Mix & Match

Color and prints are beginning to play a large role in fashion once again, in a way we haven’t seen in a very long time. Learn how to fearlessly mix and match fabric prints for an effortless look.

Trend Spotting
On the runways during Fashion Week, a large number of spring ’12 shows emphasized color and print. Designers combined bold, bright colors that many of us were taught not to mix, such as pink and orange or red and violet, and mixed prints more ambitiously than ever.

All the emphasis on print and color means that what appears in stores and what looks “fresh” in the coming seasons will drastically change. In New York City, the fashionable crowd will embrace color and print after years of black, neutrals and solids. Some of the color and print mixing shown on the runways was overwhelming, but that’s typical of runway shows. The designers overemphasize a concept for the runway, but tone it down for ready-made clothing.
Mix it Up

One of the pleasures of sewing for yourself is choosing your own color and print combinations. There are a few basic principles about mixing prints in fashion and design. The following guidelines will help you successfully combine prints without feeling mismatched.

Unified Color Palette: Don’t restrict yourself to a narrow color palette; instead match a few common colors and the opposing print colors will work together. Look for a single dominant color in the chosen prints to help unify the prints and create a coherent feeling between them. For example, select two prints with an overall blue tone or prints that emphasize both blue and green. By staying within one area of the color wheel, the prints work together rather than compete with each other.

Try adding accessories to an outfit that enhance the print choices, such as yellow shoes or a wine-colored belt, that balance your selections and highlight or contrast with the prints. The accessories give the eye someplace to rest and add interest to your outfit without feeling too “matchy-matchy.”

Vary the Scale: The most successful print pairings often feature one large print and one small print. The smaller print supports and enhances the larger print. The difference in scale helps the two prints work together. Most fabric collections have a large and small scale print for this reason. Use this trick to combine all types of prints and you’ll be surprised by what works.

Combine Floral and Geometric Prints: The angles and lines of a geometric print often work well with softer, rounder floral shapes. Try combining an angular print with dots or soft, loopy print. A geometric print works well with floral prints because they play off and enhance each other through their differences. It’s easy to combine two geometrics or a geometric and a floral instead of two florals.

Striped fabric matches most prints. Depending on the prints, combining stripes with dots can be a bold, playful combination or a more subtle pairing. Mixing stripes and florals almost always looks great together. Think about motif variety when combining prints.

Look for “Un-Solid Solids” or “Solid Prints”: Textures, such as wooly tweeds, combined with rich, luxurious velvet, or fuzzy sweaters combined with shiny smooth silk, make an outfit more interesting. Apply the same concept to prints. Many small prints have a visual texture and sometimes even appear solid from a distance, instead of a flat solid fabric. From a few feet away small-scale prints, such as checks, resemble a texture rather than a print and add interest to any outfit.

Fabric Fancy

Always keep the fabric type in mind as you plan and combine prints and colors. It’s important to use fabric with the correct hand (how the fabric feels), drape (how a fabric hangs on the body) and weight (how heavy or thick the fabric is).

Review the clothes in your closet before selecting project fabrics. Choose similar fabric weights and textures to those in your closet, and then start experimenting with other fabrics that you find interesting. Always check the pattern envelope to find fabric suggestions.

Audition the chosen prints before cutting. Hold them up to a mirror to see how they look together. Or hold them in front of you and have a friend take a photograph. Discovering how a fabric photographs before using it helps you gain a different perspective on the best print combinations. Or ask a fashion-conscious friend what they think about your chosen print combinations.
Creative COMBOS
Discover stylish print combinations to create a basic dress and jacket ensemble.

Floral + Ikat
Choose a warm color palette for a stylish spring outfit. Select lightweight sateen with a large-scale watercolor floral print for the dress and a lightweight canvas with small ikat medallion print for the jacket.

The large-scale floral looks great for a sleeveless dress, and layers nicely with a the small-scale ikat medallion print jacket. The medallion print has plenty of solid space around the print motifs, which creates a more subtle print that matches a busier print.

Paisley + Check
Choose a unified color palette in a cool shade, such as aqua, and use textured check canvas fabric as a “solid print” for a sophisticated and understated ensemble.

The check print canvas creates a solid print, adding texture and visual interest to the jacket. The paisley floral print dress is the focus of the outfit, which has a loose, hand-drawn feel. Combining the textured effect of the subtle “solid” print with the paisley floral print prevents the dress from becoming lost and helps emphasize the hand-painted appearance of the print.

Kaleidoscope + Ikat
Go for a bold approach and select a large-scale print for the jacket and a smaller-scale geometric print for the dress. The print combination draws attention to the jacket.

The two prints share the same color palette, despite the wide range of colors within each print. Selecting two busy prints works as long as they share a few matching colors.

The scale of the two prints are quite different, which actually helps them coordinate. The ikat print has soft edges that contrast the hard edges of the kaleidoscope print.

Tip: Select lightweight sateen fabric for dresses, skirts and blouses. Canvas works well for bottoms and jackets or more structured dresses that don’t require a lot of drape.
Dressed to THRILL
Combine different prints on a dress bodice and skirt to create “solid” print color blocking look or to mimic the look of separates.

Stripes + Dots
Select a geometric striped print for the dress bodice and a geometric dot print for the skirt. The print combination works well because the colors coordinate, the print scales differ and stripes easily match with other prints. In addition, the stripes are a “solid print” and add texture to the simple dress.

Geometric + Cloisonné
Choose a unified color palette, such as yellow with pops of pink, for a subtle sundress. Select a geometric pattern that draws attention to the interesting dart details on the dress bodice and a cloisonné-inspired print for the skirt.

Stripes + Geometric
Combine two geometric prints in a cool color palette, such as green, with slightly different scales. Choose a subtle stripe that works as an “un-solid solid” for the bodice and a bold smaller-scale geometric print for the skirt. Both prints have textural interest that unifies the outfit. Combine this print mix on a dress with a bold floral jacket for a wearable, but not too overwhelming, ensemble.

Tip: Combine prints within a dress with a yoke, obi-style belt or trim.

SOURCES
Simplicity carries the featured Lisette Passport Dress and Jacket pattern: simplicity.com.
Common Era provided the Seychelles shoes ($86): mycommonera.com.