



by Clara Parkes

I'm always intrigued by the juncture of dissimilar materials. Take water and oil, for example. Initially they refuse any contact, but if you put both in a jar and shake vigorously, they'll quickly amalgamate into a far more friendly blended material.



Or consider the circular knitting needle. Getting a perfect transition from solid needle to flexible nylon cord is the bane of every needle manufacturer's existence. Done poorly, your yarn will always stall on its way across. Done well, the transition is seamless.

Lori Versace's [Sympatico](#) seems like a simple enough cardigan, elegant and classic with minimal fuss. But I was immediately smitten with the prominent bands of seed stitch that quickly shift to stockinette. It's the knitter's version of "The Odd Couple," with stockinette playing a perfectly relaxed, stretchy Oscar while seed stitch is the ever-uptight, unyielding Felix. Not every yarn can transition gracefully from Oscar to Felix. The less willing ones will puff or pucker at the intersection

of the two stitches. I picked three likely candidates and started swatching.

The original sweater is knit in Halcyon Yarn Victorian 2-Ply Wool, a hearty sportweight wool composed of two fairly springy, perpendicular plies. The yarn produces a strong, slightly lustrous fabric with sufficient bounce and structure to transition from fluid to firm without visible or structural awkwardness.



I wondered how a slightly more fluid material would handle the Oscar and Felix challenge, so I picked a 100% baby alpaca for my first swatch. Blue Sky Alpacas 100% Alpaca Sportweight Yarn comes in 110 yd/100m (1.75 oz/50 g) skeins that retail for about \$10. You'll need 15 skeins for the medium (chest circumference 44  $\frac{3}{4}$ "/113.5 cm), putting the bill at an even \$150.

The yarn's construction is similar to that of Victorian 2-Ply Wool. In both cases, the two perpendicularly twisted plies give a decidedly staccato overtone to the seed stitch while rendering cobblestoned stockinette. But the baby alpaca fibers in Alpaca Sportweight give a much more luxurious, slinky hand and a gentle halo that softens the overall effect.



*Classic Elite Yarns Classic Silk*

I suspect many people will be tempted to knit a summer version of this cardigan, which poses even more challenges since cotton—the top summer fiber—has no elasticity. In transitioning from tight to smooth, any extra cushion helps. Here's where blends can come in handy. I found Classic Silk, a three-ply from Classic Elite Yarns that blends 50% cotton with 30% silk and 20% nylon. The cotton serves as an underlying air-conditioning system while the silk adds a bare hint of luster and the nylon provides strength but, much more important, elasticity. Not tons, but just enough to help the yarn grip my hands and the stitches transition from tight to smooth and back again. Classic Silk's slubby finish makes the fabric more relaxed and suitable for everyday wear. It also helps conceal any irregularities in tension, although they'll still be visible—just not as much so. As an added bonus, the three-ply construction gives full stitches for stockinette and beautifully three-dimensional seed stitch. Classic Silk comes in 135 yd/123 m (1.75 oz/50 g) skeins that retail for \$8 apiece, putting that same medium cardigan at about \$97.



*Rowan Felted Tweed*

I liked the rustic texture of the Classic Silk so much that I decided to seek a woolly equivalent. The answer came in Rowan Felted Tweed, a relaxed two-ply yarn that blends 50% Merino wool with 25% alpaca and 25% viscose/rayon. In many ways, this yarn is the Oscar to Victorian 2-Ply Wool's Felix, a slouchy, fuzzy, huggable alternative. What you lose in stitch definition is made up for in overall come-hither coziness. The difference between Felted Tweed and Victorian 2-Ply is so striking that you could easily knit two sweaters—one from each yarn—and genuinely feel like you got two different sweaters out of the deal. Felted Tweed ships in 190 yd/174 m (1.75 oz/50 g) skeins, with a medium taking nine skeins and costing you about \$108.

Those are just the beginning. Which yarn is calling you?