fabrics and creations are sold at Diane's Design Outside the Lines retreats and design studio. Each piece of his work speaks with unabashed inspired enthusiasm to most all who see it; young and old, fellow artists, sewists, and fashionistas. You can catch Miles sharing his newest work and philosophy in his art blog [urbancadence.blogspot.com](http://urbancadence.blogspot.com)





## CREATIVE EXPRESSION

### The Graffiti Shirt, men's shirt V8759

**Miles:** Drawing on my close ties with graffiti and “Graph Artists,” and my experiences immersed in the skateboard culture, I enjoy juxtaposing many abstract techniques while wielding the oppositional edge of realism to create my aesthetic balance. For this fabric piece I used a two-step process. In the first step I used discharge paste that removes color, then in the second step applied the design to the fabric with a plastic syringe. Here’s the process:

**1.** I applied discharge paste to the fabric haphazardly and with gusto, creating big splatters. After letting it dry in the sun, it was put in the dryer to set. Normally the fabric would be washed in the machine as a final step, but I washed the fabric in dirty paint water. This, combined with the lighter areas where the discharge paste removed color, gave the background a mottled effect. **(A)**

**2.** The fabric was hung on a clothesline for the next step, but if you don’t have one you can work flat on the ground. I sprayed the fabric lightly and unevenly with water.

**3.** Using a fine-tip syringe I squirted fabric paint **(B)** onto the fabric in a writing motion, focusing on the overall visual

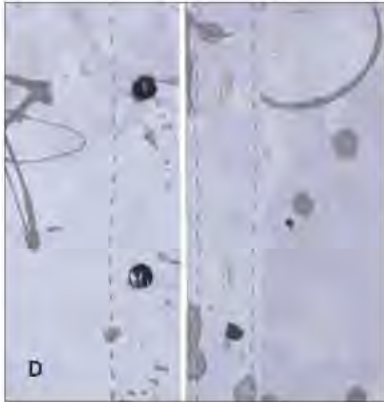


feel rather than the ability to read the words. As you work, you may want to occasionally drift into drawing different shapes, or just doodle. In the areas where the fabric is wet, the color will diffuse. In other areas it will look runny. **(C)**

**4.** To finish it off, I made a few random brush strokes with rust-colored metallic fabric paint.

**5.** To set the design, allow the fabric to air dry for 24 hours, then heat set with an iron.





**Diane:** I enjoyed getting to know this fabric piece, studying where Miles spent more time, wiped his brush, etc. Besides the grain of the fabric, there were lots of directional elements in the surface design to consider before deciding where to place the pattern pieces. After the fabric spent some time on my dress form in various directions, I was ready to take the scissors to it. I always start by placing the front pattern piece on my favorite part of the fabric, then work out from there. [Note: pattern pieces will be cut single thickness, so when the pattern states Cut 2, remember to flip your pattern to cut left and right pieces.] The bright rust-color metallic paint bits became a focus for the front of the shirt.

The more sewing experience you have, the more construction options there are. I suggest reading the pattern for an information base, then deciding what you want to use, and how you might want to incorporate your own ideas into the process. For example, with this shirt, I folded the front facing/band extensions in different directions on the left and right sides. The structural result is the same; it's just a different look. **(D)**

Another detail to consider is the use of contrasting fabric as an accent.

For this shirt I cut the outside collar band, under collar, and inside of the cuffs in black. **(E & F)** On the collar and cuffs, the black extends over the edge to create an accent that resembles piping, but without a core. This is one of my favorite techniques, and it's easy to do. Here's how:

1. Cut the art fabric and interfacing according to the pattern. Cut the contrast 1" (2.5cm) wider on the edge where you want it to show. On this shirt it's the lower edges of the cuffs and collar. Attach the interfacing to the art fabric.
2. With right sides together, stitch across the edge where the accent will be with a ¼" (6mm) seam allowance. Press the seam flat and toward the art fabric.
3. Fold with right sides together and raw edges even. Stitch down both sides of the cuff.
4. Turn right side out and press. Check the depth of the cuff against the pattern piece and trim off any excess along the raw edge.

I used this same technique to create an accent edge on the collar, however, collars have a curved edge and you will need to be more careful when cutting and stitching.

As a finishing touch, I hand top-stitched the collar and along the front band.





## CREATIVE EXPRESSION

### The Updated Bowling Shirt, men's shirt V8759

**Miles:** The inspiration for this shirt is 1950s men's bowling shirts. **(A)** I found a great collection of images online, with lots of color blocking ideas. The designs are bold and perfect for interpreting into combinations of painted fabrics and solids. Steering away from creating a traditional patchwork shirt, I interpreted this idea into artistic panels that became the front of the shirt. Following my favorite mantra, "Start with what you know," I sketched the panels then let the shirt dictate their placement.

To draw the panel designs I used fabric marking pens that come in three point sizes. **(B)** To be permanent they need to be heat set with a dry iron, so if you don't like what you've drawn, just wash it before using any heat. Here's the process:

1. Draw a series of vertical parallel lines in varying widths using the thinnest pen point. They don't have to be perfect-

ly straight or neat. You can use a ruler as a guide, but keep a freehand feeling with rough or ragged edges.

2. Using the thinnest pen point, draw interesting shapes inside the lines without lifting up the pen. **(C)** In one column I drew cursive letters written as stylishly as possible, not focusing too much on their legibility or actual words (it's actually the alphabet), but going for interesting shapes. Down the other large column are a series of interconnecting faces, like a totem pole, with roughly scribbled facial features. The eyes, nose and mouth are more implied than realistic. You can make any shapes you like, such as leaves or flowers, circles or squares, just don't lift up the pen—keep the line flowing.

3. Using the fine tip pens, shade in certain focal points of the letters and the faces. This can be scribbling, a series of vertical and horizontal lines, or cross hatching. **(D)**

4. Using the medium tip pen, roughly color in more areas of the design. Try highlighting some edges of the shapes to

make them bold. Use the thick tip pens to fill in larger areas for more depth. Add strokes and scribbles outside the vertical lines to create a frame for the design. **(E)**

There's no right or wrong way to do this. Just do what you feel. Remember, the ink isn't permanent until it's heat set.

**Diane:** The art panels were not symmetrical in width or design, but that's part of the beauty and art, so I reworked the pattern pieces to accommodate the panels. One panel was wide enough to use for the entire left front, minus the facing/band extension of the front edge. It's easy to cut the extension off to create a separate pattern piece, just remember to add  $\frac{1}{4}$ " (6mm) seam allowances to both cut edges. I cut the facings for this shirt from the black fabric and used the same technique as on the blue graffiti shirt to create an accent-edge, which resembles piping but without a core. **(F)**



The directions for this technique are listed on page 19.

The other panels were quite a bit narrower, so I divided the right front into four sections. The major panel was positioned near the center front. Again, I cut the facing extension off to create a separate pattern piece. I laid the pattern piece on top of the art panel and

decided where to make the first division. I then made two more divisions of unequal widths, alternating the black and tan fabric. The tan fabric has just a bit of art on it, for an interesting effect. The remaining art panels were used for the outside of one cuff and the yoke lining. (G & H)

When the shirt was completed, I

added hand topstitching to outline a few of the seams, and in swirls on the collar to echo the swirls in the art panels. Near the right armhole I changed the direction of the stitching to diagonal just for fun.

(I) The mini red snaps always seemed like the perfect finish. The positioning of the snaps was chosen to interact with the surface design down the front.



#### LABELING

Adding a label to a custom-made garment is a perfect finishing touch. If you think about the label before construction, you can integrate it into the design, which is what I did on this shirt. I inserted a piece of fabric in the yoke lining. When the shirt was finished Miles and I celebrated by signing our names with fabric marking pens.

There are lots of options for labels—they can be made of fabric or wide ribbon, hand written or embroidered. And if you want to try something different you could inset the label on the outside of the garment as part of the design. When you are making an arty shirt, the label should be just as unique.





## CREATIVE EXPRESSION

### Katherine Tilton's Re-shaped Shirt, B6177

**Miles:** I often start without thought, having set up my workspace with what paints and brushes I need and maybe a notebook I have at hand for ideas. Painting can be like buttonholes: NEVER make the first one at the top, since that probably ensures the best one will be at the bottom. So when painting you may want to start on one side and not in the middle. You will be cutting out your favorite pieces first, so you will want lots of variation to choose from.

**1.** Working with a medium-size dry foam brush, start making marks with space in between. The geometric shapes I started with were literally tracings around some of the edges of my notebook and round paint jar. **(A)** The paints are a combination of metallic and opaque. **(B)** Some are highly pigmented so brush strokes should be kept light and flexible so that the drape and hand of the fabric doesn't change. **(C)**

**2.** Next, I looked for areas where outlines butt up against each other or that are close enough to have more shading in different directions along the edge. A dry brush technique can give more depth and variation. **(D)** It is important when using a heavier hand with paint to leave spaces of fabric in between the painted images. This allows the fabric to move and not feel as stiff as it would if you applied a solid line of paint. Each space you leave in the fabric is all part of the design.

**3.** For the last step, add more marks in complimentary colors to accentuate the design. **(E)**

**Diane:** It is easy to spend more time working out the best use of a painted fabric than actually sewing up the garment! This shirt design has front panels extending into side drapes that were perfect to showcase Miles's art, but it didn't fit the pattern pieces perfectly.



B6177 modified

Earrings: Rivka Friedman



A



B

The lines of the art are very dynamic and I didn't want to cut through them, so I knew I would want to reshape and/or piece the pattern together in some areas to keep the art intact. This made cutting and construction more of a puzzle. An obvious solution was to reshape the center front to go around the art, which influenced the button placement options. I also thought to outline the shapes with a bit more color by using my favorite technique of a contrast fabric edge, used on the two previous shirts. Taking color cues from this dynamic piece of art, I decided to add a pop of orange—being across the color wheel from blue, it's a complimentary color. I felt this would add even more energy to the color relationships in the shirt.

I started by reshaping the front edge.

Here's how:

1. Position the pattern tissue over the fabric art to determine the best use of the design. Thread-mark the center front line (shown in green thread) for both the left and right pieces. **(F)** Overlap the lines and see if you are happy with the arrangement.
2. Using the painted design as a guide, determine what your front edge shape will be. Use chalk to draw the edge (free-hand or with a sewing curve). This will be the right front stitching line. Draw a second line  $\frac{1}{4}$ "– $\frac{1}{2}$ " (6mm–13mm) out from the first; this will be the cutting line. Try it on to see how the line looks on the body or dress form.
3. The left front side (underlap) can be cut straight to match the original pattern since the right side front will over-

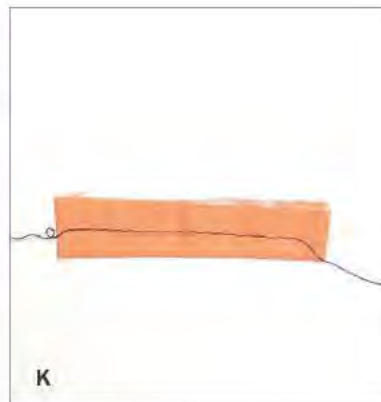
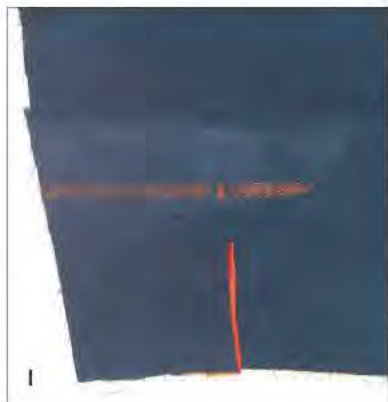
lap and cover it.

4. You will need to make a facing to match the new shape of the right front side. You can make a pattern piece out of paper or oak tag or just use your art fabric as a guide. **(G)** I cut both front facings from orange fabric. Interface the facings.
5. With right sides together, stitch down the front edges. Clip curves and corners and grade seam allowances. Press and turn. Normally you would not want the facing to be visible on the outside, but I wanted it to roll to the front and be visible. **(H)** Because of the curved shape, the question was "Will the fabric let me do what I want?"—or, "Can I steam it to get it to move the way I want?" You just have to coax it into position. I rolled the facing toward the outside of the garment to get it to show,





## CREATIVE EXPRESSION



and pressed it into place. It may not be perfectly even, but that's fine.

**6.** Turn inside out again and sew across the bottom edge to hold the new folded edge.

Having used most of Miles's fabric art on the back, front panels, and collar, there were just a few odd-size pieces left. I put them to use on the sleeves in whatever way moved me for a very random patchwork arrangement. Continuing on, I slashed into the sleeves to create vents, one short (**I**) and straight, one long and curved, (**J**) and finished them with folded and pressed bias strips of orange fabric. The strips are essentially piping without a core. (**K**) Using it this way doesn't stiffen the seam or add bulk as piping can do. Simply add the folded 'piping' piece to one edge of the garment, matching raw edges, and baste it along the seamline. (**L & M**) To finish off the vents and sleeve hems I created facings in accent-orange that could be turned up as cuffs. (**N & O**)

Where else could I add accent pieces? These pieces can effectively move the eye around the design, so placement can be planned or random. I scattered them here and there in seams. The ends can fold down into the seam allowance or be folded back inside when pressing the bias accent piece. ☺



### MATERIALS

The following products used to create the surface designs pictured here are available from Jacquard ([jacquardproducts.com](http://jacquardproducts.com))

Dye-Na-Flow, highly concentrated free-flowing fabric paint.

Lumiere, lustrous metallic paint.

Neopaque, highly pigmented opaque paint designed to cover dark backgrounds.

Textile Color, semi-transparent light-bodied paint.

Tee Juice fabric art markers with three point sizes.

Discharge Paste, used to remove most fiber reactive colors, direct dyes, and acid dyes from fabric.

Syringes, useful for detail work and transferring paint.