

French seam refinement

Make a smooth transition to a vent

When you're working with lightweight fabrics, a French seam is often the finish of choice. But if there's a side-seam vent, you need a way to neatly end the seam and create a sturdy, good-looking treatment at the top of the vent. I'll show you a clever method. Try it with shirt-weight linen, cotton, and sheer fabrics—the very textiles that call for a light, clean finish. Avoid applying it to loose or open weaves, however: You'll end up with a hole at the point of transition. The process shown is for a pattern with $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch-wide seam allowances, but you can adapt it as desired for wider allowances in the vent area.

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1 Thread-trace and sew the seam.

Place the layers with wrong sides together. On the top layer, thread-trace the point where the seam ends and the vent begins, with crossed horizontal and vertical lines. Place the vertical line on the seamline, $\frac{5}{8}$ inch from the cut edge. Machine-sew the seamline down to within $\frac{3}{4}$ inch of the horizontal basting, using a $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch-wide seam allowance. Reduce the stitch length to 1.0 mm, and curve the stitching line to the left, to end at the basted intersection. Leave long thread tails.



Curve the seamline to the marked intersection.

An impeccable transition from French seam to vent makes garments special.

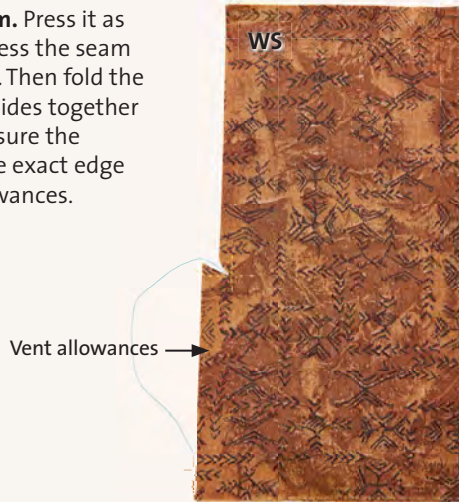
*Pattern: Butterick 6208, out of print.
Fabric: Cotton print, author's stash.*



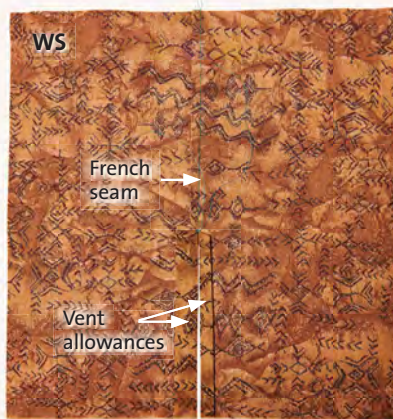
2 Trim and clip the seam allowances. Along the seam portion, trim the allowances to half their width ($\frac{3}{16}$ inch); stop trimming where the seamline curves away from the edge. With small, sharp scissors, clip into the seam allowances from this point to the basted intersection. Don't trim the thread tails.



3 Press the seam. Press it as sewn, then press the seam allowances open. Then fold the work with right sides together and press; make sure the seamline is at the exact edge of the seam allowances.

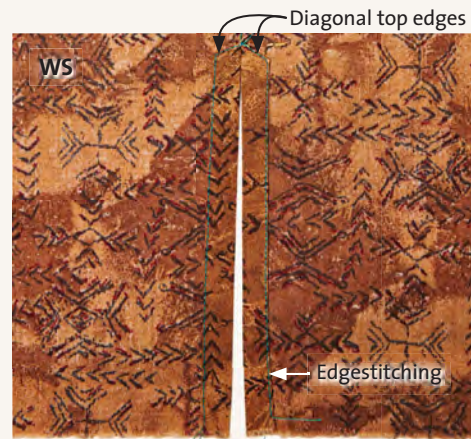


4 Sew the seam. Stitch at $\frac{1}{4}$ inch, enclosing the seam allowances as you do. Sew to within $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of the intersection, reduce the stitch length to 1.0 mm and continue to the basted horizontal line. Stop and remove the work from the machine without backstitching; leave thread tails of at least 3 inches. Press the seam as sewn, then press the allowances to one side. In the vent section, press the allowances to the wrong side along the $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch seamline.



Complete the French seam, and press the allowances to one side.

5 Complete the vent. Press the top points under on a diagonal, then press the vertical edges under by $\frac{1}{4}$ inch. Edgestitch to secure: Sew up one side, along the top point, and down the other side.



Press under the vent edges and edgestitch.

6 Hide the thread tails. Thread them, one by one, into a needle and pull them through between the seam allowances to hide them. This is neater and more secure than trimming.



Completed seam and vent (WS)



Completed seam and vent (RS)