

Artistry *by the* Strip

Three techniques for
embellishing with fabric

BY ANN WILLIAMSON



*Narrow strips
and tubes of
gorgeous fabrics
can become
magnificent
pieced garments
and unique
appliqué.*



Simple garment shapes call out for special details and embellishments. I use fabric strips and tubes as piecing or appliqué in my quest to create sophisticated, elegant, and modern wearable art.

These embellishment techniques were developed over many years and were influenced by my previous fiber arts and quilting experiences, as well as my study of art. I am always striving to “draw” finer lines with ever-narrower strips of fabric, much as early Northern European painters used brushes of the finest hairs to render minute details. Some of the strips and tubes I work with measure less than 1/8 inch wide.

These narrow pieces of fabric can have an impact on a garment’s design. A basic blouse of kimono silk is transformed into a show-piece with the addition of three-dimensional coils at its neckline. A simple tunic becomes eveningwear when made from organza, appliquéd with fine silk tubes, and scattered with beads. Piecing together strips of contrasting silks adds visual interest to a sleeveless shell.

Many types of silk are ideal for strip piecing and appliqué: kimono, organza, chiffon, dupioni, and taffeta. You can use any fabrics you wish, but the best choices are those that are flexible on the bias and don’t ravel as soon as they’re cut.

On the following pages, I’ll explain how to create a pieced garment, and how to use bias tubes as appliqué to create intrigue and dimension. Remember that they are the means to achieving your vision—they shouldn’t rule your design. All of the garments shown are original designs, but you can apply the techniques to any garment.

Ann Williamson is a fabric and garment artist in Portland, Oregon. To see more examples of her work, visit AnnWilliamson.com.

EXPRESS YOURSELF

Think of these piecing and appliqué techniques as your artist’s palette—it’s how you use them that makes them art. You can “paint by numbers” or use a free-form approach. Let your fabric inspire you.

In translating these techniques to your own garments, it’s always helpful to sketch your design first. It doesn’t have to be accurate; it’s just to help you decide how you’ll use the piecing or appliqué.

Customize the strip-piecing technique to suit your preferences: Use multiple colors for individual strips; cut strips narrower or wider, shorter or longer; stagger the colors more or less when piecing; cut the garment so the strips run vertically or horizontally.

With flat or three-dimensional tube appliqué, you can plot out designs or create something more random. Cut out the garment pieces you’ll be appliquéing, pin them to a design wall or a dress form, then play with your bias tube arrangements to find an effect you like. This lets you see how it will appear when worn.

I frequently use flat appliqué to enhance a fabric’s color patterns or motifs. Try using tubes in colors that contrast or complement your main fabric, or use multiple colors. Use the piecing and appliqué methods singly, or combine them. Above all, know that you can use these methods just about any way you wish!



Strip piecing in dupioni and kimono silks combines with a fringe of tube appliqué and beading to transform a basic shell into a stunning evening garment.

Photos: (p. 44, insets; p. 46, top right; p. 47, bottom left) Dan Kvitka, courtesy of Ann Williamson Designs; (p. 44, background; p. 45; p. 48, left) Jack Deutsch, stylist; Jessica Saal, hair and make-up; Patricia for Halley Resources; all others: Sloan Howard. Styling credits: earrings—Guess (Maacys.com), bracelet—(LisSophia.com), shoes—Ivanka Trump (Maacys.com)

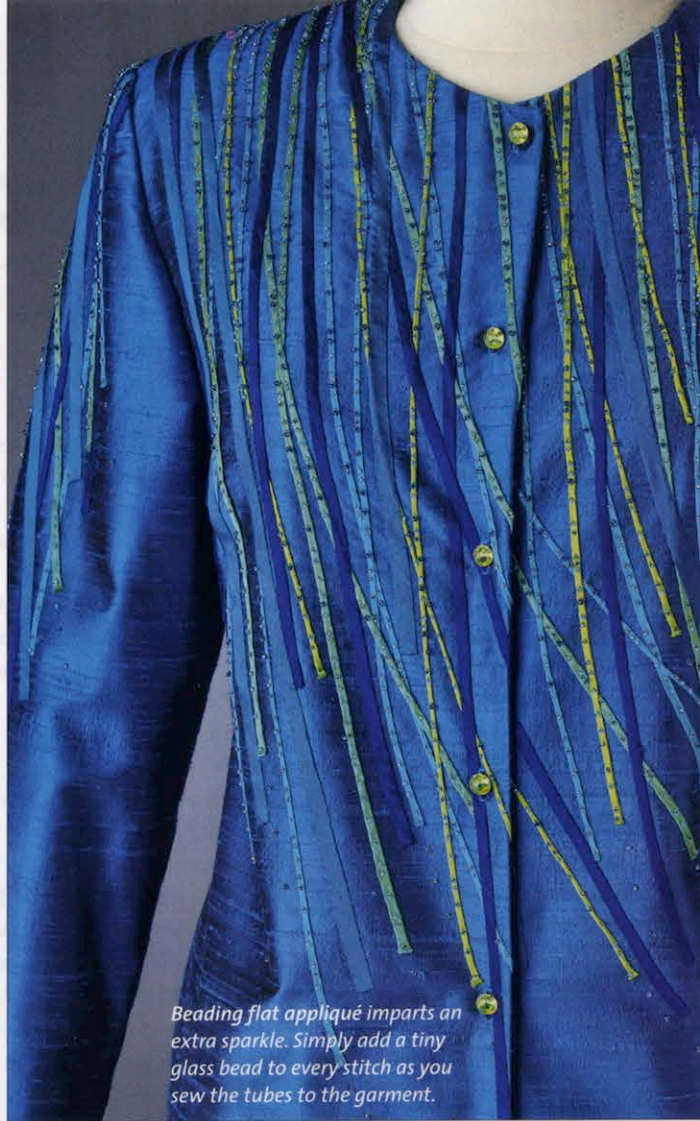
Transform tubes to appliqué

Flat and three-dimensional bias-tube appliqué make unusual garment embellishments. Bias tubes are ideal for these appliqué styles because they can be made very narrow and their seam allowances are enclosed. Tightly woven fabrics are best; three-dimensional appliqué requires organza. Use flat appliqué to make curved or linear designs that gently direct and draw the eye. Twist and loop organza tubes into three-dimensional appliqué for eye-popping drama. Don't be afraid to combine them!

MAKE BIAS TUBES

1 Cut bias strips of fabric. For a ¼-inch-wide finished tube, cut strips 1 inch wide; for a ½-inch-wide finished tube, cut ¾-inch-wide strips. Make them as long as the fabric allows. Fold each strip in half, right sides together, and stitch a ¼-inch-wide seam allowance along the long raw edges.

2 Thread a tapestry needle with a thick thread, 6 to 8 inches long, doubled. Knot the thread end. Take a stitch through one edge of a tube end. Drop the needle into the bias tube and work it through. Pull until the tube is turned right side out. Pin the strips to a flat ironing surface, straighten their seams, and steam-press them flat. Allow to cool and dry before unpinning them.



Beading flat appliqué imparts an extra sparkle. Simply add a tiny glass bead to every stitch as you sew the tubes to the garment.

GO FLAT-OUT CHIC

1 Arrange bias tubes on the garment piece. Pin them in place, cutting them to the desired length. Use a long running stitch to baste all the tubes in place on the garment piece, removing pins as you go. Then, take small, even running stitches down the center of each tube. Remove the basting stitches as you sew.

2 To finish the tubes, loop a few tiny stitches around each side of their raw ends. (Folding them under creates bulk.) Nip in the end corners of the tubes a bit. Knot the thread on the garment's wrong side underneath each tube. Tube ends may also be left raw.



GET SQUIGGLY WITH IT

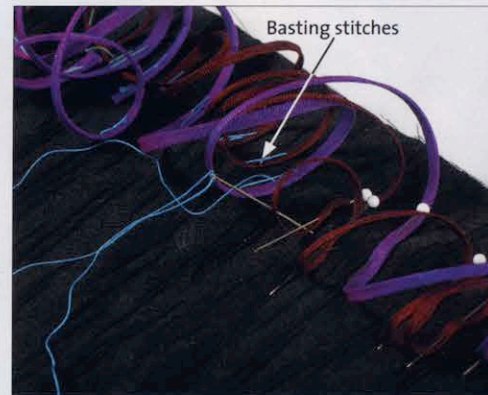
1 Twist organza tubes into random three-dimensional loops on the garment surface.

Make loops in varying sizes and in all directions. Pin in place as you go to retain desired shapes. If a tube goes flat after switching directions, keep twisting in the new direction until the tension created forces the tube to curl up again.

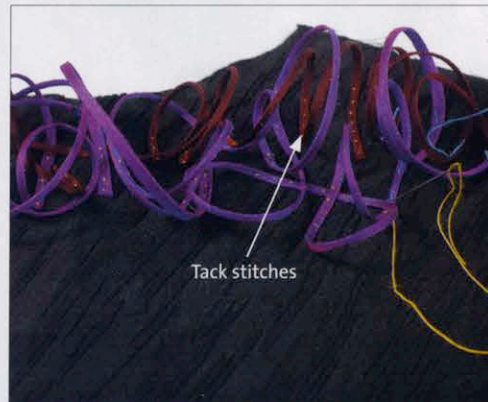


Restrict 3-D appliqué to a garment's edges for an elegant look. For something more effervescent, apply it all over.

2 Hand-baste the loops in place. Be sure to catch the looped tubes at all connection points with the garment. Remove the pins as you go.



3 Hand-sew fine tack stitches through the basted loops and the garment. Remove basting stitches as you go. Leave tube ends unfinished or finish them as detailed in step 2 on the facing page.



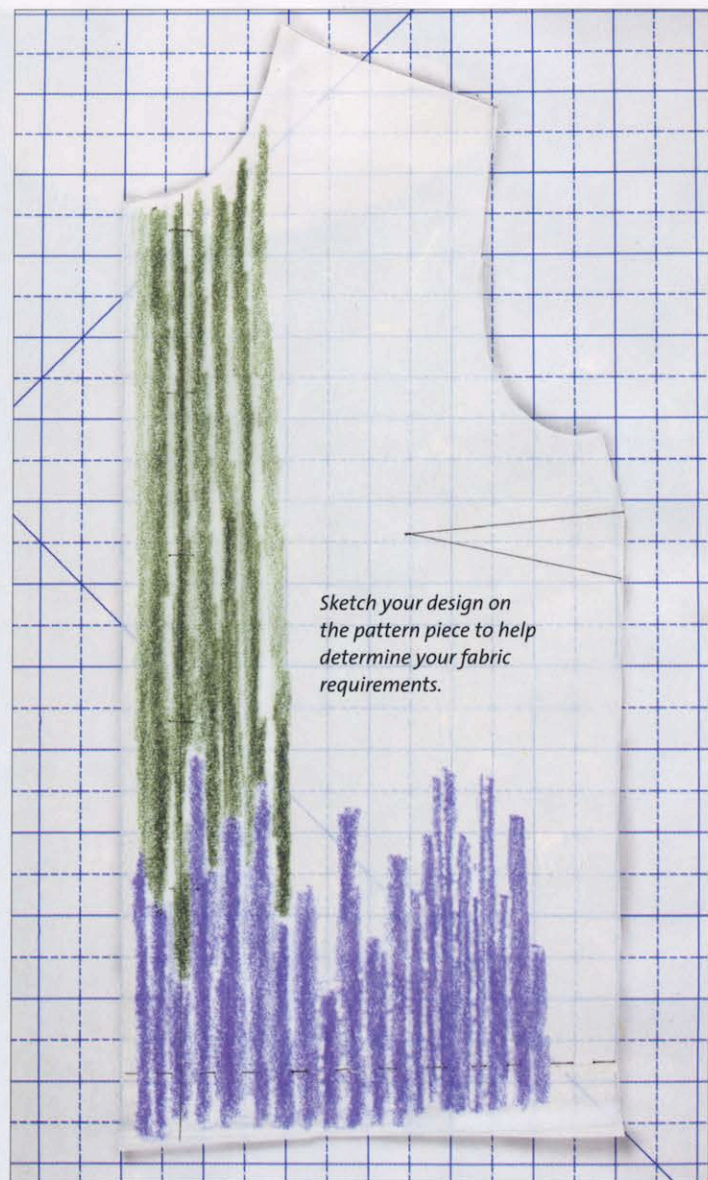


Staggering different-colored fabric strips in a pieced garment creates gorgeous dimensional effects.

Stagger and piece strips

Strip piecing a garment from different fabrics creates interesting color patterns and linear effects, particularly when pieced in a staggered design. Cut fabric panels, sew them together, then cut them into strips to be pieced. Use two or more fabrics in different colors, but in the same fiber content or weight. Include $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch-wide seam allowances for each strip; if the fabric is ravel-prone, use $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch-wide seam allowances.

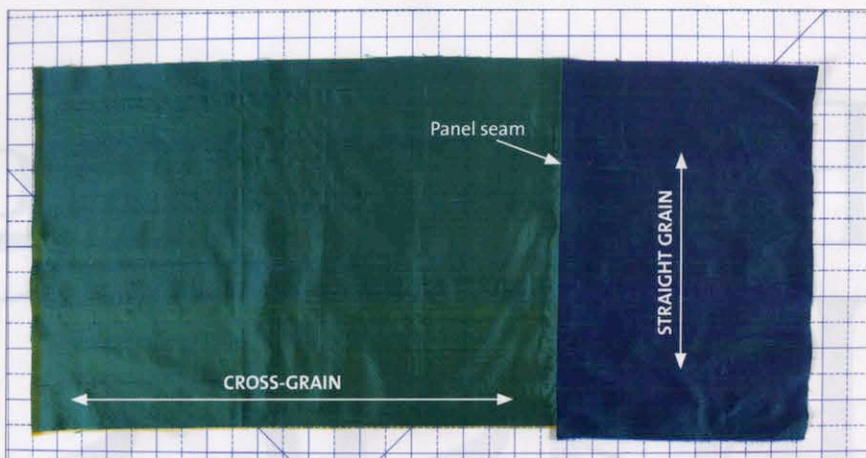
1 Decide on the degree of staggered piecing and on the length and width of the strips. Sketch the design on the pattern, and measure the longest pieces needed in each fabric color (including seam allowances). This is the length to cut each fabric panel. To determine the width to cut each panel, multiply each strip's seam allowance width by 2, then multiply by the number of strips planned, and add it to the pattern piece's width.



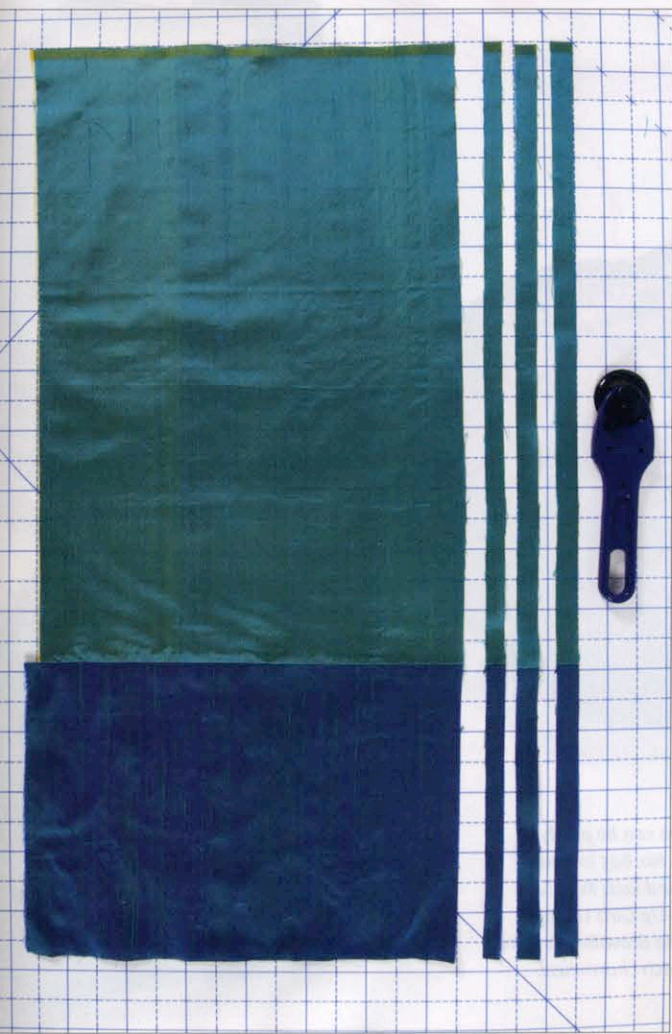
Sketch your design on the pattern piece to help determine your fabric requirements.

2 Cut panels of each fabric to the widths and lengths you calculated. Cut so the garment will maintain the same grain direction. Note that with seam allowances, the width may be three to four times greater than the pattern.

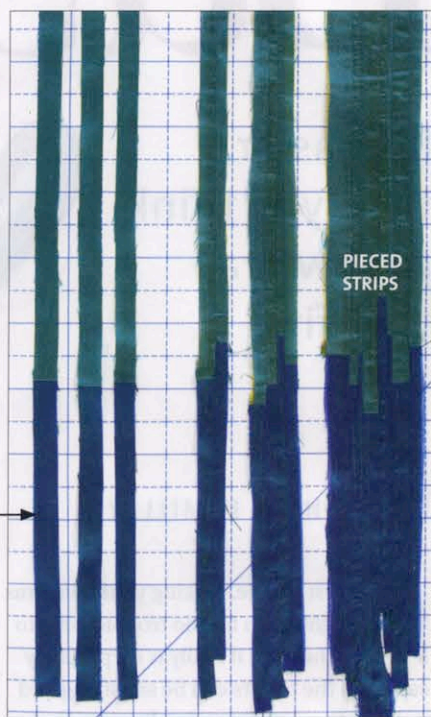
3 Sew the fabric panels together. If you're using more than two fabrics, join all the panels in the same way. This creates one large color-blocked panel.



4 Cut strips from the color-blocked panel perpendicular to the seam. To create more varied patterns in the pieced garment, cut strips in different widths. For a finished strip width of $\frac{1}{4}$ inch, with $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch seam allowances, cut strips $\frac{3}{4}$ inch wide. For a finished width of $\frac{1}{2}$ inch, with $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch-wide seam allowances, cut strips $\frac{5}{8}$ inch wide.



5 Begin sewing the strips together on their long edges. Stagger the strip ends to form an offset pattern in any way you wish. Compare the piecing to the garment pattern and your design sketch frequently to ensure the desired arrangement. As you go, press the seam allowances in the same direction on the wrong side.



6 Block the pieced yardage to eliminate wrinkles and puckering. Lay it flat on a large ironing surface. Pull the edges taut, pinning them to the surface until all wrinkles and seamline puckers are straightened, keeping the yardage on grain. Steam-press; use a silk organza pressing cloth for delicate fabrics. Allow the fabric to dry and cool before removing the pins.



7 Cut the garment from the pieced yardage, and sew it as the pattern instructions direct. Always line a strip-pieced garment to protect the multitude of seams and make it more comfortable and attractive to wear.