



By Clara Parkes

Scarves and shawls play many roles. They can warm, they can drape from the shoulders, or they can adorn like jewelry—and sometimes, though not always, they can do all three. With this in mind, I chose Mercedes Tarasovich-Clark's Lena to swatch for this issue. Made from relatively open, lace-inspired stitches, Lena can be worn as a large draping loop over the shoulders, or it can be wrapped once, twice, or even three times around your neck. Depending on how you wrap it and the yarn you use, you'll get dramatically different results.

The wrap as designed is made from a yarn that achieves all three goals: Kitchen Sink Dyeworks Seacell Merino Fine. It's a smooth blend of 70% superwash Merino and 30% Seacell, which is a regenerated cellulose fiber that contains seaweed extracts. While the dominant Merino gives reasonable bounce and elasticity to the yarn, there's no mistaking the shimmer and drape provided by the smooth, luminous Seacell fiber. This yarn has been hand-dyed by Mercedes in bright, cheerful colors. Combine those colors with the mesh-like fabric and you have a project with a distinctly tropical, beachfront esprit.



I sought three yarns that would produce results almost unrecognizable from the original pattern pictures while still fulfilling at least one of the warming, draping, or adorning roles. I started with a sportweight 100% alpaca yarn from Frog Tree. While many alpaca yarns now use the shorter, bouncier, finer “baby” grade of alpaca, this is a traditional old-fashioned smooth, long-stapled alpaca twisted into two plies that almost resemble a string of pearls.



The fabric was dense and puffy, warm, and extremely soft with a somewhat slippery hand. I didn't swatch the optional picot edging. Even in this somewhat dense two-ply state, the alpaca still enjoys being allowed to drape. I'd try wrapping the scarf twice for drape, or three times for a very dense and fuzzy cowl. Speaking of fuzz, the yarn shed quite a bit as I was knitting, although the shedding subsided after I finished and washed the swatch. I still wonder if the yarn might be happier in a tighter, more cohesive fabric than this one.



From here I took a sharp turn away from fuzzy insulation and straight into the land of bold color adornment with Noro Silk Garden Sock. I wanted to see how the slowly shifting variegated colors of Noro would work in such an open stitch pattern of YOs, SSKs, and K2togs. The middle of Lena is knit using two strands of yarn held together, so I simply knit from the other end of the skein to keep the colors within the same family.



The effect was bold and somewhat heavy, with a hint of rustic. The yarn's lack of visible ply structure makes these stitches somewhat one-dimensional, but that effect is offset by the flecks of silk randomly peppered throughout the yarn. The yarn's fiber composition—40% wool, 25% silk, 25% nylon, and 10% mohair—gives the fabric a relatively dry, cottony hand. A hint of roughness may cause next-to-skin irritation for some, although you could always wear this over a coat or sweater, wrapping it only twice around your neck so that more of the fabric is allowed to show and drape. I suspect the optional picot edging may be a little too frou-frou for this particular yarn, but I encourage you to try it if tempted.



Finally, I decided to pursue a delightfully decadent idea. What if we stripped away almost all the weight, bulk, and substance in our yarn and opted for an ethereal cloud through which a smooth stream of shimmery silk flowed? I'm talking, of course, about Rowan Kidsilk Haze, a brushed yarn composed of 70% super kid mohair (a much finer grade than in the Noro yarn) and 30% silk.



Of all the swatches, this was my personal favorite—it perfectly fulfilled the project’s goals of warming, draping, and adorning. I can see how extraordinary a Kidsilk Haze version would be if you wrapped the scarf as many times around your neck as it would comfortably go. The multiple layers would give the fabric an upright cowl-like structure while producing a deep cloud of puffy, luminous fiber. And the picot edging? Absolutely. Why not string a few beads in there while you’re at it?