

BORO BAG

Many old *boro* robes have been patched and patched again, with the random stitches and areas of fabric wear giving them an incredible texture, which is prized by collectors. The improvisational effect of the patches has been compared to abstract art. This strong, unlined *boro* bag will withstand heavy use. It is covered in patches hand-sewn onto a foundation fabric. More patches can be added as it begins to take on the patina of use. Make it from new or recycled fabrics. *Boro* is a great technique for beginners to patchwork and quilting.

You will need

Striped or plain cotton fabric:

Bag handles: two pieces, each 11.5 x 35.5 cm (4½ x 14 in.)

Bag foundation: 38 x 95 cm (15 x 37½ in.)

Note: *Narrow-width Japanese striped kimono cotton was used for this bag, and the selvages left on the sides of the cut panel. If you are using other fabric, add 1.5 cm (½ in.) to each long edge and press a hem, as for the short ends (see step 2).*

Assorted fabric scraps for *boro* patching, including plain, striped and woven patterns. (The quantity will depend on how you arrange your scraps. This is a good technique for fabrics that are slightly too thick for patchwork or have a slightly lower thread count, such as linen and cotton blends, lightweight denim, etc.)

One 100 m skein *sashiko* thread, Olympus medium, white

General sewing thread, dark grey or blue (or to match fabric scraps), to assemble bag
Sashiko needle, suitable for medium *sashiko* thread

Hand-sewing needle

Pins

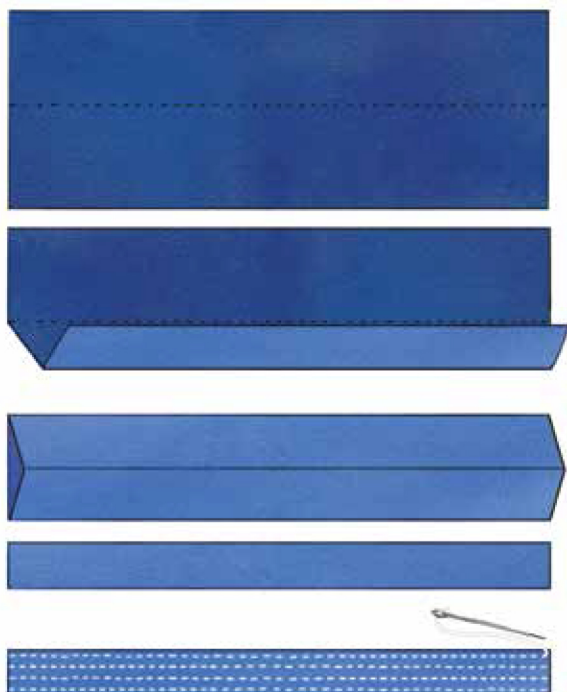
Optional

Sewing machine



How to make

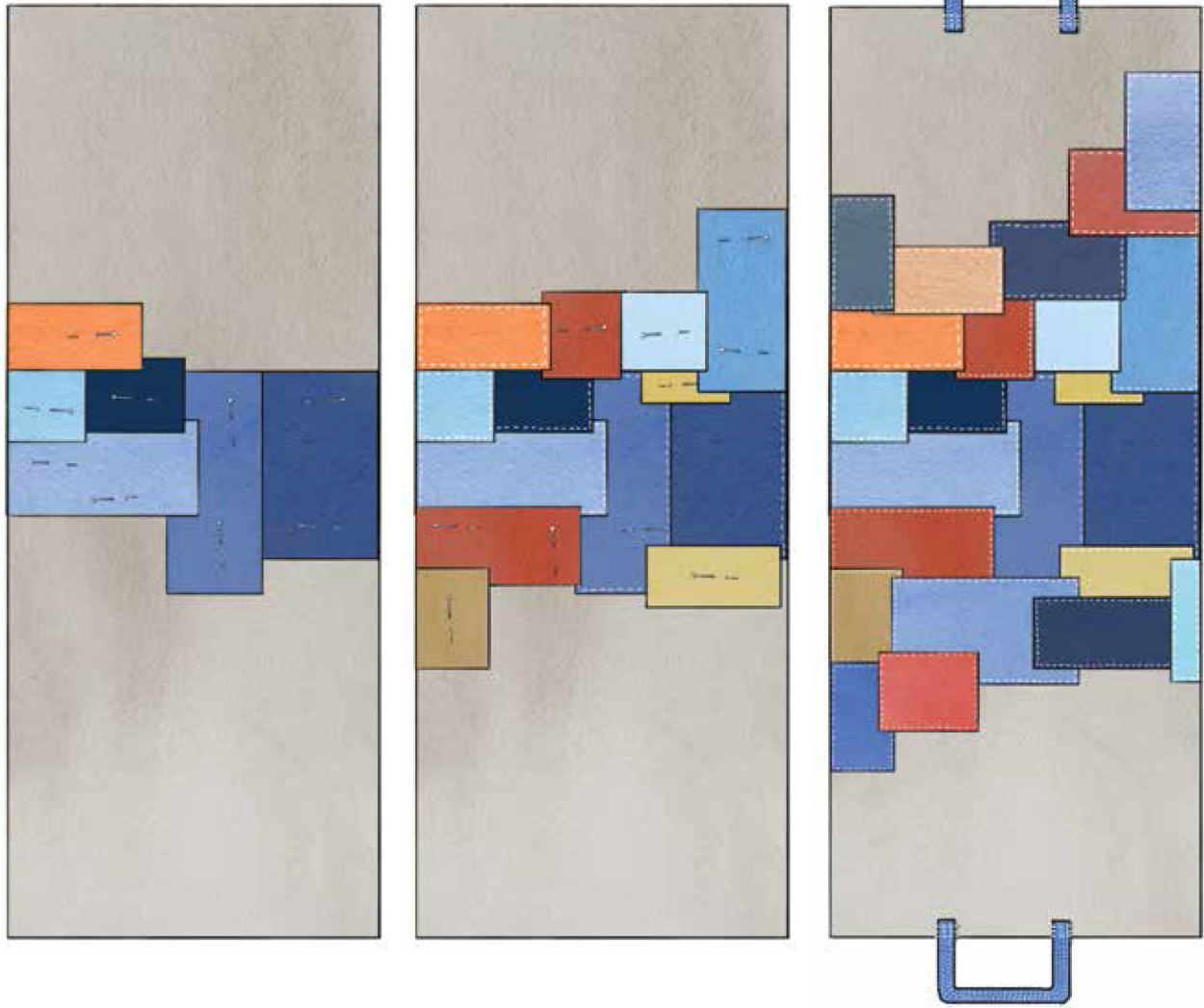
1 Start by making the bag handles, using your two 11.5 x 35.5 cm (4½ x 14 in.) pieces. Fold and press each handle as shown in the illustration below. Using *sashiko* thread, hand stitch along each long edge of each handle, going through all the layers, about 2 mm (¼ in.) from the edge. Add another two rows of stitching along the length of the handle, for reinforcement.



2 At each short end of the foundation fabric, fold a 1.5 cm (½ in.) hem towards what will be the outside of the bag. There is no need to stitch this hem in place, as it will be covered with fabric patches and sewn down as you make your *boro*. If you are not using narrow-width traditional Japanese fabric, you will also need to do this along each long edge of the foundation fabric.

3 Start covering the foundation fabric with patches, working from the centre, as shown in the illustration opposite; this area will become the bottom of your bag. While there is no real rule to positioning the patches in *boro*, working 'outwards' in this way will make the patches overlap like shingles (tiles). Pin the first patches in place. **Note:** Your patches do not have to be square or rectangular, but most old Japanese *boro* have mainly rectangular shapes, due to the fabrics having been recycled from kimono and other garments with minimal shaping.

4 Add more patches, overlapping the previous, varying size, colours and patterns for effect. Begin stitching down the edges of the patches with uneven **running stitches** (see p.17), using your *sashiko* needle and thread. Start and finish your sewing with a knot, tucked under the edge of a patch. Your stitching lines do not have to be straight - many old *boro* have very wobbly lines - but you could follow stripes or stitch parallel to the patch edges. Continue adding patches, gradually covering all but the short ends of the foundation fabric - any raw edges at the sides of the bag will be hidden later, when the bag is finished. **Note:** Take care not to accidentally cover any pins so you can't remove them later!



5 Position the bag handles at the ends of the foundation fabric (these will become the top edges of the bag), as shown in the illustration above. The handles are sewn onto the right side and more patches are used to cover the handle ends. Make sure the handles are centred at the 'tops' of the bag, with the ends overlapping the edge of the bag panel by 2.5 cm (1 in.). The gap between the handle ends is 9 cm (3½ in.) on each side. Make sure the handles are the same length, in the same position on each side of the bag, and not twisted. Use several lines of running stitches going back and forth to secure the handles in place. Like all the *boro* stitching, this will be visible inside the finished bag.



Extra stitching lines at the bottom of the bag - pictured here on the interior - provide added strength and durability.

6 Finish adding the *boro* patches to each end of the foundation fabric. When adding the final (top) row of patches, turn a 1.5 cm ($\frac{1}{2}$ in.) hem allowance under on each patch, unless you want to have a raw edge at the top of your bag.

7 Now start adding extra lines of running stitch, both horizontal and vertical, all over the bag panel. The lines don't have to go all the way across but they should be fairly close together, between 1 cm ($\frac{3}{8}$ in.) and 2.5 cm (1 in.) apart). When stitching at right angles over the edge of a patch, try to make your last stitch into the edge of the patch piece, as this will hold the raw edge in place and prevent too much fraying. After stitching all over, turn your *boro* panel over and add some extra stitching lines where the bottom of the bag will be, as extra reinforcement (as shown above). If you have used striped fabric for your panel, you can use the stripes to line up this stitching - a nice contrast to the more irregular stitching on the outside of the bag.



Your finished bag will showcase all your scrap fabrics, with the all-over stitching a unifying design feature.

8 Now it's time to construct your bag. Fold the boro bag panel in half, wrong sides (i.e., foundation fabric) together. Join the sides of the bag using dark general sewing thread, stitching about 3 mm ($\frac{1}{8}$ in.) from the bag edges. If hand sewing, use **backstitch** (see p.17). If sewing by machine, take a few reverse stitches at each end of the seam to secure. Now, using *sashiko* thread again, oversew up and down each side of the bag, sewing over the previous stitching line, so that it is hidden. Use two rows of oversewing, to create 'X' stitches on each seam.

9 Optional: Turn the bag inside out and add a small reinforcing patch running across the top of each of the side seams, stitching from the inside. To give the bag an authentic used look, machine wash at 40-60°C. This will slightly wrinkle the boro and help to 'set' the running stitches.

Now try...

Changing the size of your bag. You can make this bag to any size by altering the size of your foundation fabric, which itself can be pieced, if you don't want to buy new. These textiles simply become more beautiful as they are used and worn, so are perfect for things that will have a tough life!