Design Outside The Lines

Inspiration Takes Flight With An Airplane Themed Shirt

BY DIANE ERICSON

I make a garment every year for my birthday that reflects a personal theme I take on for my new year. The theme for this birthday garment was Flight. It has been a great metaphor and symbolic of lightening my load (personally and in my studio!) Ready for my life to be lighter and easier, I followed this theme away from the 747 image to a glider...or a paper airplane. It was a first for me to begin sewing a shirt by folding paper airplanes, but it was perfect for seeing myself as fluid and moving out into the world in new and less stressful ways. This inspiration influences how I work and what I interpret into garment details.

Moved by the desire to have a new experience, I am always inspired to explore ways to bring sewing and fabric into resonance with something more intuitive in me. I think there is a moment like tuning an instrument—even if you never played, you can relate to the process of finding that place where it is right and harmonious. So jumping in and trusting the process, I folded airplanes until I forgot what I was doing and could just BE at the beginning with airplane in hand. I found folding led me to drawing them, which led me to create a group of paper airplane stencils. As I played with stenciling the airplane designs on fabric, the look was appealing right away. This got me going with my fabrics.

I began making some fabric airplanes by folding rectangular pieces of fabric in the same way as paper. When I placed them on some of the gray fabric I had stenciled with airplanes, I liked the combo. The creative challenge is to stay in the moment and not rush to see the finished garment. More design options show up if we work with each step as it comes up.

I often use a design board as I work; it helps keep my mind clear and is an easy, visual place to keep sketches, details, possible buttons, color combos, sample fabrics and notes.

I selected Lynn Mizono's shirt pattern V1274 as my design canvas, and re-fashioned two gray men's shirts by piecing them together in an abstract collage to match the pattern pieces. If you look closely at the shirt you will see that I leave many of the original shirt details, like buttons and plackets, and let them become new design features. I also used three textured pieces of striped white linen for accents. I am attracted to the idea of 'white collar and cuffs', so you'll see how that plays into the design later on. And, naturally I wanted to combine some fabric airplanes into the abstract silhouette of the shirt, so I decided to turn the airplanes into godets placed randomly at the hem. Another element I added was a pocket bursting with fabric airplanes. The button tab on the shirt's front is a vintage silk belt, held to the shirt by the buttonholes. As you look closely at my shirt, you'll see that I've added lots of little details that were spur-of-the-moment ideas. Use them as inspiration for your own unique design. To help you along, here are some techniques I used on some of the major details.

The airplane shirt captures the spirit of flight with a combination of stenciled paper airplanes and folded-fabric airplanes. *Opposite page:* Ericson's design board with her sketches, samples and notes. A back view of the shirt with airplane godet at the hem.
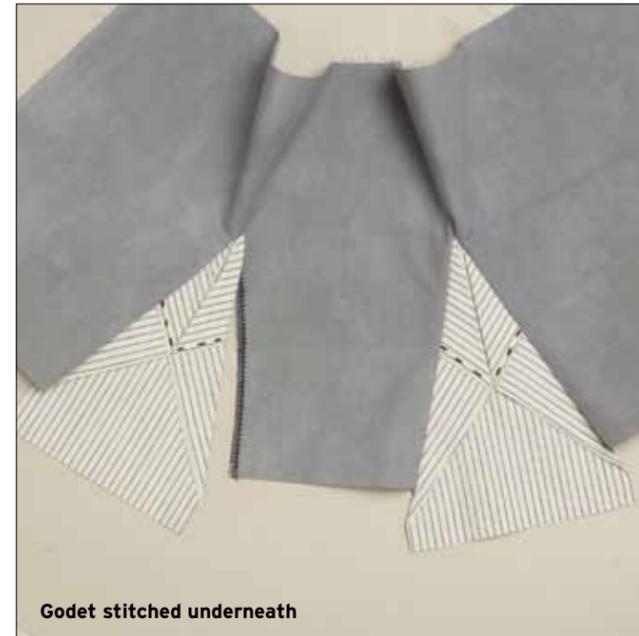
V1274
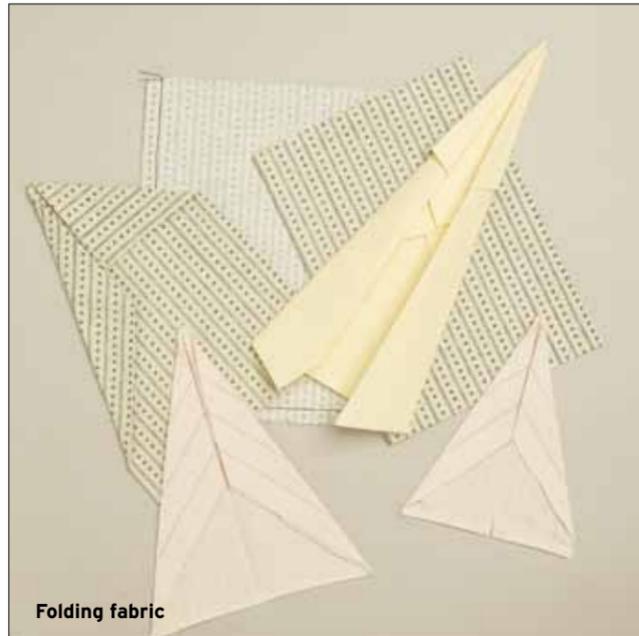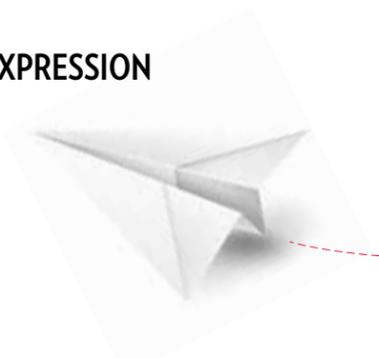
Folding fabric

Godet stitched on top

Godet stitched underneath

Godet stitched underneath

Godet stitched on top

Airplane Godets

Consider using a light to medium weight fabric since you will be folding it back and forth, ending up with several layers of thickness. My goal was to have a secure shape that shows some of the 'flap' quality of a paper airplane. This is subtle but can make a difference in the godet actually looking like an airplane! If your airplane skills are a bit rusty, you may want to refresh your memory with some paper folding first. This will also give a feel for finished airplane sizes.

Before you begin folding fabric for the airplanes, you may want to finish the edges. I used several raw edges as part of my design, but you can serge the edges, or make a tiny narrow machine or hand stitched hem, or line-to-edge with a thin organza lining, much like a flat pillow: put right sides together and stitch around the edges leaving a small opening on one side; turn right side out through the opening and press. When folding the fabric airplanes, work on an ironing board and press the folds as you go. Pin to hold the shapes.

Finish the hem edge of the shirt first. Measure the center length of the godet and determine if it will extend beyond the hem or finish right at the hemline. Choose the location along the hem then cut a slit into the shirt that is ½" (13mm) shorter than the center (godet) length. Finish the edges of the slit on both sides (I serge these), then spread the slit open. You can add the godets to the shirt by stitching them on top of the shirt or under-

neath. I used one of each on my shirt.

To stitch the godets on top of the shirt, open the side flaps of the airplane and lay the godet over the open slit in the shirt. Overlap the slit by ½" (13mm) on each side. Stitch in the crease down both sides of the slit/airplane to attach. Finish by folding the 'wing' flaps back over the stitching and hand or machine stitch to hold in place. The point at the top of the godet may need a stitch or two on the inside to secure.

To stitch the godets underneath the shirt, turn under the serged edges of the slit about ¼" (6mm). On the wrong side, add a piece of fusible interfacing at the top point of the slit to reinforce. Next, with right sides together, pin the airplane to the shirt on one side of the slit. Begin at the point of the slit and stitch the seam allowance at ¼" (6mm), tapering close to the edge at the bottom. Clip into the top point, then pin and sew the second side in the same direction as the first (to avoid stretching). Press seams. It can be challenging to get the point to look great. If the fabric stretches and there is a small 'bubble' at the point, here is a creative solution: refold one side, press the fold flat up into the shirt. Next, re-sew that side and continue sewing in the pressed fold, up into the shirt—similar to making a dart. The result will be a very sharp point on the godet, and a new design line (that looks like a seam) in your shirt! Remember, there are no mistakes, just opportunities for new creative elements.
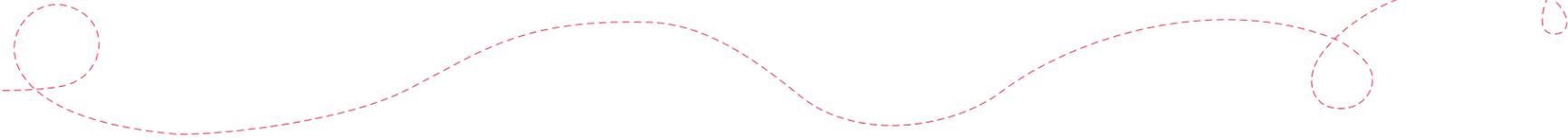
New pattern pieces

Reinforce corners
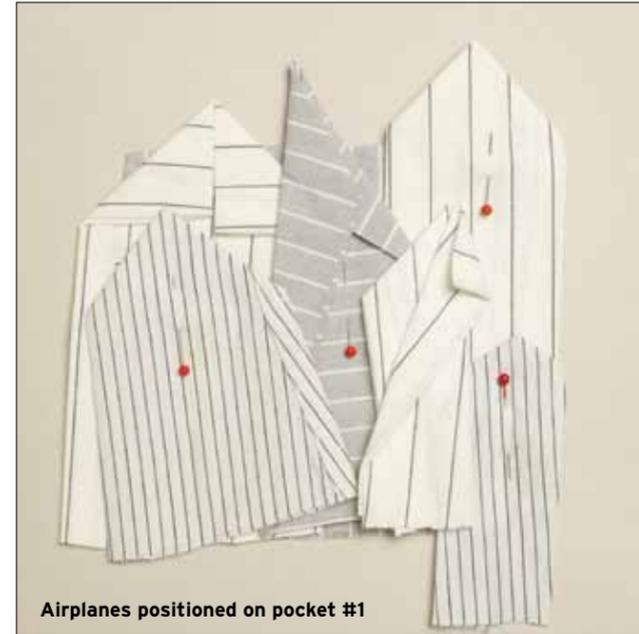
Airplanes positioned on pocket #1

Optional decorative stitching

Pocket Full of Planes

This pocket design requires modifications to the original pattern, so make a copy of the front pattern piece to work with.

Start by determining the finished size of the pocket and drawing it on paper; add seam allowances to all the edges. Label this piece #1. Cut the pocket out of fabric and finish the top edge by adding a strip of fusible facing. This adds structure and a facing at the same time.

Decide where the pocket will be placed and draw a line on the shirt pattern piece to indicate the top of the pocket. Continue this line across the width of the pattern piece. Cut the pattern apart on this line and add seam allowances to both edges. Add notches for matching when you stitch them together. Label the upper shirt #2, and the lower shirt #3.

The pocket needs an under-pocket, which will be added to piece #2. Take pocket #1 and position it to hang down from piece #2 in the desired position. When cutting out your fabric, the upper shirt and under-pocket are cut in one. Fuse interfacing to the wrong side in the pocket area and 2" (5cm) into the upper shirt.

On piece #3, cut out the pocket shape, remembering to add

seam allowances on the inside pocket edge all around. Cut piece #3 out of fabric and fuse a 2" (5cm) strip of interfacing around the pocket edge, on the wrong side. Reinforce the corners with staystitching and clip into the corners.

Now you are ready to cover the pocket with airplanes. Cut and fold fabric airplanes in various shapes and sizes. Place the airplanes on the pocket, overlapping to get a pleasing arrangement. Cover the entire pocket including seam allowances. Sew to secure all of the folded airplanes to the pocket.
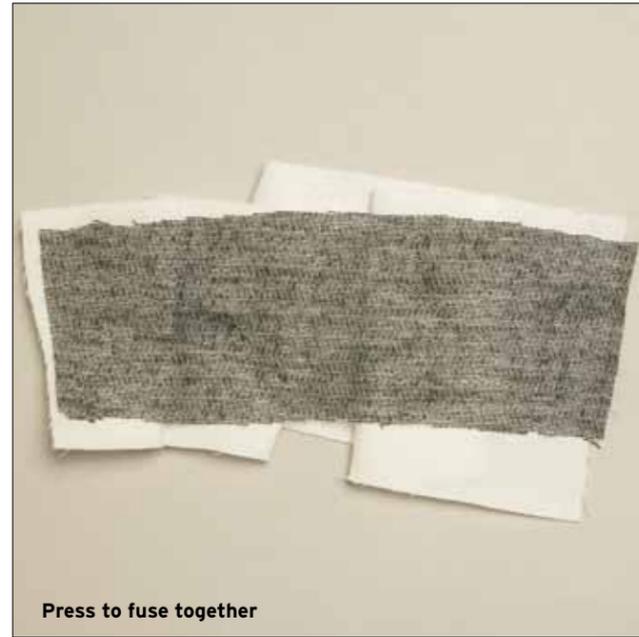
Place the airplane pocket on piece #2, with the wrong side of the pocket facing the right side of the shirt. Attach the pocket to the shirt by machine stitching around the sides and bottom.

Sew the upper and lower shirt together. Begin at the lower edge of the pocket. With right sides together, match up raw edges and stitch. Next, fold the fabric back to match the raw edges on one pocket side, and stitch to the next corner. Stop and repeat on the opposite side of the pocket. Baste if needed. Finally, sew the horizontal seams from the pocket to the edges, one side at a time. Serge or finish the raw edges, turn and press.

Pin folded fabric to interfacing

Press to fuse together

Trim lower edge

Stitch lower edge in an up and down design

Wrong side

Right side

Folded cuff

Pleated Contrast Cuffs

All of the details I created in my shirt are very much related. These pleated cuffs were fashioned to resemble folded paper. I also stitched the lower edges of my shirt along the irregular lines of the folded fabric, accentuating the asymmetrical design.

Begin by checking the sleeve pattern piece for finished length. I like the sleeve length to be three-quarters when the cuff is folded back. Make any adjustments to the sleeve length and width you desire. Decide how deep you want the cuff to be. Cut a strip of fusible interfacing for the base of the cuff the same width as the sleeve and the desired depth of the cuff plus seam allowances. For the pleated cuff, cut a strip of fabric slightly deeper than the fusible interfacing and twice as long.

With the adhesive side of the interfacing up, pin the fabric to one end and fold the fabric back and forth across the width of the interfacing. Make the folds in various widths and angles and pin to hold in place. Once you are happy with the pleat arrangement, remove the pins and press flat onto the fusible with steam. You may need to make a few thread tacks to help hold the pleats in place. Clean finish the top edge. I used a serger.

It's not necessary to have both cuffs look identical; in fact, it's better if they are different. Lay the cuff on the sleeve to decide which cuff you want on which sleeve. At this point, I decided to make the lower edge of the sleeve staggered, up and down to follow the pleats. With the cuff right side up, trim the lower edge in the desired manner.

With right sides together, stitch the cuff to the lower edge of the sleeve, starting on one side, ½" (13mm) down from the top edge. Sew down and pivot at the corner, then across the lower edge in a staggering up and down design. Pivot at the corner and sew up the other side, stopping ½" (13mm) from the top edge. Clip into the seam allowance at the beginning and ending of the stitching.

With right sides together, stitch the sleeve seam from the underarm to the cuff stitching. Press. Grade the seam allowance as needed, then turn the cuff right side out. Above the clip, fold one facing over the other, turn the raw edges under and hand tack. The top edge of the pleated cuff can be tacked on the inside as needed, or boldly topstitched as part of your design. Press to finish.
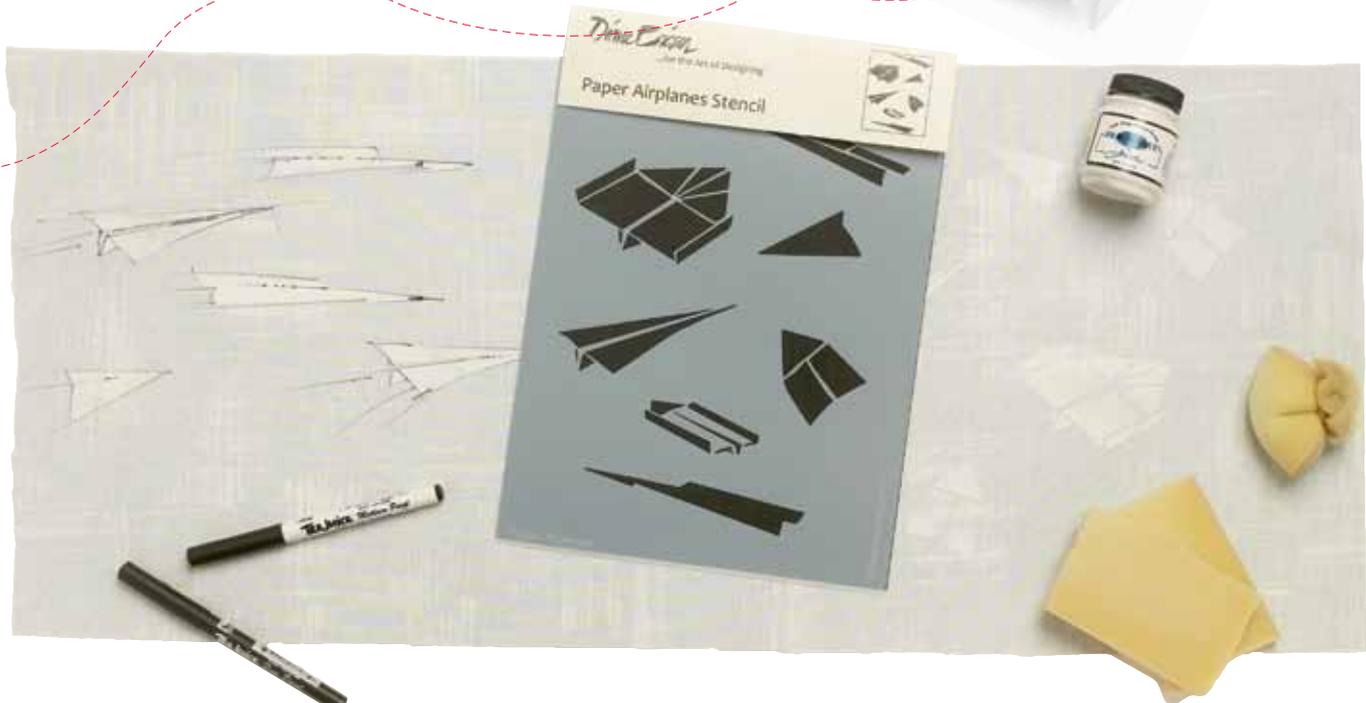
Stenciling

After the fabrics were pieced and the shirt cut out, but not stitched together, I printed the airplane designs on the pieces. Stenciling is an easy technique with lots of possible variations.

YOU WILL NEED:

plate for paint (as a palette)
dense foam sponge*
fabric paint
stencil

*Although there are stencil brushes, I recommend using a dense foam sponge (about the size of a kitchen sponge). It lets you control and vary the paint application and the amount of paint you're working with.

The process of stenciling is fairly simple and you should relax and have fun with it. Most fabrics will print better on a lightly padded surface; I lay my fabric on top of a towel or layer of felt. Have some sample fabrics ready for testing.

Put a small amount of paint on a plate. Fold up the corners of the sponge and wrap them with a rubber band to hold them, allowing you to print with the round center area of the sponge. Dab the sponge into the paint, then dab it on another part of the plate until it is even on the sponge; this step is really important because you don't want too much paint on the sponge.

Position the stencil on the test fabric, and hold two corners as you dab the sponge over the stencil. You can also drag the sponge lightly over the stencil for a brushed look. Try both techniques to see what you like. While holding a corner of the stencil, you can lift it to see how the printing is coming and put it back down until the desired effect is achieved. Play with mixing colors, only printing part of the stencil, and working with the sponge to get a variety of looks. Each fabric takes the paint differently. Experiment to develop the technique you prefer. The key is to use small amounts of paint and dab firmly to work the paint into the fabric. With a thin layer of paint, multiple layers can be added (with second colors and other designs) while keeping the fabric soft. For a visual demonstration of stenciling, watch my video on YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lVAjkC_LyIg

When you feel comfortable with your test stencils, move on to your garment fabric and place airplanes randomly on the shirt. For more emphasis, I added some thin lines with a black Tee Juice fabric pen to enhance some of the edges of the stenciled airplanes.

As I finish this year's birthday garment, I have learned again to do a good amount of editing and eliminating. It is true that often less is more. Just because you can, doesn't mean you have to include every idea that comes when working on a garment. By the time I am sitting with my new shirt and the last bits of handwork, I am appreciating the magic that has happened as I stitch the persimmon colored vapor trails behind the stenciled airplanes that got me started. ✄