



by Clara Parkes

Stitches are patient creatures; they stand in line and wait their turn. But once in a great while, an impatient stitch (or two, or three, or more) will jump the line. Needles don't know the difference, so they take the line-jumpers next. By the time they get to the stitches that got snubbed, things are tense. The overlooked stitches are peevish. It takes a while—a few rows, depending on how many stitches jumped the line—for everyone to calm back down again.

That, my friends, is how cables work. They introduce a bit of a traffic snarl where once everything was going smoothly.

You can tell a lot about a yarn by how it responds to a cable. Does it go with the flow, or does it get all tense and pouty? Do the cables look crisp and sculptural, or do they stay low to the ground? As an added creative challenge, most cables are accompanied by purl stitches that help the cables stand out; they also help to buffer the cable complexities.

Amy Miller's Dressage sweater drew my eye not only because it features an attractive double cable running beneath each arm, but because it buffers the cables with purl stitches *everywhere*. The entire sweater, barring those cables under each arm, is a sea of reverse stockinette. Ribbing on the yoke adds welcome punctuation up top.

Yarns behave differently on the purl side than they do on the knit side; and they certainly do different things with cables. And so I swatched.

The original sweater was knit in a squishy Merino singles with faint variegation in thickness and color. So I began by wiping the creative slate clean and using the Number 2 pencil of yarns, Brown Sheep Nature Spun.



In this smooth, worsted-spun three-ply yarn, the cables looked like tubes of twisted taffy, round and clear. The purl stitches looked almost like a grid, or a mesh, or even a tray of carefully organized grains of rice. The solid color added to the overall effect of crispness and uniformity.



But what if uniformity isn't your thing? The fastest way to add wobble to your stitches is to move from a smooth, rounded yarn to a heathered two-ply yarn. Cestari's 2-Ply Wool fit the bill admirably. This fleece-dyed woolen-spun yarn is made from Columbia wool, which falls on the fine side of the softness spectrum.



The difference was immediate. Where the Nature Spun had presented even, orderly purls, the Cestari offered up a bumpy, highly-heathered sea of texture. The cables were much quieter, still offering clear enough detail, but with a touch of fuzzy, lumpy distortion.



Finally, I migrated away from the country earthiness of Cestari and toward the bright lights and big city bling of Berroco Flicker. While presenting a soft, fuzzy look that's similar to the original yarn used in the pattern, Flicker achieves its look through dramatically different means. This blend contains 87% baby alpaca, 8% acrylic, and 5% "other" fibers.



Fear not, those “others” usually aren’t anything freakishly strange. Labeling laws in the U.S. dictate that any blend that has five percent or less of a single fiber lists that fiber simply as “other.” Part of that “other,” however, is silver sparkle, and it’s just enough to give a hint of glitz without veering too far into Las Vegas territory.



Having taken my needles off-road for a little while, I'm still uncertain. Would I have used any of these three yarns instead of the original from Manos del Uruguay? Not sure. But I'm glad I swatched.