



Salvage *Your* Selvages

Nine clever and creative ways to use fabric edges

BY MARY RAY

A good selvage is like a bonus with your fabric purchase. Most of the time, sewers use selvages as references to ensure we're placing patterns on the fabric's straight grain, and then we cut them off and toss them. Selvages can be so much more, however, whether used for structural support, as embellishment, or as a source of inspiration.

You may not usually buy a piece of fabric because of its selvage, but you just might start once you learn how using a beautiful and interesting selvage creatively can turn a humdrum garment into a statement piece. Some selvages are unobtrusive, narrow, and woven a little tighter with stronger yarns than the rest of the fabric, while some are much fancier, with multi-colored yarns, woven patterns, or feathery edges—or sometimes all three. Once you start looking at selvages with a designer's eye, you'll see how useful they can be. Here are nine ways you can use selvages that are just too good to discard.

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Selvages, like those shown on the facing page, may be reserved or flashy. Discover how to use them instead of trims to highlight garment details. At right, a wool tweed dress gets a boost from self-fabric selvages applied as stitched-down seam piping.

Pattern: Vogue 1183; fabric: MoodFabrics.com.

Prepare to use selvages

The ways you can use a selvage depend on whether it is uncut (flat) or fringed. Uncut selvages are just that; they are lifted off the loom rather than cut off, which gives a clean, sharp, flat selvage edge. The threads on some selvages are cut at the outer edge, creating a fringe that may be narrow or wide. Here are some tips to help you choose and prepare selvages for use as decorative embellishment or for interior seam stabilizers.

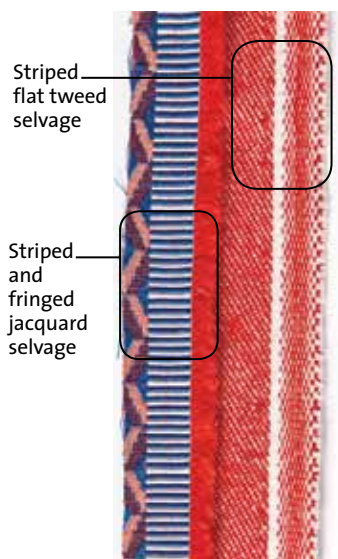
CHECK YOUR SELVAGE

Most selvages press flat, but you should always heat-test them before using them, especially if the fabric is a synthetic that can melt and warp if pressed with an iron that's too hot. Test any selvage you wish to use by pressing it first to evaluate how it responds to heat. Also, check for colorfastness. You don't want a selvage stay tape or embellishment to bleed onto the garment fabric.



CONSERVE FOR EMBELLISHMENT

Decide if you want to use a selvage as an appliqué or a piping. Cut selvage for appliqué any width you wish. For piping, add a seam allowance before cutting. Once cut from the fabric, some selvages will fray; use selvages of this type for piping rather than surface appliqué.



TRIM FOR STABILIZERS

To use selvages for stabilizing a seam, choose those that have a straight, solid edge, such as those found on silk organza, crepe de Chine, or charmeuse. Selvages with a very narrow fringed edge also can be used as stabilizers. A straight-edged selvage also can be cut lengthwise into narrower strips and still work effectively as a stabilizer even if it frays a little at the cut edge. To save selvages for use as stabilizers, cut $\frac{1}{4}$ inch to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch beyond the selvage's inner edge; this also provides ample width for edging a hem.



Improve interior finishes

There are many ways to use selvages in garments to provide strength and stability or to eliminate some finishing steps.

FINISH A WAISTBAND

I like to cut a straight waistband with its inner edge placed along the fabric's selvage. This eliminates a finishing step and reduces bulk. This only works for waistbands that are cut on grain with a straight interior edge. Sew the waistband's inside selvage edge in place by stitching in the ditch from the garment's right side.



STABILIZE EDGES

A strip of uncut, tightly woven selvage can be used to stabilize seams and edges on everything from sheer wovens to bulky knits. Silk organza is ideal, but many other lightweight natural-fiber edges work, too.

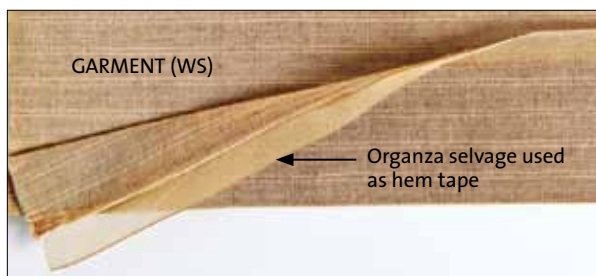
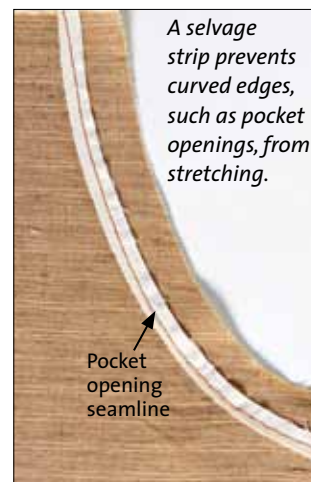
Necklines are the areas most often in need of stabilization. Any neckline shape can benefit from stabilizing, but especially V-neck or wrap styles. You can use a selvage strip to stabilize slightly curved seams, such as pocket openings, too.



Although they are tightly woven and very stable, most natural-fiber selvages are malleable enough to shape into slight curves with heat and steam. The only selvages that may resist shaping are synthetics; heat and steam cause them to shrink.

Faced skirt and pant waistlines also can be stabilized with selvage strips, as well as the shoulder seams of stretch or knit tops.

For all applications, cut the selvage from the fabric at its full width, or cut it as narrow as necessary to fit the seam. For all edges and seams requiring a stabilizing tape, baste or pin a selvage strip centered along the seamline; steam-press, if necessary, to shape the selvage strip; and then sew the seam.



SUBSTITUTE SELVAGE FOR HEM TAPE

In Claire Shaeffer's *Fabric Sewing Guide*, second edition (Krause Publications, 2008), the author suggests using a selvage in place of hem tape to finish a hem. I recommend silk organza selvage for this application because it is lightweight and won't add bulk. Cut an organza selvage strip $\frac{1}{4}$ inch beyond the selvage's inner fabric edge and pin the strip to the right side of the hem, aligning the raw edges. Sew it in place with a $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch-wide seam allowance. Press the selvage away from the stitching, press up the hem, and hand-stitch the organza strip to the garment's wrong side to secure the hem.

SELF-FINISH A FACING

Use uncut or fringed selvages as a built-in finish for facings. A selvage provides a clean-finished edge that requires no sewing and eliminates excess bulk. Simply cut the facing with its interior edge aligned on the fabric's selvage. This only works on facings with a straight interior edge. If the pattern includes a cut-on facing, cut the pattern with the edge of the facing along the selvage.

You can also use this method to create an exposed facing with a prefinished, decorative edge. Cut the facing with the free edge on a fancy selvage, and install it so that it turns to the garment's right side. Interfacing can still be used between the facing and the garment layers. This method can work for cut-on facings, too, but it exposes the fabric's wrong side on the garment's exterior.



Embellish with selvages

Selvages are useful for a variety of creative surface embellishments. Incorporate them into a garment to add detail and texture and to accent design lines.

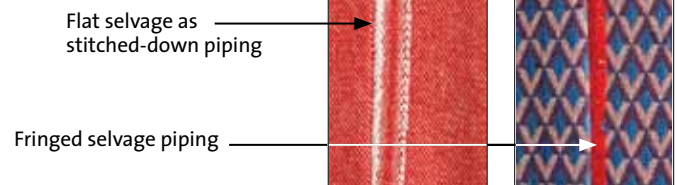
TRIM AN EDGE

Use the garment fabric's selvage or the selvage from a complementary fabric as an applied edging. The simplest application is often the most elegant. In fact, Chanel often trimmed garments with self-fabric selvages. There are three approaches: Insert the selvage in the garment's edge seams (neckline opening or hem facings); sew the selvage to the wrong side of an edge and press it to the right side; or press under the selvage's cut edge and stitch it in place along the selvage's fold on the garment's right side as shown.



PIPE A SEAM

A selvage strip can be used as piping to accent seams. Any type of selvage can work in this application: flat or fringed, subtle or dramatic. To use selvage as piping, cut a selvage strip to any width you wish, plus seam allowance. Insert and sew the strip in the garment seams just as you would attach piping. If necessary, control the selvage in the seam by pressing it flat and stitching it to the garment's right side.



This diamond jacquard fabric's fringed selvage creates interest as piping in the vest's angular seams. You can use a fabric's own selvages or mix up it by borrowing from another fabric.

Pattern: Vogue 8932; fabric: MoodFabrics.com.

GATHER INTO A ROSETTE

You can use selvages to make pretty rosettes of any diameter. Cut three lengths of selvage in graduated widths. The 5½-inch-diameter tweed rosette, shown at right, was made from 2½-inch-, 2-inch-, and 1½-inch-wide strips. The strip lengths depend on the fabric's thickness and body; the strips used in the rosette shown are 15½ inches long. Sew each strip's ends right sides together with a ¼-inch-wide seam allowance. Layer the rings, raw edges aligned, and sew two rows of gathering stitches through the raw edges. Gather to form the rosette. Finish the center with a pretty button or a fabric circle whipstitched in place and stuffed with batting.

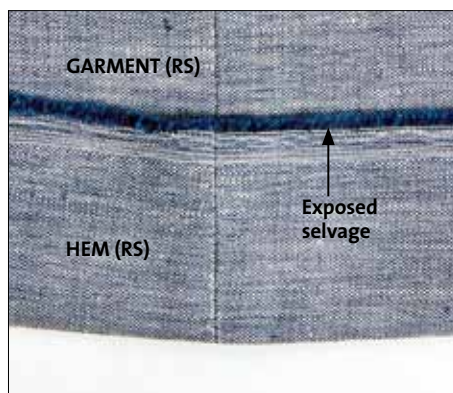


The best trim for a fabric may be its own selvage. Using selvages you might otherwise have tossed out is economical and eco-friendly.

CREATE A DECORATIVE BORDER

A pretty selvage can be used to create a border-like effect at a skirt hem. Cut the skirt sections on the fabric's cross-grain with the hem allowance edge on the fabric selvage. The hem must be straight—shaped hems won't work. Turn the hem allowance to the skirt's right side, exposing the selvage and creating a decorative border. This works best with fabrics that have the same color values on the wrong side as the right side, unless a contrast hem is desired.

There's a trick to this technique: You must hide the vertical seam allowances within the hem allowance; otherwise they'll show when the hem is turned to the right side. Sew the garment's vertical seams right sides together as usual, but end at least ½ inch above the hemline. Clip the seam allowances to the stitching, then sew the rest of the seam wrong sides together. Finally, turn the hem allowance to the right side, and stitch it in place.



COUCH A SURFACE DETAIL

Treat a selvage like yarn, and couch it to a garment's surface to add raised detail. It's best to use a cording foot for this treatment, but you can use any presser foot with some open space underneath to accommodate the selvage strip's thickness. Cut selvage strips to any width desired (try combining a few different widths in the same design), and arrange them on the garment sections until you find a composition you like. Then stitch each strip in place using either a zigzag or straight stitch. If you choose to use a cording foot, and the selvage strip is slightly wider than the chosen zigzag width, the selvage will roll around the stitching at the strip's edges. If you use a regular presser foot, it's best to couch the selvage strip in place by sewing down its center with a straight stitch.

