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# Modifications to the Sophie Bag Pattern

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## Preparations And The Shopping List

### The Pattern

I used a wonderful, free pattern from Julie Anderson found at <http://www.magknits.com/warm04/patterns/sophie.htm> ([link](#)).

### The Needles

For the beaded-handle bags, I **double the yarn**, to make a more substantial and stiff fabric. I feel it needs that to support the weight of the handles and the grommets or eyelets.

I have knitted it on size US 10.5 (even with the doubled yarn), US 13 and US 11 needles. My favorite is the US 11. 10.5 works great, but it's a workout for the hands with the double yarn. With the 13s, I ran out of yarn and had to really fudge the decreases in the pattern, resulting in a shorter, wider bag. It was actually quite cute, but it was not the look I was originally going for.

I used 16-inch circular needles. The size US 11 is Clover Bamboo. The others were Addi-Turbos. Either one is great. The Addis are slippery, which has its pluses and its minuses. The stitches are squished quite tightly on the needle, and the Addis makes it a little harder at times to keep all the stitches on. So a real beginner will be happier with the bamboo, I believe.

### The Yarn

I have made these from Cascade 220 and Patons Classic Merino Wool. Both worked very well. I feel that the Patons felts a little faster, but this is not a scientific study, by any means. I have only tried two colors -- pink (made 2 bags) in the Patons and gold No. 4010 in the Cascade. (as you will read later, it took a lonnnng time to felt the gold Cascade to become the fabric I wanted. It took much less time to felt the pink Patons to the correct texture. And the Patons made a firmer, stiffer fabric, which I think is more desirable in these bags.) I think various yarns and colors felt differently, depending on how they've been processed and the various dyes used. **Do not use superwash wool**—it will not felt. **Remember to get two skeins**. You will use up every single thread of two 220-yard skeins. You might even want to get a third skein,

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although I have only used two. In order to get two to work, I had to modify the pattern somewhat, which I will detail later. White or cream (and maybe some pastels) will probably not felt, because of the chemical processes they have undergone. I want to make a cream bag with pearly and gold handles in the future. When I get to that, I'm going to use the untreated Rambouillet wool from which I made my Plain Vanilla sweater. I've also seen felted bags made from Manos del Uruguay yarn, and it makes a luscious, boucle fabric. I hope to make one of these bags in that yarn someday.

## The Handles

I ordered mine from Kim of [Gibson Girl Design](http://www.gibsongirlsdesign.com/) (http://www.gibsongirlsdesign.com/) She does fantastic work and has an artistic eye and a really fun and beautiful inventory of beads. In all cases, I sent her a snippet of the wool I was going to use and she color-matched. But she also has standard colors available, and will do custom work as you request it. You can tell her if you're going for "elegant," "funky," all one color, or multicolor, whatever you wish.

## The Hardware

As shown in Photo A, I use inexpensive 1/4-inch two-piece eyelets that I purchased at Michaels, a crafting department store. I bought the inexpensive eyelet tool, which looks like the thing at the top of the photo. The two pieces at the bottom are the two pieces of an eyelet pair.



Photo A

There are more expensive grommets and grommet-applying tools in various sizes, but I found they were not necessary.

**Also**, I have found it necessary to use some sort of clips to attach the handles to the bag through the grommets (eyelets). There are several options available, but after several unsuccessful tries, my favorite find is the one shown in Photo B from [Universal Mercantile Exchange](http://www.umei.com/) (http://www.umei.com/). They are part number HK-R34-nickel, two pieces. The rod on the bottom screws into the hook on the top. Just perfect! (The instructions say to add a drop of glue to prevent it from unscrewing,) I use silvertone or nickeltone hardware, because Kim uses



Photo B

silvertone wire and ends to her handles, and I think the look is more pleasing that way.

They also come in goldtone, and they come in different sizes and shapes. This one is the 3/4-inch size. If you go to their site, it is rather challenging to navigate, but I think I eventually found and clicked on "handbag hooks." It took a while to find it. They sent a catalog, and that is much easier to understand than their website. They are really in business for large orders, I think, and they sent me minimum packages of 10 of the two types I ordered. I think I read something in their site that they limit these "sample orders" to a small number of orders before they require you to order a big wholesale-type order.

A reader told me that they are called D-shanks, and that they are available at hardware stores such as Home Depot, as well. I have not looked, but this may be a good option.

## Knitting The Bag

Follow Julie's instructions, but I have found the following modifications necessary. Otherwise, I run out of yarn.

Do the decreases every 7 or 8 rows, rather than every 10th row. Even at that, I end up only able to do six decreases, then follow immediately the next row with another set of decreases, while binding off at the same time. Do not do the handles, obviously, since you are going to put on the beaded handles. There would not be enough yarn, anyway, in my experience.

**Do not worry about little imperfections.** The felting will hide most mistakes. There have even been times when I've forgotten to do a decrease or two, realized it later, and fudged it by adding it in when I realized it.

Following the above modifications, this is how much yarn I ended up with (Photo C). I might have gotten one more row out of it, but it's doubtful.



Photo C

## Felting the Bag

The unfelted bag is shown in Photo D. To felt the bag:

**Step 1.** Place the bag in the washing machine with a pair of white or very-light-colored jeans.. (I am not a fan of putting items in a mesh bag. I feel it slows down the felting too much, but some people recommend it. If you're felting a large number of items at once, **be aware that lint and fuzz from the items can clog your washing machine pump.**)



Photo D

The reason for the addition of jeans to the mix is that friction is important in the felting process. I have used blue jeans (even ones that I thought were very faded) before, and have ended up with blue stains on my felted item, so I got the white ones for this purpose. I got my white pair of jeans at the Salvation Army for a dollar, and they are kept in the laundry room for this purpose.

**Step 2.** Add a very small amount (just a few drops) of Eucalan, very mild laundry detergent, or even Dawn dishwashing liquid. Eucalan is my favorite, as it conditions the wool. I am not a fan of that other common wool wash, the one that is available in grocery stores. It rhymes with Woolfright? Did you know it actually has bleach in it? It fades stuff. It also makes wool scratchy, in my opinion, and stretches things and makes them dull-looking. Liquid Ivory Snow is terrific for this purpose, though, and it's available at grocery stores.

**Step 3.** Set machine for hot wash/cold rinse. Set on smallest volume of water (mine has a "mini-basket" setting that I use, but I just don't put in the mini-basket.) Run almost through one cycle. Before it starts to drain for the rinse portion of the cycle, turn off the machine, pull out the bag and check it. The main reason for doing this is just for kicks and grins, because it will probably look very stretched out and be floppy, and if you didn't have me harping at you here, you'd probably look at it and have a hissy fit because the individual stitches will still be very visible, it's all stretched out, and it looks and smells horrible. It's not felted yet.



Photo E

I have always found that felting takes much longer than I expect, every time. But it might depend on the hotness of your water and the agitation of your machine. I think front-loading machines,

which are inherently less damaging to your clothes, will therefore take longer to felt an item. Felting is an inexact science, and therefore I cannot give you any hard-and-fast rules about when your bag will be "done." You just have to watch it fairly closely (but not nearly as closely, in my experience, as I've heard some say) and know that the magic elements for felting are hot water, friction, time, and—I've found—shocking the wool with an occasional cold-water rinse. Just when you think it's never going to happen, give it a nice frigid rinse, and then, baby, you'll start to get some *action!*

And also, don't get upset if you think it's gone too far—the stuff stretches back quite well (within limits, of course.)

I reset the timer before it gets to the rinse portion and run it through a couple of more agitation cycles, checking every once in a while, then I let it rinse in cold water and spin dry.

**Step 4.** Take the bag out and shape it. It might look a bit weird or amoebic, like Photo F, when it comes out. Don't worry. Just untwist, pull and tug it into shape. It's actually quite fun. It's sort of like Silly Putty, but.... different. Pull it into the desired shape. With the Sophie bag, the knitted-in decreases and shaping are all there; you just have to remind the washed item who's boss. Pull and stretch and shape it the way you want it to look. Trust me, it's really not hard.



Photo F

Photo G shows how it looked after six cycles in the washer and judicious pulling-and-tugging. Ultimately it took seven cycles of the washing machine to get the fabric I wanted. I really would have liked this bag to shrink one more inch in height and one more inch in depth (viewed from the side), and to be stiffer, but it seemed apparent to me that I had reached the limits of this yarn's shrinking and felting abilities, so I gave in. I even tried adding boiling water to the bath, and put it in the dryer for several minutes but it refused to budge any more.



Photo G

With the pink Patons bags, as well as my large project bag and my brown purse, not to mention my Fuzzy Feet and at least a half dozen party purses, it only took two or three cycles. So there you have it -- an inexact science if I ever saw one.

## Drying the Bag

Put the bag through the spin cycle of your washer, so most of the water is spun out. Then my preferred method is to roll up small towels and washcloths and place them in the bag, somewhat blocking it to the shape you desire. Don't overstuff—just make it look the way it should look when it's finished. I place the bag stuffed with towels on a drying rack, and place a fan on it. After a few hours, or overnight, reach inside and take out the towels, which will now be damp. They've absorbed a lot of the water left in the felted bag. You can replace them with dry towels or not. The drying from this point will proceed fairly quickly, unless you're having very humid weather. You won't want to leave the damp towels in there for the whole drying process because they will slow it down, and all I can envision is mildew. Take them out after they've done their wonderful job of sucking out extra moisture and let the bag finish air-drying.

## Attaching the Hardware

Photo H shows the tools you will need to attach the grommets, rings and handles to the purse.



Photo H

**Step 1.** Decide where you want to place the grommets or eyelets.

**Step 2.** As shown in Photos I and J, hold one half of the grommets in place. Take a knitting needle and poke through the hole, through both thicknesses of the fabric, to line up the holes.



Photo I



Photo J

**Step 3.** As shown in Photos K and L, using very sharp scissors (I use spring-action ones—they are the coolest things ever!), poke and twist through hole, **one thickness of the fabric at a time**, making it a bit larger, then snip away very small bits of fabric to make a hole through

which the bottom portion of the grommet/eyelet can just barely fit. **Be careful not to make the hole too big. If you do, there is no repairing it without getting larger grommets.**



Photo K



Photo L

**Step 4.** As shown in Photos M and N, place bottom of the eyelet through hole, and place top piece over it. Squeeze together and hold in place.



Photo M



Photo N

**Step 5.** As shown in Photo O, place eyelet tool over top portion and hammer sharply a few times. Be careful to move other fabric out of the way, and hammer on a cutting board or some other surface so as not to damage surfaces below. Photo P shows a finished grommet.



Photo O



Photo P

**Step 6.** Repeat for other three eyelets—one behind the one you just finished, and two on the other side of the bag.

**Step 7.** As shown in Photos Q, R and S, position the D-shank over two eyelets, place end rings of two handles over the D-shank. Screw in rod, adding a small drop of glue before tightening with a tiny screwdriver (from an eyeglass repair kit).



**Photo Q**



**Photo R**



**Photo S**

We're done! But in the interest of full disclosure, I must tell you that I did some creative set work for my photography. In order to get this bag to stand up, I had to fill it with light cotton kitchen towels. Photo T shows what it looks like with the towels; Photo U shows what it looks like without the towels. However, Photo V shows what it looks like with my wallet, cell phone, sunglasses and the few other items I would normally be carrying in it. Isn't she beautiful?



**Photo T**



**Photo U**



**Photo V**

## **And A Word About Closures**

This bag could use a closure, but I don't feel it's necessary, and unless I could find just the right thing, I feel it would detract from its appearance. Magnetic closures are a no-go because they

erase credit cards. A large snap might be ok, but it would have to be covered with a decorative button on both sides, otherwise it would be hideous. The bag is designed well, so it doesn't really gap open, and it's wider on the bottom than the top, so things would not necessarily fall out. Kim once did one with a neat shank-style button, and I might consider that with a nice piece of leather or something to hook it shut. A snap closure would also work if the bag were lined and the snap were placed only in the lining. I think I will experiment with that a little bit. For this particular bag, being a bit floppy, the extra fabric might be a plus for adding body, as well.