

From Jeans to Fabulous

Turn a so-so pair into a cute suit

Here's a great idea for anyone who likes to restyle, recycle, or renew clothes. Grab a pair of jeans from your closet, a local thrift store, or a tag sale, and use their fabric, details, and hardware—along with a coordinating fabric—as inspiration for a unique new outfit. I'll walk you through mindfully deconstructing the jeans, laying out the fabric, and, finally, sewing your new garments together. You can use these instructions as a starting point and then customize your snappy suit in whatever way you'd like.

Patricia Robison does alterations and custom sewing in Bellingham, Washington.

Deconstruct the Jeans

With creative cutting, you can harvest enough fabric from one pair of jeans to form the upper part of a skirt and the sleeves and collar of a cropped, fitted jacket. Choose a pair that fits you nicely, and then let the deconstruction begin!

1 Establish the skirt's waistband and yoke area. With a rotary cutter and mat, or scissors, cut a pleasing shape (not straight across) in the waist/yoke/pocket area for the upper part of the skirt. The back pockets need to be removed to accommodate the yoke and skirt seam. Plus, you may want to move them higher up, as I did on this suit.

2 Cut the jeans for sleeves and collar. Cut off the jeans' lower legs at the knee to use for sleeves, leaving the seams intact. The jeans' thigh area becomes the upper collar on the jacket, with the original inseam adding a decorative touch to the lapels. You'll use a pattern to cut the upper collar, adding a center-back seam so that you cut one collar half from each jean leg. The undercollar is cut from coordinating fabric.



Jeans get a new life in a fun-to-sew suit, using Kwik Sew pattern 3334.



Cut the Garment Pieces

You need to shape some of the jeans sections, as well as cut the coordinating fabric. Depending on the fabric you choose, you can make your suit anything from super-casual, with all denim, to dressy, with velvet or even chiffon. Here, the dark blue denim is juxtaposed with a lighter, fun polka-dot patterned denim.

1 Cut the skirt front and back. Cut the fabric for the skirt at the length you desire, plus hem allowance (you'll fine-tune the length later). The polka-dot fabric was cut wider at the hem edge to give the skirt more flare and fullness. At the seam where the skirt joins the jean waist/yoke unit, you can use gathers, pleats (as shown here), or any other shaping features you like; if you prefer multiple gores, that's also an option.

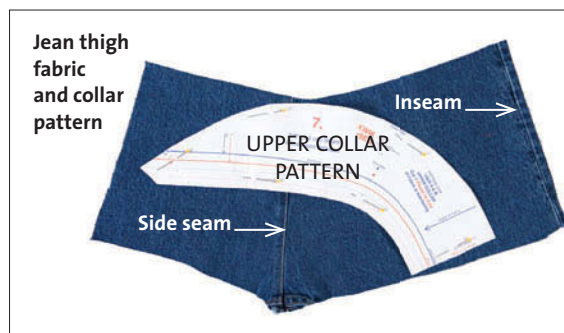


Choose the skirt's length, fullness, and seam placement as you cut and lay out the fabric.

2 Cut the jacket sleeves. Select a sleeve pattern that fits you well; I used Kwik Sew 3334. Open a side seam in each jean leg so the fabric can be laid flat. Lay the sleeve pattern on the fabric and cut. I used the inseam down the center of each sleeve because I liked the topstitching. Or, you can simply drape the fabric on a dress form until it starts to take a shape that you like, then cut away the extra fabric to make the armholes and side seams.



3 Cut out the jacket's upper collar. The upper collar is cut in two pieces, half from each thigh. Be sure to include a seam allowance for a center-back seam. Cut along the inseam and lay the fabric flat. Align the pattern to the cross-grain on the back thigh. Cut the collar half. Repeat for the other half, mirroring the pattern placement.



Draped to Fit

You can fit this garment sans pattern by arranging the deconstructed jeans and fabric on a dress form and sewing as you'd like. That's how this suit was completed.



Red denim coordinates beautifully with a printed silk noil fabric.



The short, bolero-style jacket front is another great design choice for your denim suit.

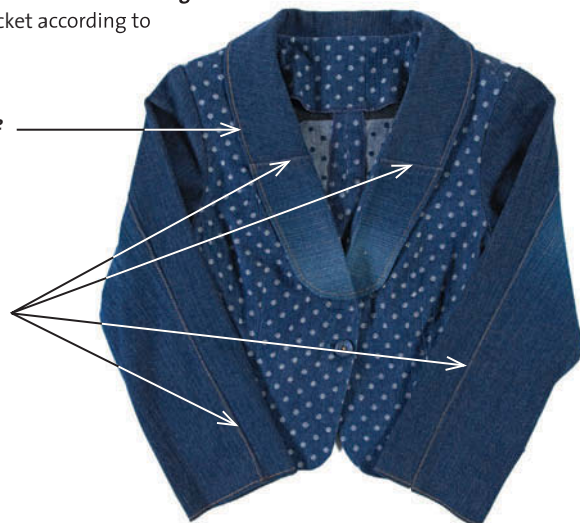
Construct the Suit

Sewing this unconventional suit is surprisingly straightforward. The two fabrics join as if they were meant to be together from the start.

1 Cut the undercollar as well as the jacket body and facings from the coordinating fabric. Construct the jacket according to pattern instructions.

Topstitching mirrors the jean side seams.

Jean seams



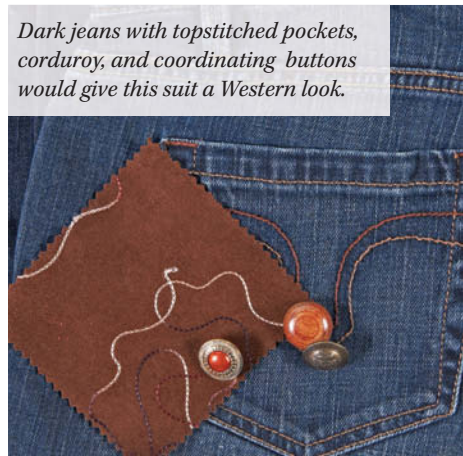
2 Sew the skirt. Join the skirt front and back at the side seams. Attach the skirt to the jean waist/yoke unit. I formed inverted pleats at center front and center back for more fullness and movement.



Well-suited

Your suit can be a combination of whatever fabric you'd like to coordinate with the jeans. Here are a couple of great options.

Dark jeans with topstitched pockets, corduroy, and coordinating buttons would give this suit a Western look.



For an edgier look, opt for stonewashed jeans, lace, and silver and jet accessories.



Dress up this charming suit for work, or keep it casual for dinner out or for a get-together.