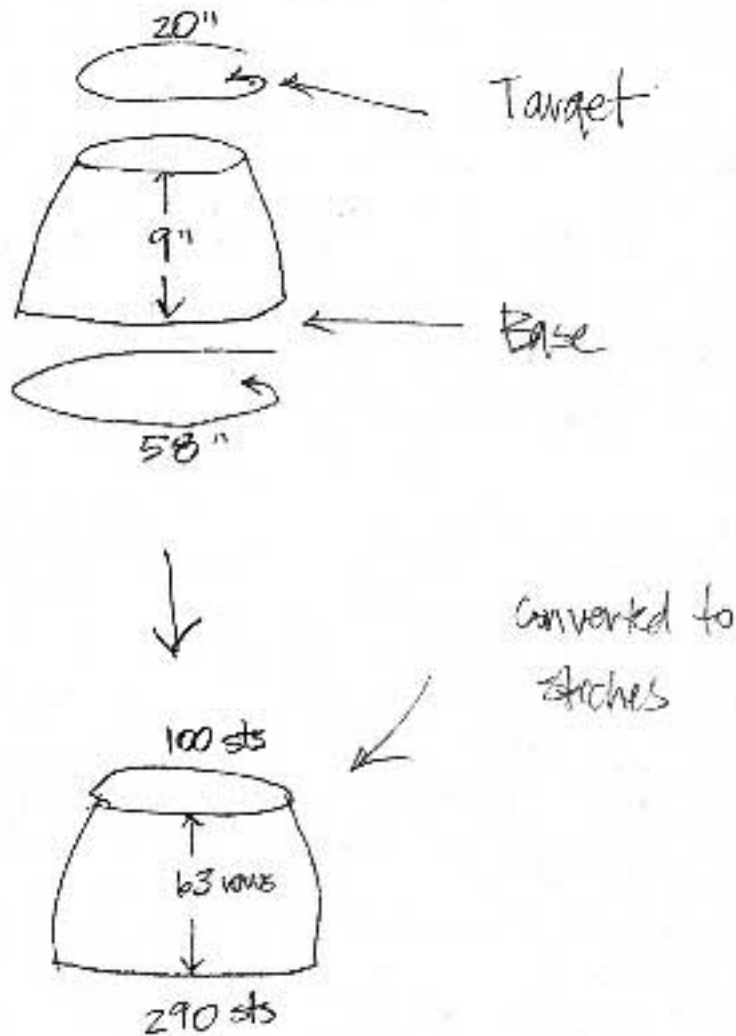


by Pam Allen

While I do know a thing or two about fitting sweaters to the body, I'm not exactly an expert on round yoke sweaters. And perhaps, if I'm being perfectly technical, you can't call the yokes in my designs Come Together (Twist Collective, Fall '08) and Vaganova (in this issue) proper round yokes at all. My new favorite yoke isn't constructed like the traditional Icelandic sweaters. True, it follows the classic cone shape from underarm to neck, but it isn't shaped by concentric rings of decreases spaced between color patterns, or even by stacks of decreases along raglan lines. However, just like those classic round yoke constructions, my new favorite yoke is worked in one piece, in the round, after the sleeves and body parts are joined on a single circular needle.

A round yoke is a tube that reaches from the underarm to somewhere between the curve of the shoulder and the base of the neck. If you were to knit a yoke from the bottom armhole edge straight up without shaping decreases, your yoke, quite obviously, wouldn't fit; it would flop over. When you work a round yoke, you can decrease in several ways to fit the tube to the contours of the body around the upper chest/arm and shoulder area. How you get rid of stitches—where you place your decreases -- how often you make them, etc., determines the look of your yoke. What makes knitting round yokes fun (aside from the seamless aspect) is the variety of ways to go from wide base to tapered top. Once you have all the stitches on one needle, the only thing you have to worry about is decreasing.

Here's the way I approach any kind of one-piece yoke: First, picture the yoke. It starts out wide around the bottom edge and narrows slowly to a smaller neck opening. In some cases, to fit better over the shoulder, the rate of decreasing picks up near the neck to accommodate the abrupt turn of the shoulders. At the bottom edge, the yoke measures the combined width of the upper sleeves, and the front and back pieces after armhole bind offs. At the top edge, the tube measures whatever circumference is needed to fit comfortably at the point you want the yoke to stop. If you want a shoulder-hugging, open neckline that sits just over the angle of the shoulder, the upper opening will be wide. If you want a crew neck, the opening will be narrow enough to hug the neck. The length, or depth, of the tube, or yoke, is measured from the tube's bottom edge (if you're knitting from the bottom up) to wherever you want it to end. For a scooped-out, off-the-shoulder design, the yoke depth will be shorter than for a sweater that extends to the base of the neck.



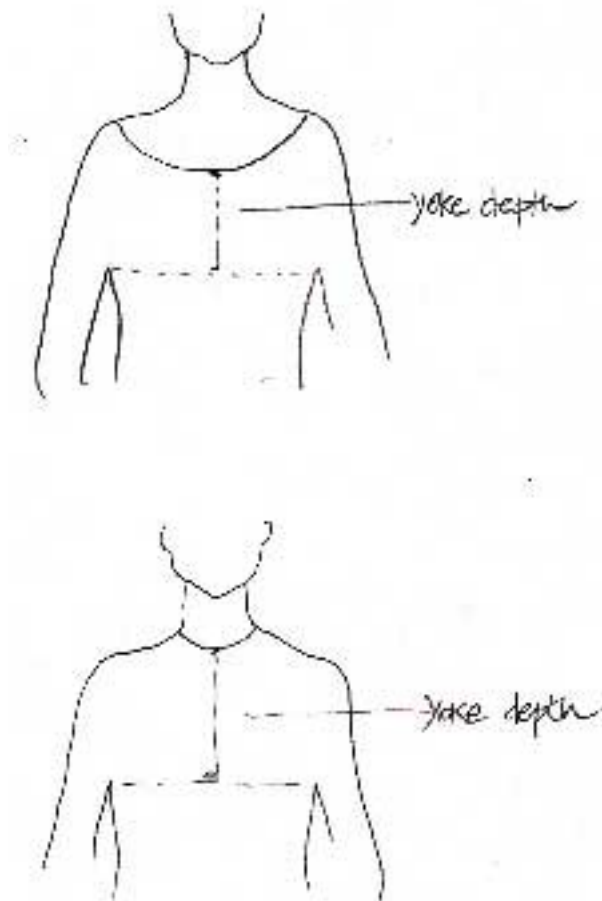
To design a round yoke, you need three measurements: the inches around the base, the inches around the neck opening, and the depth of the yoke. Once you have the measurements in inches, you can convert them to stitch counts. (Multiply inches by stitches per inch to get stitch count.) The difference in stitches between the opening at the base and the opening at the neck is the number of stitches that you have to eliminate as you work your way up. The depth of the yoke, and the number of rows between bottom and top, determines how frequently you need to decrease.

To first figure out your base measurement, count the number of stitches on your needle after all the pieces have been threaded onto it.

An aside: When it comes to threading the sweater pieces on my circular needle, I like to start with the back, followed by the left sleeve, then the front, then the right sleeve, so that the beginning of the round starts at the right edge of the back piece. Others might prefer to start with the left sleeve, followed by the front, right sleeve, and back. Or on top of the shoulder—if that works into your design.

But how to determine the upper tube (neck) circumference and the depth of the yoke? This is easy, too. For yoke depth, I tie a loop of yarn around my neck, or my dummy's and tweak it around until it sits at the neckline the way I'd like, evenly all around. Then I measure from the armhole line (tie a piece of yarn around your body at the underarm point, leaving enough room for comfort) to my neckline yarn circle and that gives me the yoke depth. It's approximate, yes, but good enough.

Then I lift off the yarn loop, untie and measure it to find the desired circumference of the neck opening. Once I have these numbers, I sketch something that looks roughly like this.



I convert everything from inches to stitches by multiplying inch measurements by the number of stitches per inch in my sweater. At this point, it's best to take a gauge reading from the sweater itself—it makes a much more accurate swatch than anything you worked up before starting your project. In the example, gauge is 5 stitches and 7 rows per inch.

The circumference at the base is my beginning stitch count number—a given. The circumference at the neckline is my target number—it tells me how many stitches I need to eliminate. Thus the formula: Base circumference in stitches minus target circumference in stitches equals the number of stitches to decrease. The depth of the yoke in rows (inches times number of rows in an inch)

tells me how many rows I have in which to work my decreases.

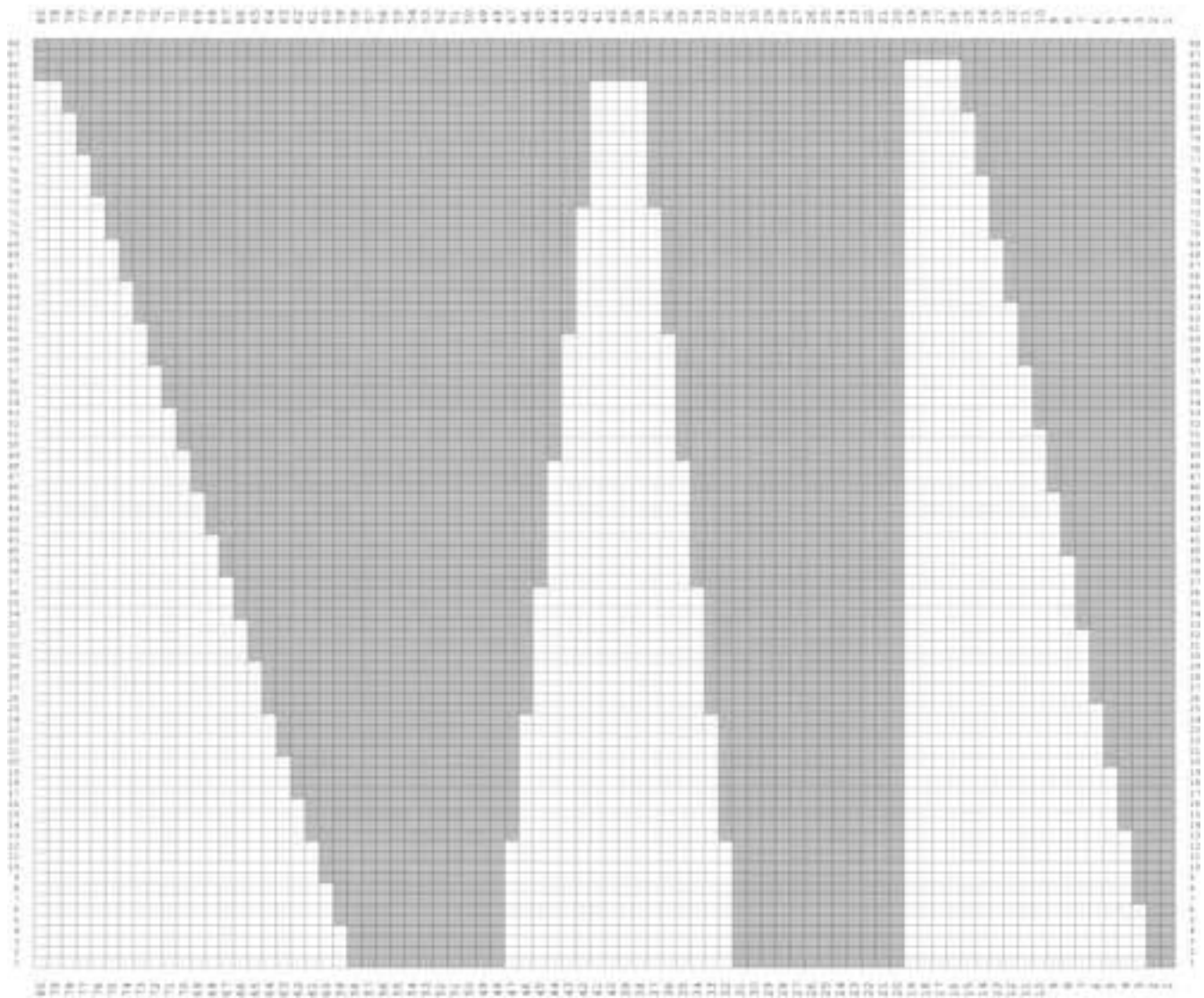
The next step is to decide what kind of yoke to make, or to put it differently, how to distribute the decreases. The two most common methods are decreases worked in distinct rounds, as in traditional round yokes, or paired decreases that follow the four raglan lines that run from the underarm to the neck.

The beauty of the traditional round yoke is that it allows colorwork or texture patterns to wrap the upper body without decreases or seams to interrupt the rhythm. One way to work a round yoke is to eliminate the numbers altogether and follow Elizabeth Zimmermann's foolproof technique for shaping a traditional round yoke. Following her percentage system from *Knitting Workshop* (Schoolhouse Press, 1981), or Meg Swansen's variation shown in *The Opinionated Knitter* (Schoolhouse Press, 2005), you can easily shape a round yoke. Once you've determined the body circumference, you can calculate your sleeve width from wrist to underarm. After you thread body and sleeves onto a round needle, you can taper the yoke to the neck with a few well-placed decrease rounds. In the percentage system, the depth of the yoke is 25% of the circumference of the body. About halfway up the yoke you work the first round eliminating about a third of the stitches—k2tog, k1 around. Then you work two or three more evenly spaced decrease rounds, depending on the size of the sweater you're knitting, before beginning the neckband. EZ's percentage system is ingenious—and it works. But if you figure out your base, target, and yoke depth numbers, you can play around with the number of rounds on which to decrease and the rate of decreases, depending on the look you want and the fit you envision.



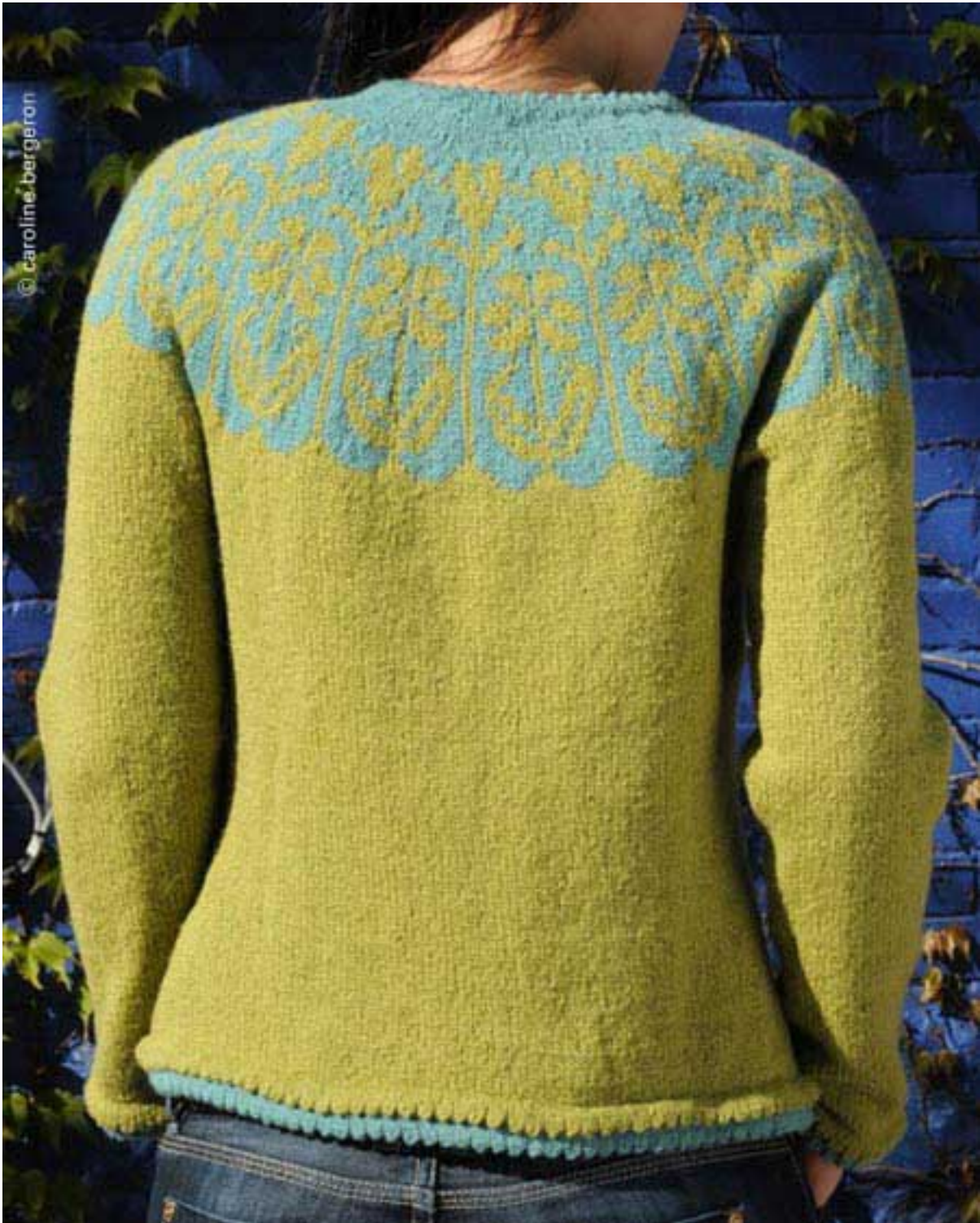
[Sundog by Kristi Schueler](#)

A traditional round yoke looks round. Your eye travels horizontally around the yoke following whatever patterns you've plugged in. A variation on the round yoke that emphasizes vertical lines might be called a spoke or pie yoke. In this version of the round yoke, the yoke is divided into sections—six, eight, ten, as many as you like—that are wider at the base and taper at the upper end. In raglan shaping, the decreases are spread out along four 'lines' and it's standard to work the decreases every other or every fourth round in order to get them all in. But in a spoke yoke, because there are more 'lines' along which to decrease, the decreases are spaced more rows apart.



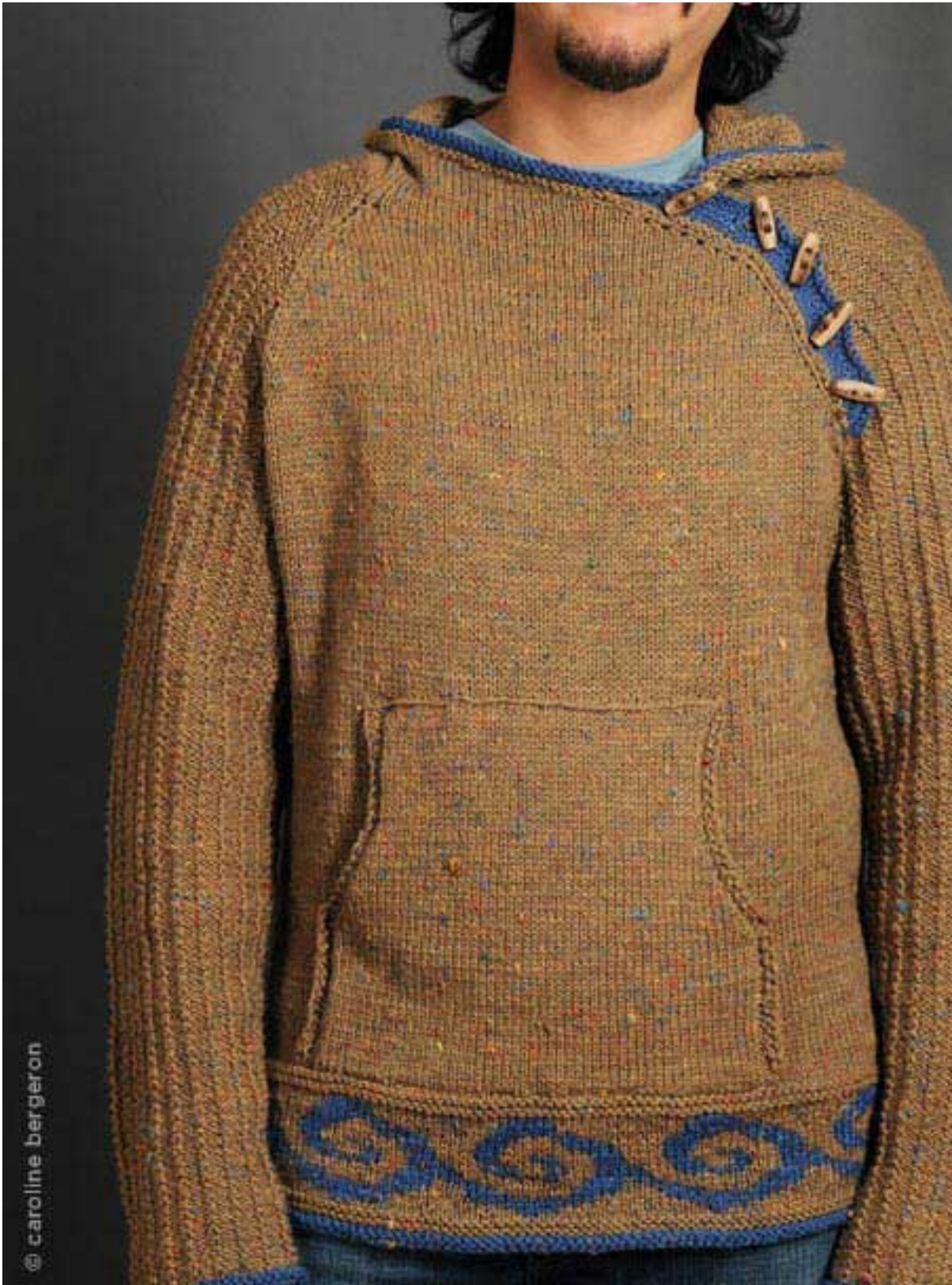
If you want your spokes to be straight lines from base to top, you need to work paired decreases on decrease rows, for example, k2tog, k1, ssk, or a double decrease in which the stitches slant left and right. If you work decreases along one edge of the pie section and consistently use a k2tog or ssk at the decrease point on each round, your decrease lines will curve—gracefully—around the yoke. If you've pictured cables moving in a line perpendicular to the hem, use paired decreases (center figure on the chart). If you want them to swirl around your yoke, then use single decreases (right figure on the chart). And obviously, with paired decreases, you will work double the number of rows between decrease rows as with single decreases, if you're decreasing at the same number of points on a given round.

The spoke construction lends itself perfectly to cables or any other stitch or colorwork pattern that follows a vertical line. Anything you can design that will fit into a tapering shape will work. Running cables up the yoke and decreasing in the spaces between them is a classic spoke embellishment. But there's no reason not to work color patterns with a vertical axis in each section. If you're doing a colorwork pattern, be mindful of the spacing of color changes—too long a stretch will make long floats and/or create tension problems.



[Cottage Garden by Cheryl Burke](#)

Raglan shaping, as mentioned, happens, on the average, every other round or every fourth round, depending on your numbers, and it creates a diagonal line from armhole to neck along the column of stitches between the pairs of decreases on either side (left figure on the chart) You can use decrease spacing in raglan shaping to refine the fit at the shoulder. Take the total number of decreases necessary for every raglan axis and spread them out toward the bottom of the yoke. Then group them closer together at the shoulder for more of a curve.



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[Pyorre by Mari Muinonen](#)

All these methods make great yokes. And, as long as you end up at your target number, you can shape a yoke by placing decreases in other, less traditional, arrangements.

In [Vaganova](#), in this issue, I set up a column of decreases in the body of the sweater that line up on either side of a center cable-like panel. These decreases shape the body into an A-line. As the decreases continue in the center panel, they also help to shape the yoke. However, keeping the rate of decreases consistent didn't allow for enough stitch elimination. I needed to decrease more stitches to reach my target number. So about 2/3 of the way up the yoke, I began working decreases on either side of the center stitch on each sleeve/shoulder. It makes sense to work decreases along the top of the sleeve in this manner because the little dart that they form molds the yoke tube slightly to align more with the sudden angle of the shoulder.



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[Vaganova by Pam Allen](#)

In [Come Together](#), paired decreases along the center front and back and the center of the top of each sleeve shape the yoke. In both sweaters I used a stitch pattern with a well-defined rib structure. The decreases pull the fabric and tilt the ribs toward the center of bodice and sleeves. It would be interesting to see what this decreases structure would look like using other stitch patterns.



[Come Together by Pam Allen](#)

Sweater construction offers many opportunities for invention. Round yokes, in particular, are ripe for exploration. So many combinations of stitch patterns and decrease arrangements have yet to be created—best get started!