

# Victorian Vamp

By Martyn Smith

Today's lifestyle doesn't leave a lot of time for pressing and starching a garment, and that's generally the main reason many sewers will not attempt an heirloom blouse, shirt or top. However, more modern trends allow us to use some of the machine heirloom techniques to make softer more romantic or ethereal-feeling garments made of soft cotton, like voile or faille, rather than cotton batiste. Please, don't misunderstand my intentions here ... I absolutely appreciate the work involved in this art form and for those who have the time to starch and press, the finished look is outstanding and an absolute Victorian Dream ... but for most people it is really not an option and these skills are being lost because of our busy lives.



**NOTE:** Cotton batiste is a lightweight, sheer, delicate fabric in a plain weave similar to cotton lawn, but a little thicker. Batiste has a very delicate handle and a graceful drape and can be mercerised for added lustre. The only drawback is that it needs starching to give it a fabulous finish and who's got time for that these days.

**F**irst of all, choose a soft 100% cotton voile, or similar, to create your masterpiece. Wash the fabric primarily to shrink it, take the dressing out of it and lastly to ensure the nature of the fabric is worth making up after the washing. I have been disappointed more than once with the wash result of a fabric and had I known that beforehand I would probably not have spent the effort on making it up. When choosing insertion braid, lace or entredeux it is important to find 100% cotton and the best match of colour to your fabric. Heirloom colours are usually white, off-white, cream or ecru (beige or tea dyed). It can be hard to find the exact match. Wash this product too (iron dry if necessary)!

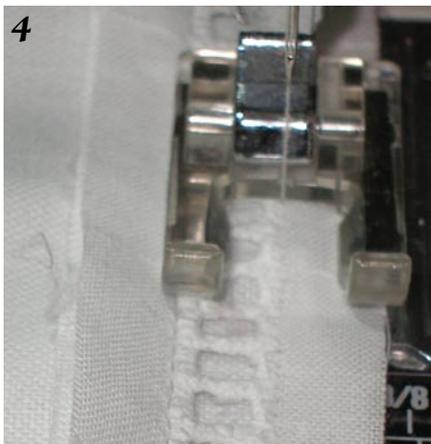
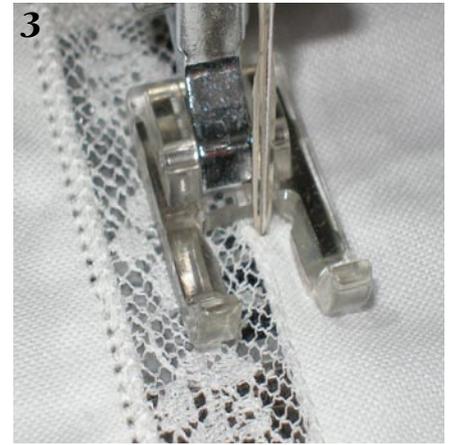
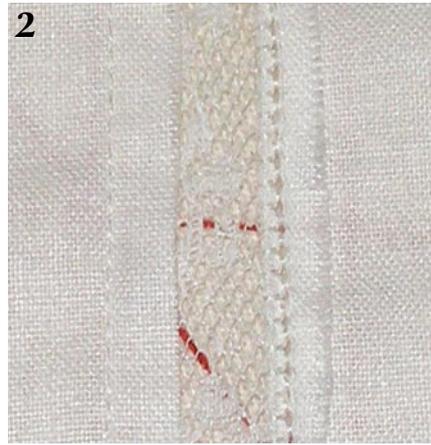
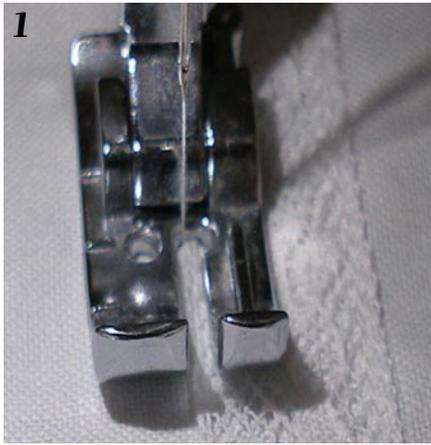
Choose the thread you wish to use... my choice is Mettler Fine Embroidery 100% cotton 60-weight for the heirloom stitching and Madeira Aerofil Sew and Quilt (USA only) to construct with. For those who haven't tried Aerofil it's a 50-weight 100% polyester (but feels more like cotton), sits well on any fabric and does the most fabulous buttonholes. If you are a purist then use Mettler Silk Finish Sewing (Art No.105) 100% mercerised cotton 50-weight (a stunning garment construction thread as well!).

For this shirt you could use a shirt pattern like Kwik•Sew 3555 or 3668 with or without sleeves. The advantage with a Kwik•Sew woven shirt pattern is the 6mm (1/4in) seam allowances so you don't need to trim back your seams and when inserting entredeux tape ... simple, easy and quick!

This article shows you three simple techniques that you can do on most machines with limited stitch patterns available. As you can see in the pictures of the shirt, we have only used a limited array of stitching styles: pintucks, faggoting, entredeux insertion, using applique or blind-hem stitch, satin stitch for the shell edging, satin stitch leaf pattern and straight stitch.

Lace insertion (even though it's not shown on the garment) is the mainstay of heirloom sewing. The lace is first edge-stitched into place on each side of the lace on the right side of the garment fabric. See photo 1. The underside fabric is then cut down the middle of the lace





(to make it see-through), pressed back away from the lace and then stitched (from the right side) with an appliqué or blanket stitch with either a wing-needle or a #100. Trim the excess seam allowances away from the underside of the work. [See photos 2 and 3.](#)

### Entredeux

The tape gets stitched onto the fabric with a 6mm (1/4in) seam right up against the edge of the ladder pattern. [See photo 4.](#) The seams need to be pressed away from the tape and then from the right side of the garment, using applique or blanket stitch (use the blind-hem stitch or narrow zigzag if your machine doesn't have these stitches) with a wing-needle. The wing-needle makes a hole when the blade of the needle penetrates the fabric and then the stitches keep the hole open to give a lace effect that makes the entredeux blend in with the main fabric. Once this has been completed, using pelican-billed (embroidery) scissors, trim back the excess seam allowance from the underside of your work. [See photos 5 and 6.](#)

### Pintucking

This is fun and really easy. Using a twin needle (3.0/90 = 3mm [1/8in] distance between the needles and 90/14 as the needle size) and a pintuck foot, thread the machine with two spools of thread (ensuring they are both the same brand, colour and the thread is unwinding off the spool in the same direction), a shorter stitch length 1.5 – 2 and increasing you top tension 2 or 3 clicks above normal (tighter). Test the formation of the pintucks on scrap fabric before stitching on the garment. A little alteration of settings is often necessary to get the perfect pintuck as every machine differs. A dedicated pintuck foot has grooves on its underside that you can also use as a guide when doing more than one row. This foot is also great for 'free-motion' pintucks (random curves and patterns that are NOT in a straight line) and makes it easy to stitch a pintuck on the bias ... this needs a little practice but has an exciting result. [See photos 7 and 8.](#)

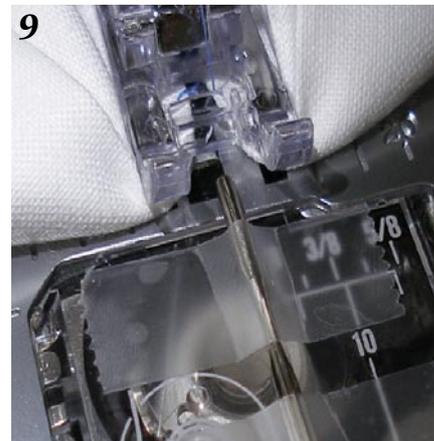
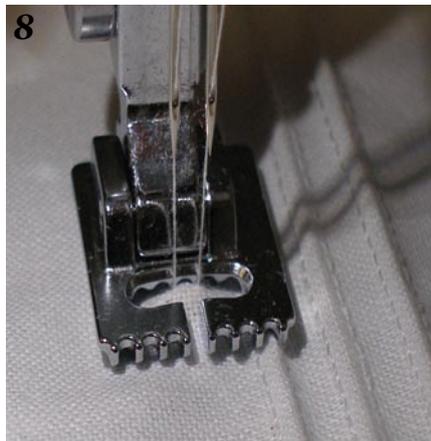
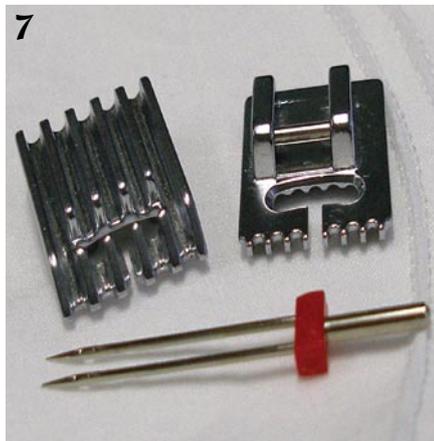
### Fagotting

Fagotting stitch connects two pieces of

turned-in fabric together leaving a small gap or ditch between them. This gap is usually filled with a lacy web-like stitch to prevent them from moving too far but still allowing the skin or contrast fabric to show through. It was a very risqué stitch in its time, but it does sometimes get referred to as 'honeycomb' stitch.

The version used on this shirt is combined with a shell satin stitch so you get a shadow work effect along the seam as well. First of all, test out some of your machine stitches and see if you can get a honeycomb effect forming on the turned-under edges of two scraps of fabric. I've used the feather stitch but traditionally a Venetian hem stitch is used. If you look closely at the photo you will see that I've taped an old wing-needle in the middle of the plate to use as a guide to run the edges of my fabric along. [See photos 9 and 10.](#) Most machine brands have a dedicated fagotting plate for this technique but I've always improvised much to their horror!

The shell satin stitch is applied evenly along the sides of the finished honeycomb stitching and there is a balance mark (marked with a fade-out pen) to keep



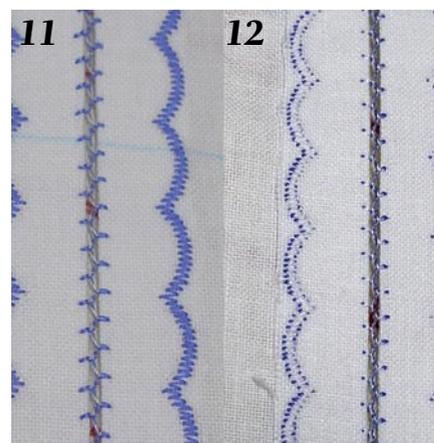
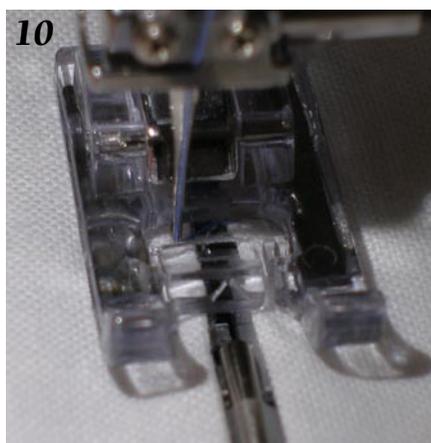
both sides even as they can go astray very easily. See photos 11 and 12. The cut-away edge on the underside of the work is trimmed in a straight line rather than clipping into the valleys of the shell pattern. Either way is correct, it's just a time thing and really, from a distance, nobody notices.

### Troubleshooting and helpful hints

If the fabric is gathering or creeping under the foot of your machine with any of these stitches or finishes, check the top tension of the machine (lower the tension) and see if an adjustment makes any difference. The use of strips of wash-away interfacing can be very useful to bulk out a stitch and give the fabric some temporary body without the need to starch the fabric in the first place. Pintucks should not need any stiffening as they won't form correctly. A gathered pintuck will be either too much top tension or the stitch length is too long. DON'T SPEED when stitching ... SPEED PULLS and that's the rule!

There is a wonderful new iron-on stabiliser available from Vilene® called Soluvlies, which can help with both satin stitching and fagotting.

Whenever I plan any form of garment embellishment I use one main rule: be happy with your plan and then remove one design element. Hence this is why the shirt doesn't have lace on it... it was too much! I always cut out pieces of fabric, stitch my patterns and then lay the pattern onto the fabric and cut out the garment. This way you get the heirloom work in just the right place and there is NO waste of time checking to see if both sides are the same. It wastes a little more fabric this way but it's far more time efficient.



**Final stitch layout**