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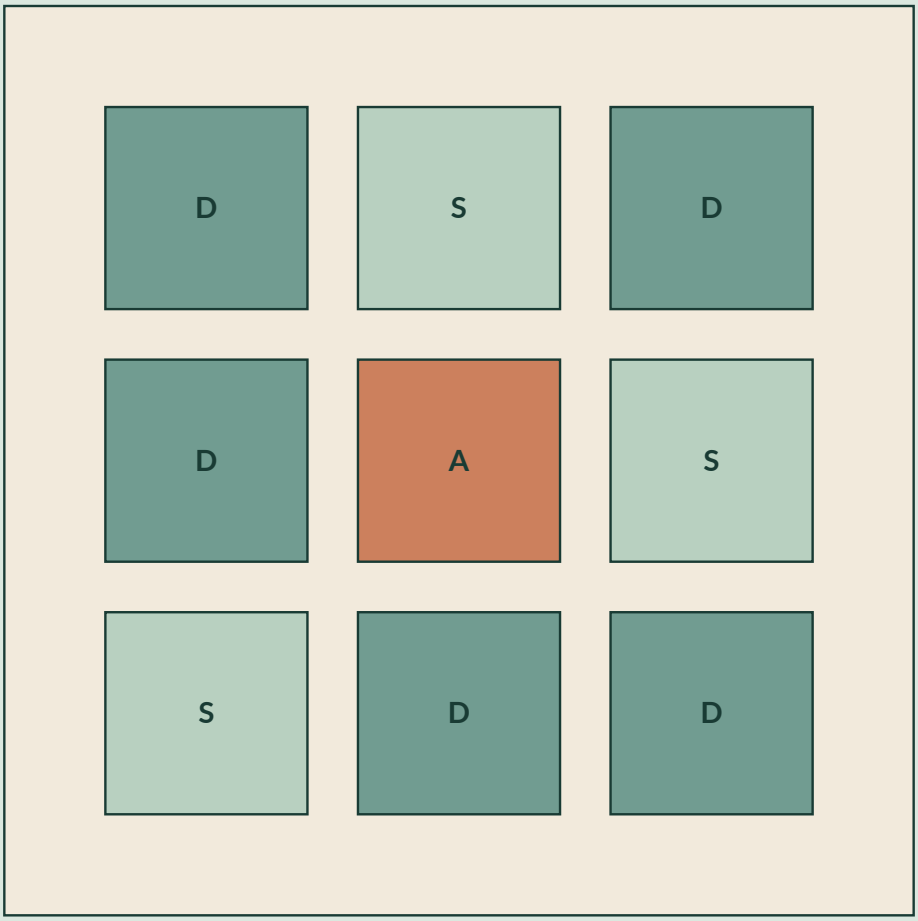
MAKE / OFFCUTS & CREATIVE REUSE

Build a Color-Coordinated Scrap-Fabric Collage



180 mm backing / 140 mm field

40 mm squares • 10 mm channels • D5 / S3 / A1

Arrange nine fabric scraps in a coordinated palette and stitch them onto a flat display panel.

14 practical steps • Original diagrams and maker records

Illustrative plans — not physical test results

Before you start

A small collage lets the colour and texture of leftover cloth become the subject rather than a compromise. Make a nine-tile, stitch-down composition on a stable cotton backing. The edges are deliberately visible; choose fabrics that do not shed badly. This is a flat indoor decorative panel, not a washable mat, potholder, toy or item for contact with food.

Materials

One 180 x 180 mm piece of stable cotton backing; nine sound fabric scraps large enough for 40 x 40 mm squares; matching or contrasting sewing thread, suitable hand needle, fabric scissors, ruler, marking tool compatible with the cloth, paper for a palette, clips and a flat work surface. Optional plain backing card for display. Avoid contaminated, brittle, coated or heavily fraying scraps. Keep needles and loose pieces away from children and pets.

Plan the project

Use a 180 mm square backing. A 140 x 140 mm design field starts 20 mm from each edge. In each row place three 40 mm squares with 10 mm gaps: 40 + 10 + 40 + 10 + 40 = 140 mm. From the upper left of the backing, tile origins are x = 20, 70, 120 mm and y = 20, 70, 120 mm. Keep at least 20 mm border; use a simple running stitch around each patch about 3 mm inside its edge, adjusting for stable cloth. If a scrap frays to the stitch line, replace it or finish its edge before use and remeasure. Select three palette roles: five dominant, three supporting and one accent square. The nine patches stay separate; no seams join them. Display flat in a suitable frame or mount without claiming archival properties.

Steps 1–2

1. Select sound cloth

Lay the scraps on a clean table and inspect both faces. Reject damp or mouldy pieces, sticky coatings, damaged fabric and uncertain contamination. Prefer stable lightweight woven cotton or other compatible cloth; thick seams and slippery fabrics make the grid harder to keep flat.

2. Prepare backing and scraps

Follow the individual care labels if cleaning is needed. Let fabrics dry fully, flatten them without stretching, and keep each labelled for care. If mixed fibres have incompatible care, treat the finished panel as display-only rather than promising it can be washed.

Steps 3–4

3. Choose three colour roles

Sort pieces into a dominant family, a supporting family and one accent. Compare them in daylight or a consistent indoor light. Choose five dominant, three supporting and one accent; contrast may be quiet, but ensure the accent remains distinguishable from its neighbours.

4. Mark the backing

Cut the backing to 180 x 180 mm. Measure 20 mm in from every edge and mark a 140 mm square lightly. Use an appropriate marking tool and check an offcut first for visibility and removal. Leave the border untouched.

Steps 5–6

5. Cut the nine patches

Make a 40 x 40 mm paper guide. Cut one stable layer at a time with fabric scissors on a table, fingers clear of the blades. Count nine squares and mark each colour role on paper, not on the display face.

6. Plan the layout

Set the patches on the nine positions shown in Pattern 1. Try the accent in the centre first; move it if another placement gives a clearer focal point. Compare colour value, pattern scale and texture without adding more colours.

Steps 7–8

7. Record the selected arrangement

Write the role and scrap ID in each cell of the map. Photograph the layout if useful, but record the nine positions even if you do. Keep the 10 mm channels open and ensure no tile extends beyond the marked design field.

8. Choose the stitch

Practise a small running-stitch line on spare matching cloth and backing. Use a suitable needle and thread; make small even stitches without pulling the backing into ridges. For fragile edges use sound replacement cloth or finish edges before returning to the grid.

Steps 9–10

9. Secure the first square

Start at the upper left position. Clip or hold the patch without distortion and stitch around its perimeter about 3 mm in from its edge. Secure thread on the reverse. Remove clips and lay the panel flat before starting the next patch.

10. Work across each row

Stitch the remaining two patches in the first row and then complete the middle row. Recheck the 10 mm channels after each patch. Avoid long unsecured thread floats across gaps on the reverse; end and start thread separately.

Steps 11–12

11. Complete the final row

Attach the last three squares. Keep the panel supported on the table and inspect the right side for wrinkles. Undo any excessively tight stitches and replace a patch if the fabric is tearing beside them.

12. Tidy the border

Account for needles and clips. Secure remaining thread tails and remove compatible temporary markings according to their instructions. If the backing edge frays, finish with a suitable stitch outside the design field or mount behind a frame lip without covering tiles.

Steps 13–14

13. Choose a display

Place the dry panel on a clean flat display support. Use a frame sized to accommodate the full backing and thickness, or a non-damaging mount suitable for fabric. Avoid direct strong sun, damp locations and heat. Do not claim the mount is archival.

14. Record the composition

Complete the palette and finish records with actual materials, tile positions and observed edge condition. Mark READY FOR DECORATIVE DISPLAY, CHANGE or HOLD. Keep the map so another collage can use the same proportions without repeating the colours.

Fix, care and preserve

Puckering

Remove overly tight stitches and rework with the backing flat.

Fraying

Finish edges before sewing or replace the weak scrap; never rely on stitches through crumbling cloth.

Weak focal point

Swap the accent with a supporting square before fixing the arrangement.

Uneven channels

Measure from the fixed backing edge rather than from a neighbouring patch.

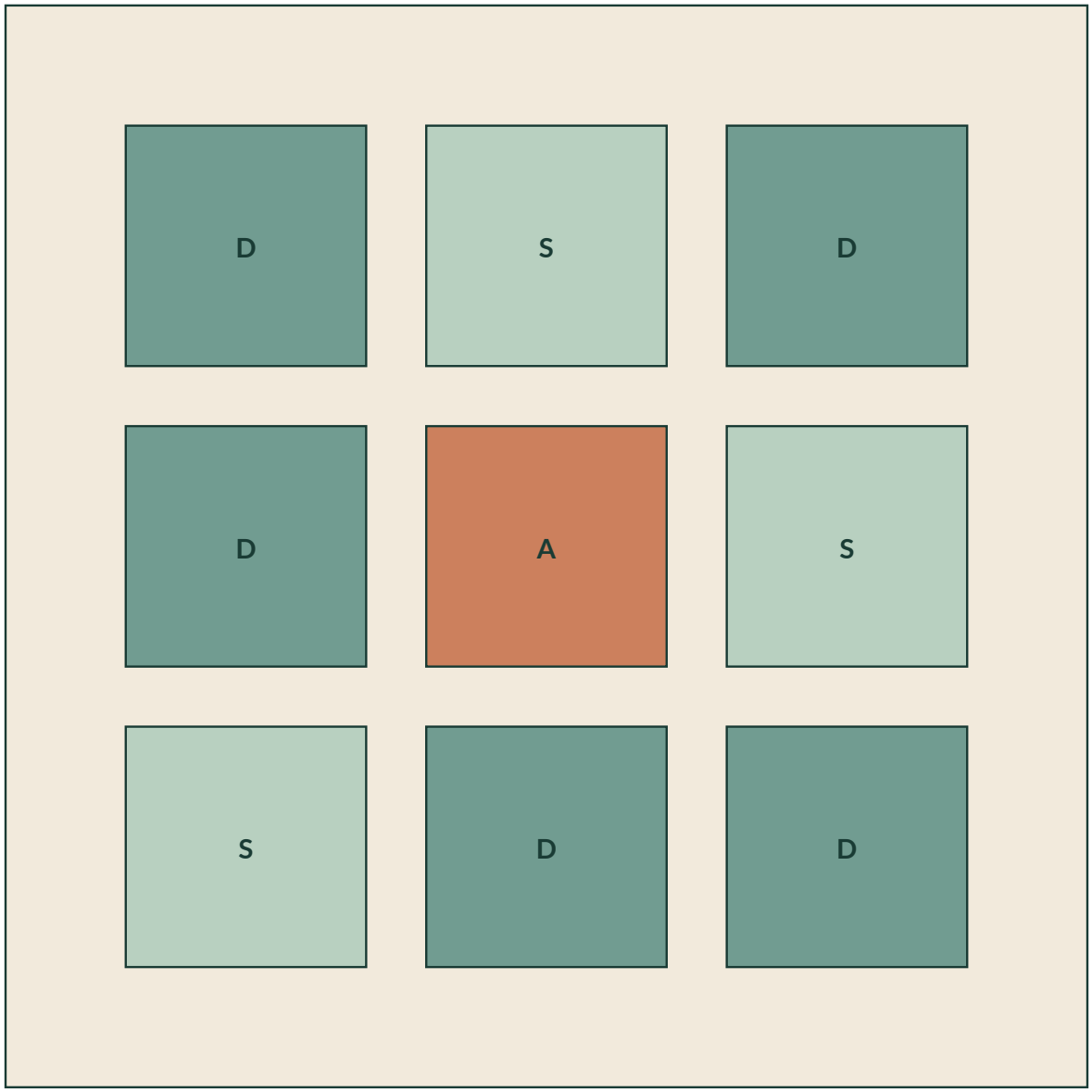
Originality and evidence boundary

Original Steadleaf English prose, design, dimensions, artwork, diagrams and maker records. Follow actual material and tool instructions. No physical construction, cutting, sewing, adhesion, washing, durability or safety testing was performed by the publisher. Adult decorative craft only; no safety or archival certification.

Print the following pages separately if desired. For any actual-size template, disable fit-to-page scaling and check the printed calibration bar. Measured schematics are not full-size cutting patterns.

Pattern 1

Nine-tile fabric map: backing 180 x 180 mm; field 140 x 140 mm; squares 40 x 40 mm; gaps 10 mm. The sample shows five D, three S and one A. Measured schematic, not a full-size cutting template.



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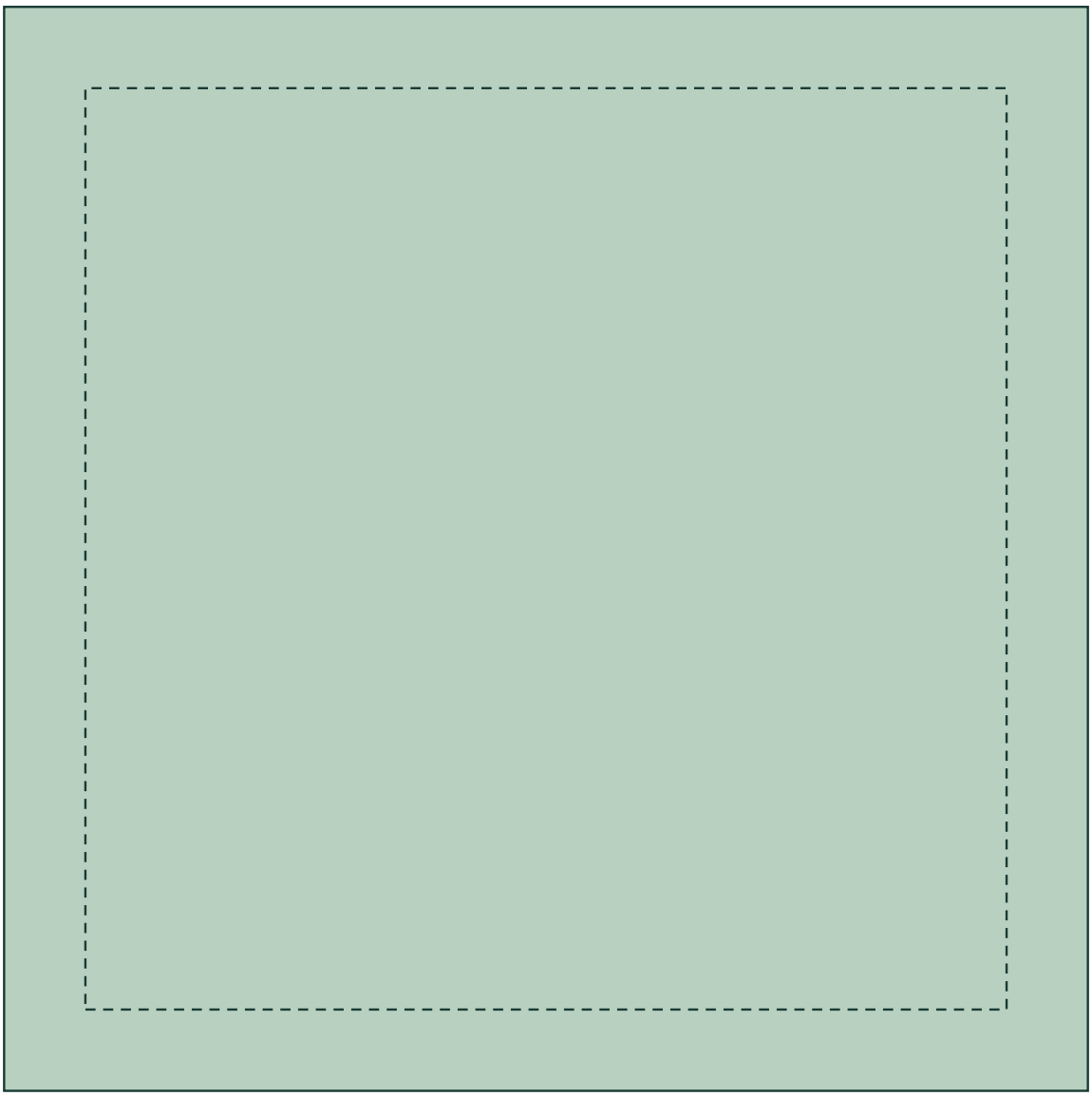
Pattern 2

Stitch-down detail: 40 mm square, suggested perimeter stitch 3 mm inside a sound edge. Inspect the actual cloth and adjust edge finish before attachment. Measured schematic.



40 x 40 mm patch

Dashed line: running stitch ~3 mm inside sound edge

Record 1 — Materials and plan

Record actual observations only. Use UNKNOWN or NOT CHECKED for anything you have not established.

Backing fibre and actual size

Dominant scraps (5 IDs)

Supporting scraps (3 IDs)

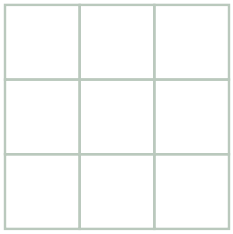
Accent scrap (1 ID)

Map positions: row 1 / row 2 / row 3

Edge condition and marking method

Needle / thread and stitch observation

Decision: PROCEED / CHANGE / HOLD



Optional blank 3 x 3 tile map

Record 2 — Finish and display

Record actual observations only. Use UNKNOWN or NOT CHECKED for anything you have not established.

Actual finished panel dimensions

Tile alignment and gaps

Patches needing repair / edge finish

Reverse thread ends and needle accounted for

Mount / frame choice

Display location and care limitations

Disposition: DECORATIVE READY / CHANGE / HOLD

Date and unresolved issue