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Three Stages of Steam

Part 3

by Sharon Nani

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his series of articles describes different methods of steaming knitwear and knit fabric. I discussed an introduction to steam procedures and the process of first steam in previous articles of *Machine Knit America*. This article will emphasize the process of "Hard Press."

"Hard Press" - this is a term that explains itself. It is the process of actually laying the iron head on the knit fabric with enough pressure to press it. Sounds scary, doesn't it? Well, you would not do it to just any fabric. How so, you say!! Then how would you know which fabrics to hard press and which not!! That is a good question. And it brings me to the point of why I am writing these articles for *Machine Knit America*. If you have followed my articles over the past years, I have been giving you a lot of "foundation material" on which to build your skills in order to create products that would be profitable. But the major key has been to encourage you to be inventive, creative, to make choices and to experiment. To reach this point, the basic foundation had to be built first. Now, we are ready to venture on. Hard Press is part of this venturing on.

Applying steam, or steam with pressure, can change the characteristics of a yarn or fabric. You, as the designer, can create fabrics of your choice with various yarns. Therefore, you, as the designer, must have the

patience to experiment with this fabric and how it reacts to different finishing techniques. I can only tell you how I feel about these fabrics and how I like to steam them. That does not mean that it is the "right and only way" to do it. It is just what I like!! What makes a designer unique is that he/she has found a fabric, design, or product that he/she liked and that the buying market also liked!!

For example, I just "first steam" any textural fabric. This would include tuck stitches and off-balanced fabrics such as blister stitch, or pin tucks. It would not have mattered what yarns I used in producing these fabrics. I would not have wanted to "squash" the texture. On the other hand, I have found that rayon has a wonderful drape and silky feel after it has been hard pressed. The first time I knitted with a rayon, it came off the knitting machine feeling coarse and wiry. My first thought, was "Oh my, what a terrible yarn." Then I took it to the steam table and first steamed it. (This means just passing steam over it to unroll the edges and warm the fiber.) Well, that made it feel a little better, but it was still wrinkly. Next, I just smacked it with the iron and applied pressure. I did not iron it, I only lifted the iron up and down to apply pressure. And it was like the ugly duckling emerging on my vacuum table. A beautiful, drapery, silky, fabric emerged from

under that iron. I was elated with my new fabric. As a result of this experiment, I hard press any non-textural fabric containing rayon or rayon blends, such as: wool/ rayon, cotton/ray and pure rayon.

You have seen how hard press is used to change the characteristics of a fabric. Hard Press is also used to "size" a fabric before final steam. An example of this would be a basic 6-gore flare skirt knitted in stockinette stitch with a velveteen or wool 70%/rayon 30% yarn.

Step One: Measure the skirt gore and compare the measurements to the pattern measurements.

Step Two: With the wrong side of the garment facing you: First Steam the gore:

1. Leave the gore in the natural rolled position.
2. Pass steam over the gore to warm it up.
3. Unroll the edges, passing steam over the edges gently, pat them flat with your hand.
4. Measure again, comparing to the pattern.

This is where the sizing comes in!!

A. If the gore is longer and wider than the pattern calls for: it must be shrunk down to size. Pass steam over the gore in a circular fashion to the count of approximately 5 seconds, at the same time with your hand, pat the fabric inward as if to shrink it.

Proceed in this manner until the correct size is obtained. Then do the final hard press of laying the pressure of the iron directly on the wrong side of the fabric in an up and down fashion. Do not press as this would stretch out the fabric that you just shrank.

B. If the gore is shorter or narrower than the pattern calls for: it must be stretched to size. In this case you do not pass the steam over the fiber to warm it. Starting in the center of the fabric and applying pressure to the knit, you actually iron from center outward for the width enlargement and center upward and downward for the length adjustment.

This procedure does take practice, but it is nothing to fear. I have found that I could alter a garment 2 inches in length and width with the procedure of correct steaming. Once you have tried it, it will give you greater confidence to go forward in

your creative adventures.

In the next issue of *Machine Knit America*, I will share some of my designs that implement many of the techniques of shaping and finishing that have been discussed in previous articles. Any technique I haven't described previously will

be given in detail. In addition, I will use these designs as my sample to describe the final stage of steam.

Happy and Profitable

Knitting,

Sharon ■

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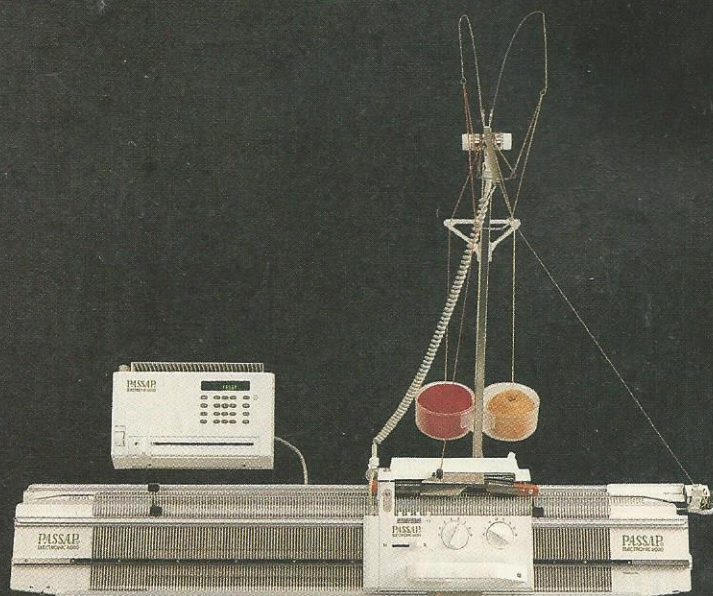
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