



In this cross post from Elizabeth McCarten's [blog](#) we get a closer look at how she adapted [Sandridge](#) for the women's version.



When I graduated from law school 27 (yikes!) years ago, I won the prize for Women and the Law. I was part of the first big wave of women graduates in law, and full of assumptions that would be blown away over the succeeding decades. I worked for 5 years and then, when Bill, my husband, was offered a job with the International Monetary Fund in Washington, DC, I left my job and became a stay-at-home mum for 20 years. I became the glue that held the family together while Bill was globe trotting and we were on our own in a foreign country. I knitted my way through those

years, attending the Maryland Sheep and Wool Festival, Montgomery County Studio Tours, and workshops with Alice Starmore and Debbie Bliss.

Now I'm back at work, my kids are off at university, and I'm still knitting and thinking about knitting. I'm thinking about women and the workplace and knitting, and I'm so thankful that we've got past the era when work attire meant 'menswear' for women--the little tailored suits with floppy bow ties that were de rigueur when I entered the workforce. This has led me to think about what it is that makes a sweater 'feminine'. Bows and ruffles aren't my style. So what is it that makes a sweater a female sweater, and what is it that transforms a menswear style into something distinctly female, yet something that can be worn both to the office and to the farmers' market on the weekend? My recently published design, Sandridge, falls into this category. I first designed this as a jacket for my son, James, with no thought of re-doing it in any other form. Near the end of the process, I needed to see how the work was progressing and, James being out of the house at the time, I slipped the garment on myself. (James and I both wear the same chest size, but that is the ONLY measurement we have in common!) The hip-length jacket was tunic-length on me. Hmm, I thought. These zigzag lines are very flattering. What if I changed the silhouette to accommodate hips? What if I replaced the zipper with big buttons? What if the collar was open at the throat to allow the wearer to show off a pretty scarf?

This brings me to the following list of personal design preferences (I don't like the word 'rules') that guide me when I knit for the female form:

1. When looking at a sweater, it should be immediately apparent that it is a woman's sweater, i.e. the silhouette, the details, should declare that this is a sweater for a woman. Sounds obvious, but it isn't, especially for my generation, which for many years knitted unisex sweaters for men and women from the same patterns.
2. Avoid ribbing at the hips. Yes, it can look flattering in a form-fitting sweater on a young person. However, the majority of women look more attractive in sweaters that have a little looseness or drape in the hip area. There are plenty of ways of making an edge non-curling other than by utilizing ribbing. In Sandridge, I extended the cables right to the edges of both the body and cuffs. I did the same thing in my earlier design, Valentine (see photo).
3. Build in a little waist and hip shaping. Even plump middle-aged women like me look better when there is some shaping. If it looks great on a slightly plump person, it will look fabulous on a slim one.
4. Pay extra attention to the neckline. V-necklines and scooped necklines are always better than crewnecks. Avoid bulky turtlenecks and go for tall stand-up collars instead (as in Sandridge). Maybe I have these neckline preferences because I'm short, but I think that most women look better in garments that create these more vertical lines. I always think of Katherine Hepburn in the movie 'Desk Set', where she portrayed a strong-willed beautiful, intelligent woman with marvelously well-designed clothes.
5. Aim for designs that work on a wide age range. I design garments to be worn by me and my 18-year-old daughter. In the case of Sandridge, all that was required to make the design suit her, was to make the jacket fitted to the waist before it flared out. This is the practical knitter speaking--I want to get as much bang for the buck as possible from my time spent

designing.

6. Finally, employ feminine finishing details, such as special buttons, seed stitch, lace, etc.

My goal is always to create, in a subtle way, a garment that is unfussy, but unmistakably feminine.