



Fiona Ellis has a way with cables (and lace and colorwork, for that matter) and her design for Spring/Summer is no exception. [Harriet](#) is proof that gorgeous cables can be perfect for cool weather in a comfortable cotton blend. Fiona takes us through her design process in this fascinating blog post.



“Knitting is a traditional craft, linked both to the past and to the future by the thread of current practice.” A line that I use over and over to describe my approach to designing: basically we don’t have to re-invent the wheel every time, we can apply what we have learned from traditional techniques to make contemporary garments and thus come up with new ways to approach our craft.

So when I was designing Harriet I knew that I wanted to add what I call “filler stitches” into the areas defined by the cables to add extra texture and dimension. So my starting point was looking at cables that already existed and at what filler stitches had been used before. I quickly came to the conclusion that from a technical standpoint, I could not deviate easily from this tried and tested route. These patterns need to have small repeats to make them simple to put into small areas and

so ruled out many interesting initial possibilities. I ended up with the old stand-bys of seed and rib, both of which have a two stitch repeat.

With that settled I moved onto looking at the path the cable cords themselves would draw. Harriet was to be a feminine sweater or cardigan (instructions are given for both), so the lines created needed to be soft and flowing. I also liked the idea of working with a pattern that created pairs or double elements. Using tradition patterns as a jumping off point I came up with several variations, some of which I liked and some of which I thought were ugly.

You can never tell what a cable will look like until you knit it, so swatching is the only way to know. I love doing this. It is the part of the process which for me can generate many other ideas, some of which head off on tangents, that's why I keep a notebook, enabling me to return to them one day.

The size of the repeat, especially the row count became very important at this stage. I could certainly come up with something beautiful but knew that some (although certainly not all) knitters might be put off by a huge long repeat. I think that there must be some kind of magic number to this, you know not so long that you can never learn it but long enough to encourage you to knit a whole repeat in one sitting and thus move the project along at a good speed. Now if only I knew what that magic number was.... but I'm sure it varies from knitter to knitter.

Anyway I thought you might like to see a few of my swatches and hear my thoughts on what I thought worked (and what did not).



1) Single element divided with the two filler stitches contained in the same circle - didn't look feminine enough and would produce a sort of polka dot effect.



2) Celtic Knot first attempt: mirror cables within the same repeat. This is 52 rows long – yikes! Plus the areas for adding the filler stitches are way too small.



3) Titling cables: loved the lines and the filler stitch areas are a good size but again repeat is too long at a whopping 56 rows.



4) Final design: row repeat is a minuscule (ahem) 42 rows, nice size areas for the filler stitches. Soft gentle curving lines.

Then I decided to create the mirror image cable, as the negative space created between two cables can sometimes be almost as interesting as the cable its-self. Also I felt that the double element aspect would be more aesthetically pleasing if placed symmetrically.

I guess I didn't achieve my aim to have a really manageable row repeat but I loved the cable and knowing that it would probably appeal to avid cable knitters I decided to go with it anyway.