



Chelydra

"Dancer With An Attitude"

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THE LAME LAMENT

It's a sad fact of life that the most beautiful fabrics for middle eastern dance costumes are the most difficult fabrics to sew. Especially lam. Almost any lam. And we keep buying it, year after year.

This article represents my love/hate relationship with a variety of lams, most of which I don't even have the technical names for. As the old saying goes "experience allows you to recognize a mistake when you make it again". And again ... and again ...

Tissue Lame: The great seducer. Originally only a problem during the holiday season, it's now out there year-round, ensnaring the hapless student or dancer with its siren call. Fantastic colors, great shine (on both sides!), and reasonable prices.

My advice is, "*Just say NO to tissue lam*". It's hot, it's fragile, it's scratchy, it doesn't drape worth a darn (I call it the puffy pumpkin effect), and you can't sit down in it unless you want to start looking like you're wearing finger-pressed aluminum foil.

The truly fatal error is to try to use it for a veil; not only does it have a mind of its own (catching the slightest air current and taking off for parts unknown), it's opaque (you'd better know where the edge of the stage is), and it's impossible to transport anywhere without creasing.

My friend **Scherzade** gave me four yards of chartreuse tissue lam for Christmas last year. She was so tickled that she'd found it that I had to suppress the moan of despair. Things are looking up, though - I'm experimenting with turning it into crinkle lam using a crystal pleating technique described in **Threads** magazine. Perhaps I'll have the results by this time next year.

On the up side (for the lam family), tissue lam responds well to most stitches - straight stitch, zigzag, or serger. You should start with a fresh needle, and replace it whenever the fabric starts to snag. Mylar threads will dull a needle very quickly.

French seams are recommended. You should avoid extremely fitted garments involving highly stressed waistline, underarm, or crotch seams. You should line fitted areas unless you enjoy covering yourself in saran wrap. Your best bet is to use it for a circular underskirt or accent panels. It can be used for a circular veil if the outer edge is well weighted.

Textured Lame: I don't know the official name of this fabric. I have a number of unofficial names, most of them unprintable. It is very soft, with a looped or crinkled mylar surface and a loosely woven cotton backing. Highly reflective (on the right side only), it is available in bright gold and silver and a variety of stunning jewel tones. Prices range from \$10-12/yard.

So far, so good. Now for the down side. It's even more fragile than tissue lam, and it starts to fray the second the scissors pass the cut (pinking shears don't help). All seams should be reinforced with fusible knit interfacing (carefully, or you'll melt the lam). In addition, sleeves or bodices should be fully lined to take as much stress as possible off of the fabric.

For assembly, a 20-stitch narrow zigzag or four-thread extra-wide serger stretch stitch work well. All raw edges should be overcast. In my experience, only the wide serger stitch has managed to overcast this fabric reliably

without pulling out.

It has proved impossible for me to prevent the mylar threads from picking or pulling as I sew the seam, but the fabric texture minimizes the effect of the snags. The problem might be eliminated by a different type or size of needle, but my conventional machine will only sew with a Singer yellow band ball point, size 9 or 11. Neither of those will sew this fabric without pulling.

Brocaded Lam: Difficult to find, thank heavens, or a lot of us would be in therapy. A very drapeable lam with a raised brocaded or jacquard effect in a variety of patterns and color combinations. A popular item on the evening wear bargain table at **G Street Fabrics** in DC.

Don't use it if you value your sanity. It ravel if you even think about cutting it, and won't reliably hold a stitch of any kind on the cross grain. Fusible knit interfacing cannot be used to reinforce the seams without sacrificing the drape, which is why you wanted it in the first place! It must be sewn immediately after cutting or it will self-destruct. A serged seam will hold together just long enough to allow you to finish a french seam with a narrow zigzag. Straight stitching on this fabric is futile.

After completing your project, you may expect to spend several hours vacuuming your sewing room, and any other room you were foolish enough to take the fabric into.

Unfortunately, I didn't know how charming this fabric was until I had purchased 45 yards of it (now I know why it was only \$1/yard). Silly me, I didn't think anything could be worse than textured lam.

Twill Lam: I call this fabric twill lam because of the subtle diagonal pattern in the weave. Available in a wide variety of colors. The weight varies depending on the manufacturer, but it usually has medium body. The backing is dull and unattractive, and it has a tendency to wrinkle.

The best use for this fabric is for covering bras and belts. Panel skirts should be lined (finally, perhaps, a good use for tissue lam), and circular skirts should be closed.

Fuzzy Lam: A new fabric that appeared in stores here last year. Expensive (\$16/yard), but dynamite! Available in antique silver, gold, copper (breathtaking), and black (the 60's wet look). A napped fabric rather like short metallic fur, always on a black base fabric.

On the heavy side, it is appropriate for fitted beledi dresses, panel skirts, and covering bras and belts. It doesn't ravel and sews like a dream. Seams may be itchy if not bound. The only drawback that I have found with this lam is that it sheds little mylar hairs all over the cutting room.

Rayon Lam: All of the drape, controllability, and body missing from tissue lam. It cost more, but its durability and relative ease of construction make the difference worthwhile. It is spectacular as a veil, skirt, or beledi dress. Usually only found in antique silver and antique gold (because of the black background threads). A little nasty when working on the cross grain, but not anything like the textured and brocaded lams.

Foil Knit: Technically not a lam, but with the requisite shine and glamour. Available for many years in solid gold, silver, and a variety of jewel tones, usually on white tricot. In recent years, it has become commonly available in a wide variety of prints, usually on black tricot. You should choose the larger prints for stage use; the smaller, more detailed prints will look solid from a distance. In addition to the glamour, one of the most endearing qualities of a foil knit is that it doesn't ravel, pick, or shed mylar all over the sewing room.

Usage should be restricted to patterns which work well with knits, such as fitted beledi dresses or harem pants. This fabric is not recommended for circular skirts because the weight of the fabric will continually cause it to stretch along the bias.

This material, especially the solids, must be handled like leather or vinyl fabrics. Once the needle has passed through a foil area, the foil is gone and the needle mark is permanent. In other words, sew it right the first time!

Another word of warning - the foil will wear off wherever two fabric surfaces rub together, such as the inseams of pants or where fasteners are continually handled. If your costume needs to have a long stage life, this fabric is not a wise choice.