Straightening Fabrics

Imagine you are preparing to cut fabric for a project and when the fabric is rolled out on the worktable you realize that the woven design is not running true. The fabric seems to be twisted or crooked.

There are some simple steps you can take to fix this problem which work best for a woven fabric and designs but may not work correct a printed design or motif.

Blocking

The technique used to straighten fabrics is called blocking. I first learned to use this technique when working with wool for men's suits, often the fabric would need to be straightened before use.

A worktable with horizontal and vertical lines and a padded surface that can be pinned into is needed to block materials. There are several different options that can be used to square up fabrics.

Option 1: Pin the fabric to the worktable in the correct alignment, making it square, and steam it to correct the position. This option works well when the design is off only slightly.

Option 2: Stretch the fabric on the bias in the direction you want the design to move or straighten. Pull and stretch along the entire piece of fabric, always on the bias or diagonal. Check the design alignment. If it is still not square stretch on the bias again. Once you get close to correcting the alignment, pin the fabric to the worktable and steam to retrain the fabric.

Fabric Finishes

Most fabrics for home décor are finished with a stain repellent like Scotch Guard or Teflon. These finishes are heat set or UV light set onto the fabrics. Some dyes need to be heat set as well. If a heat setting is used for any of these processes then the blocking technique may not work as well because the grain has a memory to hold that position.

Depending on the fabric, it may be possible to retrain a fabric even if it has been heat set. The only way to learn if blocking will work is to try this technique on a piece of the material and see if it works. Your fabric must be able to take steam; test first.

Recent Project

I recently created soft cornices for a bay and sink window from a light-weight plaid upholstery fabric. As I unrolled the material I could see that the woven design was very slanted. This was not good news as the soft cornices were straight across the top and sides and the design drift would be very obvious.

By using the second blocking option I was able to correct the problem but I had to repeat the process several times. Once the fabric was steamed it held the new, straight position and I was able to successfully complete the project. **CHF**
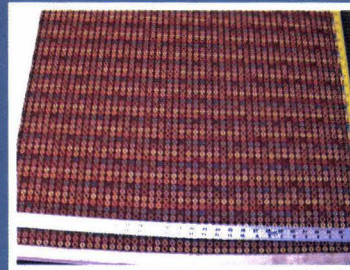
Photo 1: Fabric design is not straight.
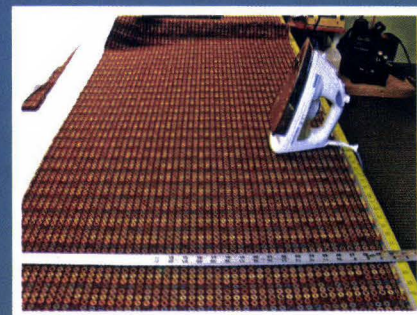
Photos 2: Stretch fabric on the bias to correct the pattern.

Photo 4: Pin fabric to the worktable and steam