



Julia Trice's debut pattern for Twist Collective, [Red Oak](#), is featured on the Fall 2010 cover. In today's post, she discusses a little about her design process and her inspiration for this lovely piece. You can also find this post at Julia's [personal site](#).

I think that if you spend enough time doing anything, you develop a style and when you do your best work it is true to that style. I tend to focus on two things when I design. The first is shape. I like pieces with smooth, organic lines, and I generally prefer to have size and noticeable endpoints fall in less standard places - nothing radical, but I am more likely to choose a cap sleeve than a bracelet sleeve, and more likely to make a piece oversized or body-skimming than to give it the standard ease of around two inches. I like shape to influence the overall feel of a piece in an important but subtle way, and make it feel just a little different.

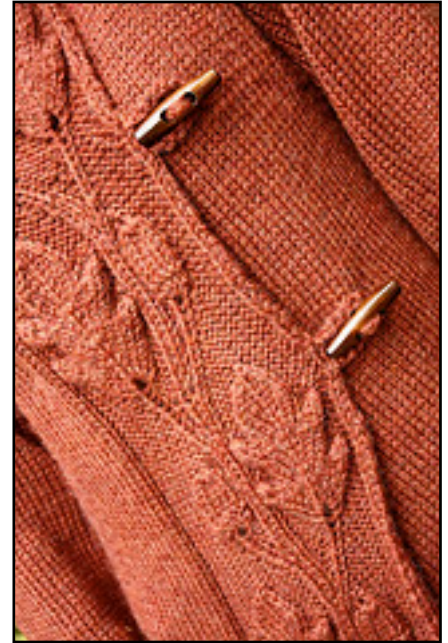


The [Red Oak coat](#), [Twist Collective](#), Fall 2010.

The second thing I like to do is to limit the number of stand-out details to as few as possible - one is ideal. The fewer details there are the more impact a single detail will have. This concept has come back to me again and again, and my favorite phrasing of it (well, ahem, paraphrasing probably) is that perfection is reached not when there is nothing left to add, but when there is nothing left to take away.

When a design isn't working, I look to these two factors to see if something needs to be changed. Is there too much going on? What needs to be taken out? Does the shape flow? If not, how can I change it to work with the details? Often this means omitting something that I really like - maybe even the element that I began with - but ultimately it is the process that makes the pieces I like the best work.

The shape for the [Red Oak coat](#) was inspired by a wonderful camel coat I bought in college that I wore for over a decade. It still hangs in the back of my closet waiting for the day that I mend the frayed-through lining and wear it again. It is *that* good. Red Oak differs from my old coat significantly but it retains the same spirit - refined and classic, but somehow casual. To reach the final shape I omitted many of the elements that made the original special to me - no hood, no pockets, no drawstring cinch at the waist (sounds funny, but it worked!), less ease. Instead of focusing the eye on shaping details, I settled on having a dramatic central motif running down the front panel, but slightly offset. I discovered the oak leaf and acorn stitch pattern that gave Red Oak its name in a Japanese stitch book years ago, but I have since learned that it was designed by Julie Weisenberger and originally appeared on a square in the popular Great American Afghan in 1996. The stitch pattern stayed in my mind, and when I began sketching the coat and realized that I wanted to use a stitch pattern to capture the same refined, classic-yet-casual feel as my old camel coat, I knew that the oak leaf stitch pattern, which was intricate and organic, yet with clean, clear lines, was perfect.



I didn't realize how perfect the oak leaves and acorns were when I drafted the proposal in February, but by the time I was knitting the sample in May the pattern had personal significance for me. My father passed away in late April, so I ended up spending late April and the first part of May in my childhood home in Virginia with my mom. I hadn't been back since my brother's memorial service over eight years ago because the memories were just too painful and the thought of facing our old life completely changed felt totally overwhelming to me. Surprisingly, it ended up being one of the easiest, and strangely happiest, of my visits there. My mother and I had a week to ourselves talking and pulling things together, and after that we had about a week and a half with Griffin there, too, making us laugh and reminding us that there was still life and that it was good.



Griffin gets in on the photoshoot.

During the week we had alone I spent nights working on the final calculations for the Red Oak coat, and then feverishly knitting it. Our house has a life and a personality of its own, and I often think of it as the fifth member of our family. My parents restored it themselves when we were kids, so we know the ins and outs of it more intimately than you might normally know a house. One of the house's defining characteristics is a fairly severe lean where a huge old oak tree's roots have lifted the foundation out of kilter. Our house is surrounded by old oaks, but the one pushing up the house is by far the largest and oldest. I'm not completely certain, but if two people were to stand on opposite sides of the tree and try to link hands, I don't think they could. When the oak goes, it is taking the house with it, and to me that feels right - the two are inseparable.

Anyway, the room that I slept in as I worked on Red Oak was the one right next to the tree - you can touch it if you lean way out of the window. At night I could hear the sound of the trains down by the river, the crickets, and the rustling of the oak leaves. I cannot imagine more comforting sounds. We knitters often talk about the memories worked into our knitting. This coat has more of those than almost any other knit I can think of - rivaled only by husband's [wedding sweater](#). I like to think there is a little piece of my dad in it, too. I wish he had lived to see it on the cover of Twist, just as I wish he had lived to see so many much more important things, not the least of which is Griffin toddling all over his house and garden. But I take comfort in the fact that he left the world just as he would have wanted, reading his morning paper in his house, under his oak trees, and I am grateful to have had the time that I did sitting under those trees knitting, laughing at my son with my mother, and thinking about him.

P.S. As Elli so astutely noticed, there is a photo with a little bit of the camel coat showing on my

[archive masthead](#). I don't have a full length photo, and didn't remember that I had any photos at all, so I didn't link to a picture. Although this just gives a little snippet of what it looks like, it's worth a peek if you are curious.