Easy-to-Sew Totes

BY JO CALVERT

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LUIS ALBUQUERQUE

Jo Calvert | info@jocalvert.ca

- Suggested story concept
- Designed and produced models for photography
- Wrote story and instructions

Beach towels, library books or lunch and your work files – whatever you carry around, the load seems a little lighter when you tote it in a nice, bright bag. Choose a fabric you love, then stitch your own simple tote – with or without a reinforced base – or a roomier, lined version. Neither requires much yardage, so inexpensive remnants will do the job – but we used waterproof oilcloth to add some shine to this pair.

NOTES

> If using oilcloth, read the tips at bottom right, first.

> Use 1 cm (⅜ in) seam allowance unless otherwise indicated.

> If desired, bind seam allowance with machine-zigzag.

SIMPLE TOTE
YOU NEED:

Piece of sturdy canvas, denim or upholstery fabric, 101 x 50 cm (40 x 19¾ in) or, if using oilcloth, 96 x 50 cm (37⅞ x 19¾ in), for bag

Strip of contrasting or coordinating sturdy fabric, 50 x 44 cm (19¾ x 17⅜ in) or, if using oilcloth, 50 x 42 cm (19¾ x 16½ in), for reinforcing (optional)

1.10 m flat, firm, 1-in braid, for handles

Matching thread

Dressmaker's chalk pencil and ruler

TO MAKE:

1 If using fabric strip, press under 1 cm (⅜ in) along each long edge.

2 Centre strip, right side up, across right side of bag piece; pin, then edgestitch in place.

3 Fold bag piece so right sides are together and short (top) edges are even; stitch along each side edge to form bag.

4 Cut braid into 2 equal lengths. Turn bag right side out. Press under 2.5 cm (1 in) twice around top edge of bag (if using oilcloth, fold under 2.5 cm once). At bottom fold, mark centre front and centre back. Four cm (1⅝ in) from front mark at either side, push 1 cut end of braid 2.5 cm under fold, to form handle, and pin. Repeat with remaining braid and back. With handle loops down inside bag, edgestitch bottom fold in place, catching handle ends in stitching.

5 Fold each handle back against wrong side of top edge so loop is up; pin, then topstitch in X-shape to secure.

6 Turn wrong side out.

7 Flatten bag, then slide palm along bottom fold to crease. Working on 1 at a time: Open out corner, then refold flat against work surface so side seam

8

aligns with crease. Measure along each new fold and mark 12 cm (4¾ in) from corner; stitch straight across from mark to mark, then trim off corner, leaving 6 mm (¼ in) seam allowance.

8 Turn right side out.

9 If desired, form boxy bag sides as follows: Measure along top edge of front and mark 9 cm (3½ in) from each side seam; fold front from each mark down to corresponding corner of base and edgestitch along fold. Repeat for back to complete tote.

LARGE LINED TOTE
YOU NEED:

Piece of canvas, denim or sturdy upholstery fabric, 105 x 58 cm (41¼ x 22⅞ in) or, if using oilcloth, 100 x 58 cm (39⅜ x 22⅞ in), for bag

Piece of contrasting or coordinating sturdy fabric or oilcloth, 95 x 58 cm (37⅜ x 22⅞ in), for lining

1.10 m flat, firm, 1-in braid, for handles

Matching thread

Dressmaker's chalk pencil and ruler

5

TO MAKE:

1 Follow Step 3 for Simple Tote. Increasing seam allowance by 1 mm (1/16 in), repeat with lining piece. Follow Step 7 for Simple Tote. Repeat with lining.

2 Turn bag right side out. Aligning all corresponding seams, slide lining, right down into bag (top edge is below top edge of bag). Follow Step 4 for Simple Tote, folding top edge of bag over lining, pushing 1 cut end of braid 5 cm (2 in) from each centre mark at either side, and catching handle ends and lining in stitching. Follow Step 5 for Simple Tote. ●

WHEN SEWING WITH OILCLOTH...

> Any holes are permanent, so pin only in seam allowances or along seam lines.

> Use a sharp machine needle (a leather needle if you have one) and strong thread (we used buttonhole twist).

> Choose a long, straight-stitch length (you won't need to machine-zigzag or serge raw edges; oilcloth doesn't fray).

> Use a nonstick presser foot so the cloth feeds evenly.

> Try sewing scraps, first, to check thread tension, then adjust if necessary.

> Oilcloth wipes clean; don't machine-wash or iron it.