

# **PURSE PATTERNS**

**By**

*Bruce Johnson*

# CONTENTS

Pg. 1 Things to Consider...

Pg. 2 A Few Notes About Cutting Patterns

Pg. 3-8 Soft Sided Top Yoke Purse

Pg. 9-13 Tooled Leather Purse

Pg. 14-18 Shopping Bag Purse

Pg. 19-23 Hide Purse

Pg. 24-27 Zippered Top Bag/Case

Pg. 28-33 Bottom Yoke Soft Side Purse



## THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE YOU GET STARTED .... Or Factors to Consider That I Didn't At One Time

In no particular order here they are.

1. Weight - The more pockets, lining, and choice of using a heavy leather, just weighs more. Talk to whoever you are making it for. How much will they carry, do they really need inside zippered and open pockets, does it have to be lined. How big does it need to be anyway?
2. Choice of leather - Lots of suitable chrome tans in different weights for soft sides. Heavy duty 6 oz. work chap or 2 oz "butter"? I usually use about 3- 4 oz chap. Textured chrome tan gives me a truer leather look, smooth can look like naugahyde. Hair on hide looks cool, but the hair can rub off with daily use. Inlayed can last a long time. Tooling leather - the heavier, the deeper the tooling, the heavier the purse. As I line nearly all tooled purses, I use 4/5 tooling, and line with 2/3 veg tan. Gives enough tooling depth, body, yet light enough usually.
3. Lining material - I like 2/3 oz oak for body. If I am lining a soft purse, I like the lining pigskin. A lot of suppliers carry it. I use either "biscuit" or natural color. This will stiffen up a soft purse a little bit.
4. Using hair on hide - Orient the hide so the hair lays pointing down. Lessens the wear on it. And prevents 'cowlicks', couldn't resist that one, sorry. Use hide with a lot of activity. Plain single color is boring. Hide is hard to use for gussets because it will be oriented down on one side and up on another. Will work, but just feels "funny" to me.
5. Zippers - Unless you like to tramp from one store to another, make your own up to length. The Stohlman case making books are a great reference. Just get them all. Besides, those fabric store women are always looking past me to see if they can help my "wife". Hey, I'm the shopper here. Men don't always get good service in these places, now I know how some of you feel in AutoZone. I use the non-locking zippers only. I wax them well with paraffin. Cement them with Barge to the gusset and sew them down. Ask your customer how they want the zipper to work. Closed with the tab at the front or rear? Depends on which side they will mostly carry it, and right vs. left handed. Pulls can be easily made from scrap chap material to complement the color of the bag. Just bleed knot them on.
6. Dee rings - Yes you can use regular old nickle plate rings. I like to use a solid ring. Most of the time I use a more elegant dee. I take a regular #5 buckle in brass or SS and cut out the tongue. You can do the same with heel bar belt buckles as well. They just look a lot nicer. The clip and dees in one inch from most of our suppliers are OK. Recently I switched to SS strap and dees from Weavers. Again a nicer look. I like to attach the smaller dees with a leather tab through a slot and secured with a Chicago screw. It is nicer than my old way of tabs on the outside.
7. Conchos - Yes I use a lot of Chicago screws. Reason, many of my customers are western people or like the look. They may have conchos already, they may ask me to get some and put them on, they are easily changed if they tire of that pattern., etc. Whether using Chicago screws or conchos, tighten them down and use some LocTite. Yes there are other products, but LocTite is proven, and can be undone, unlike JB Weld (true story).
8. Shoulder straps - Everyone likes a different length, one size does not fit all. Ask and measure! Save a cow! Do they want a traditional strap of tooled leather and liner? On soft sides I usually will use a piece of chap leather twice the width of the shoulder strap, cement the whole flesh side, and roll it for the edges to meet in the middle. Press it down well and sew a tooled and edged strip over the seam side. Make the strip long enough to fold around the dee and Chicago screw back into itself. Wide and comfortable.
9. Handles - shape - round, thin and flat, wide and flat? length - short for hand carry, medium for over the shoulder/under the arm, longer yet for over the shoulder/hand on the bottom? Ask and measure. You will still never be right, but may be closer. Another reason for Chicago screws, easily changed out. I made a purse that the owner wanted the entire shoulder strap one inch shorter, would raise the purse 1/2 inch total. Could you even notice that? So I said "OK, Mom, I'll do it".
9. Thread color - Light color to frame a tooled yoke, color match the color of the chrome tan? Use yours and the customers preference here. I usually sew in zippers to match the gusset if possible. Try to keep a theme going. Don't use a lot of different colors and look like a "parts" car.
10. Binder Clips vs. Glue - I like to use medium binder clips for both fitting and holding things in place to sew. You can use contact cement, but it shows up if you get it inside the stitch line on inside out sewn projects. You can't cement hair on hide inside out, binder clips are easily moved to refit something, and hold some things under tension while sewing that cement won't. On the traditionally sewn things I fit with clips make registration marks, remove clips, then apply cement, and still probably will use clips to hold everything while sewing. My preference and experience.

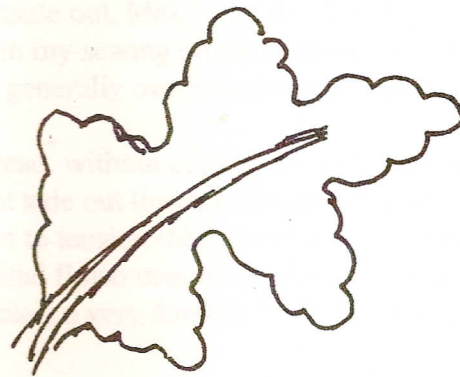
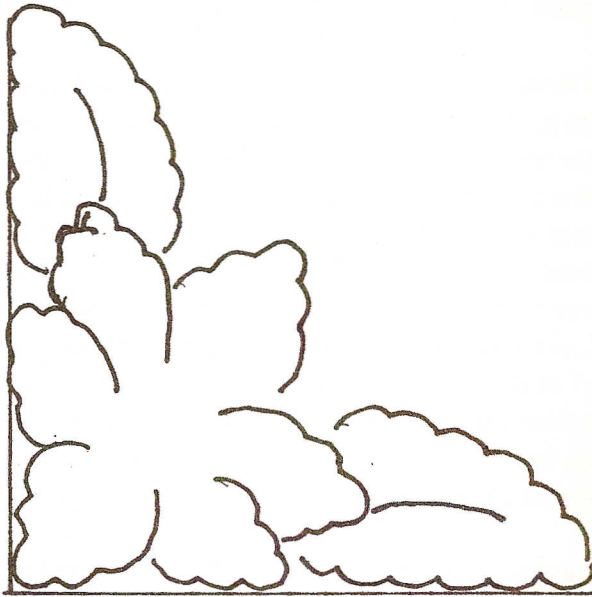


## A FEW NOTES ABOUT THE CUTTING PATTERNS...

These cutting patterns are what I use generally as a guideline. Actually many customers will request a change in dimensions. Some taller, wider, deeper, smaller, the customer can decide based on a pattern size. When something is changed, it will generally affect the other pieces also. Test fit before you secure anything.

The choice of leather, tooling, finishes, handles, is entirely up to you. Everyone has different styles, and customer preferences dictate a lot of what we do. Some of the pictured tooling patterns I don't do anymore, have either progressed, felt it getting "stale", or just plain don't like them now. Inspiration for these came from many sources, and I really recommend developing a style you like and you will progress on your own. Al Gould said something in a class I took - "Don't draw a pattern you can't cut, and don't cut a pattern you can't tool". I will add a bit to it, "but every once in a while, draw one at the outside edge of your cutting ability, and cut one that is at the edge of your tooling ability", that is how to progress. Enjoy the patterns and, if you have any problems, contact me. Thanks,

Bruce Johnson  
bjohnson@fire2wire.com





## SOFT SIDED TOP YOKE PURSE



1. After cutting all pieces, I tool and edge the yokes, slick the edges, oil or whatever, and apply a finish. I have found the acrylics to be most durable finish for me.
2. I sew the yokes to each side piece, securing while sewing with either contact cement or binder clips. They are positioned to leave about a  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch margin around the yoke to sew the gussets to.
3. I punch the slots and Chicago screw holes for the dee ring holders. Next I will edge my dee ring leathers, round the ends, and test fir to see where to punch the holes for the Chicago screw to go through to have a tight fit. I do not like the dee rings to be real loose to start with. Then go back and insert the holders around the dee, through the slot, and secure with the CS. The more punching and securing you do before the bag is made up, the easier. Fold the dee rings down to avoid sewing through them.
4. Prepare the zipper to length, and fold the gusset in half to establish a center point. Center the zipper based on this, and cut two parallel lines  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch apart. I leave a 3 inch tab attached at the ends, and cut out the center portion. The center portion will be saved to make a pull tab for the zipper later. The tabs at the end are cemented, and then folded back to extend about  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch inside the gusset. The end of the zipper sewing should catch the end of the tab to secure it. The tab is to hold while working the zipper, just makes it easier. The zipper is cemented in place and sewn with a complementary thread.
5. Now I test fit the gusset. I have centerlines marked on the edge of the front and back pieces as well as the gusset. Putting the pieces grain side together, and line up the centering marks. I use binder clips as I go to hold everything in place. On the bottom I overlap the gusset end and like to have a 5 to 6 inch overlap. This will stiffen the bottom a bit, and add some body. I mark how much to trim off the gusset ends to achieve this overlap. When I am satisfied the front and back are even and not skewed in relation to each other I make registration marks on the edges of the gusset and panels to aid in lining it up again later.
6. I trim the gusset ends to length, and sew a line across each end to close the overlap. I start and end the sewing lines about  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches from each side. I now have a solidly sewn "loop" of gusset. UNZIP the zipper. You will be sewing this project inside out, and will be bringing it out through the zipper. Using the registration marks, clip everything back in place inside out. Make sure the dee rings are folded down, and will not be caught in the sewing line. I begin my sewing on the bottom, and remove the clips as I go. I sew this by eye, and leave a  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch border. I generally oversew about three inches to secure the thread and melt the ends.
7. Carefully trim the excess leather off close to the thread, without cutting through the sew line.
8. Working carefully, gently begin to turn the bag right side out through the open zipper. I find it easier to start at one end rather than the center. Be careful not to tension the ends of the zipper too much, or scratch the leather on the zipper teeth. I then apply a final finish coat of Leather Sheen. Yes, I use it all the time on chap leather and latigo for all my bags. Makes a very durable finish and resists water. A few light coats.



9. Secure the handle of the length of your preference.

10. I usually stuff with small hand towels to "stretch and shape" the purse for a day or so. Just enough to be firm and give a pleasant shape. That's it for this one!



**MATERIAL'S LIST - SOFT SIDE TOP YOKE PURSE**

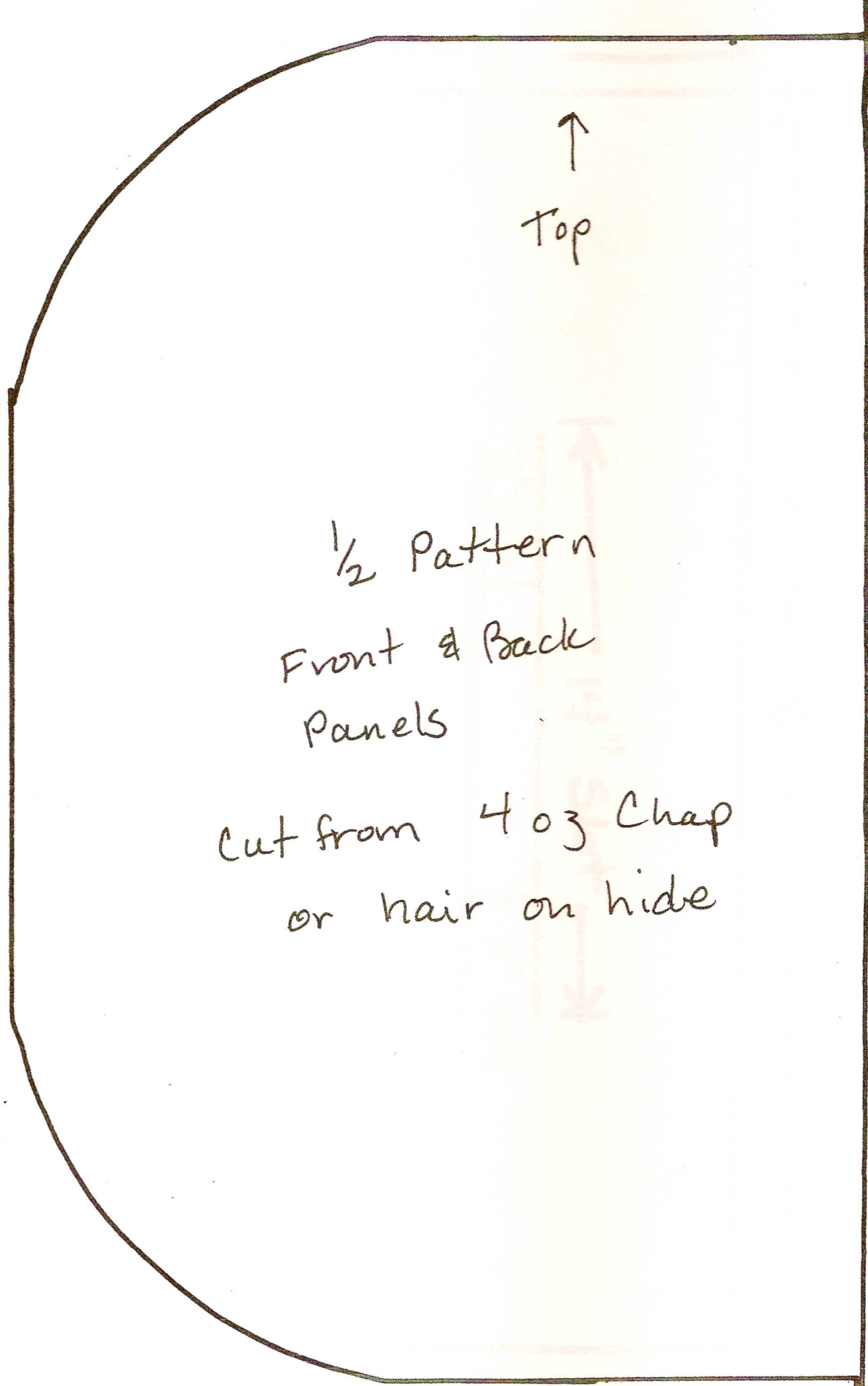
Front and Rear Panels - Chap or Hair on Hide - two pieces -  $9\frac{1}{2}$  x 12 inches

Gusset - Chap - 40x6 inches

Tooling Yokes - two pieces - 4/5 - 6/7 veg tan - 5x11 inches

14 inch closed end zipper



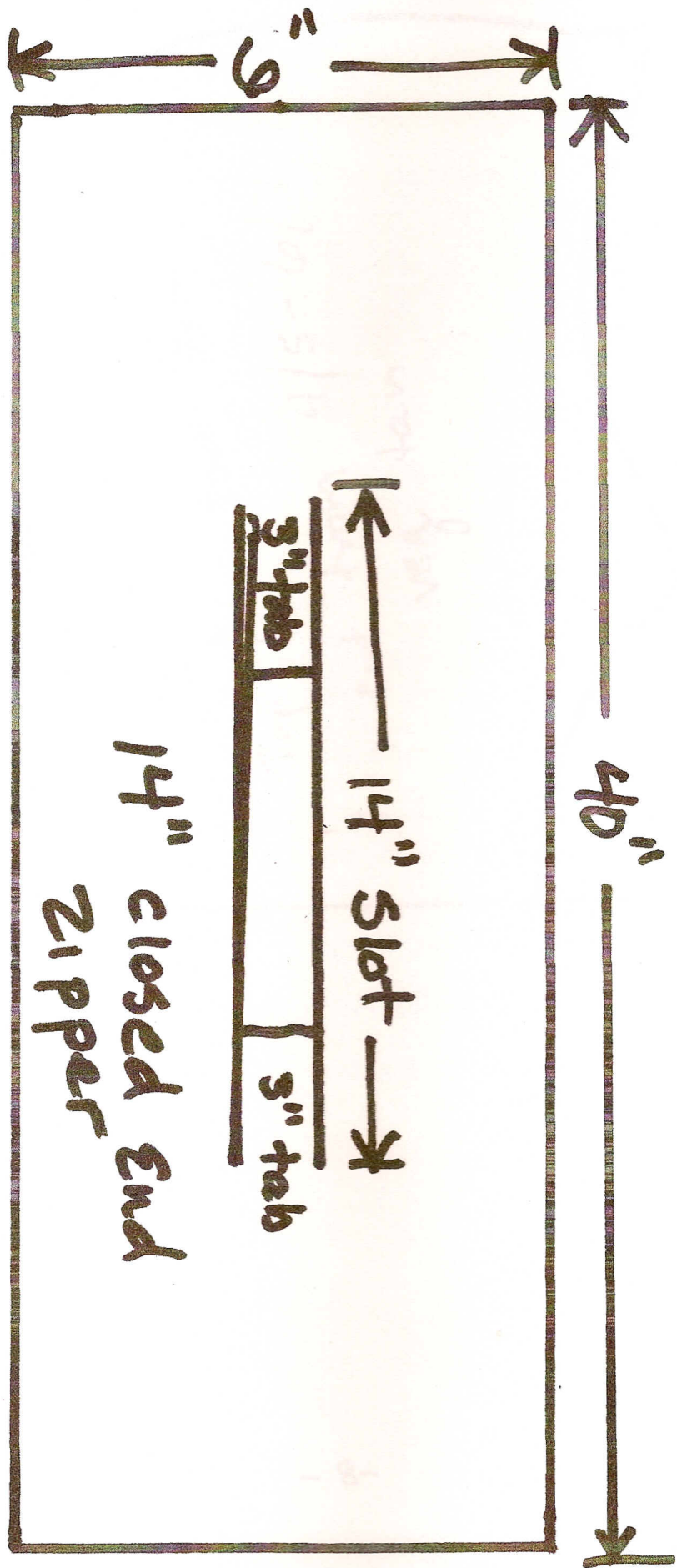


↑  
Top

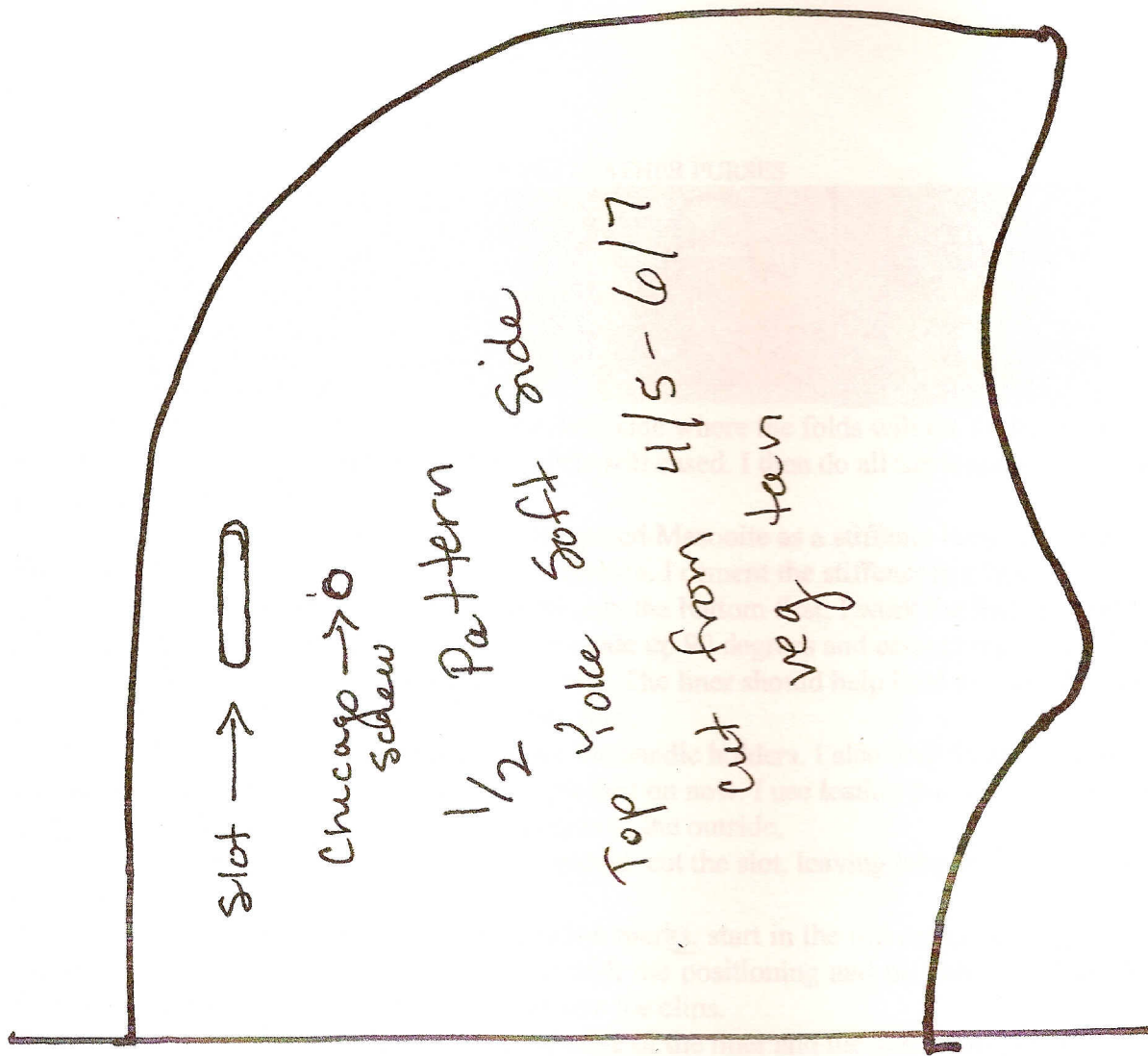
$\frac{1}{2}$  Pattern  
Front & Back  
Panels

Cut from 403 Chap  
or hair on hide





Soft Side Top Yoke  
Purse





## TOOLING LEATHER PURSES



1. I groove with a narrow French edger the flesh side where the folds will be. I take out about a half thickness or so. I accentuate the fold while still cased. I then do all the tooling, oiling, and dyeing and allow to dry.
2. On the bottom I use a piece of 1/8 inch tempered Masonite as a stiffener between the body and liner. I allow a 3/4 margin around the bottom section. I cement the stiffener in place.
3. I use a thin liner of veg tan, and cement to only the bottom first, I work the liner around the stiffener with a bone folder, and then fold one side up 90 degrees and cement that side. Then lift the other side 90 degrees and secure that as well. The liner should help hold up the sides and not be wrinkled or buckled. Trim the lining flush now.
4. Punch slots and holes for the hardware for the handle holders. I also drill through the bottom in a little at all 4 corners of the stiffener, and put feet on now. I use leather punchings for feet secured with a brass Chicago screw. The post is to the outside.
5. Prepare the zipper, center it in the zipper gusset, cut the slot, leaving tabs as the soft side purse, and cement and sew to the gusset.
6. Using the binder clips and center registration marks, start in the top center and begin securing the gusset in place. When you are satisfied with the positioning and no twisting of the front or back, make more registration marks and remove the clips.
7. I run a bead on contact cement around the edge of the liner and the gusset. Again secure to the body using the registration marks and binder clips. I leave a 1/4 inch overlap of the gusset material when sewing.
8. After sewing, trim the overlap flush with the edge. Slick and finish the edge, and apply the overall finish of choice.
9. Install the handle of choice, bleed a string from the zipper slot cut out for a zipper pull, and this is done.

MATERIAL'S LIST - TOOLED LEATHER PURSE

Body of purse- 4/5 veg tan- 11x22- $\frac{1}{4}$  inches

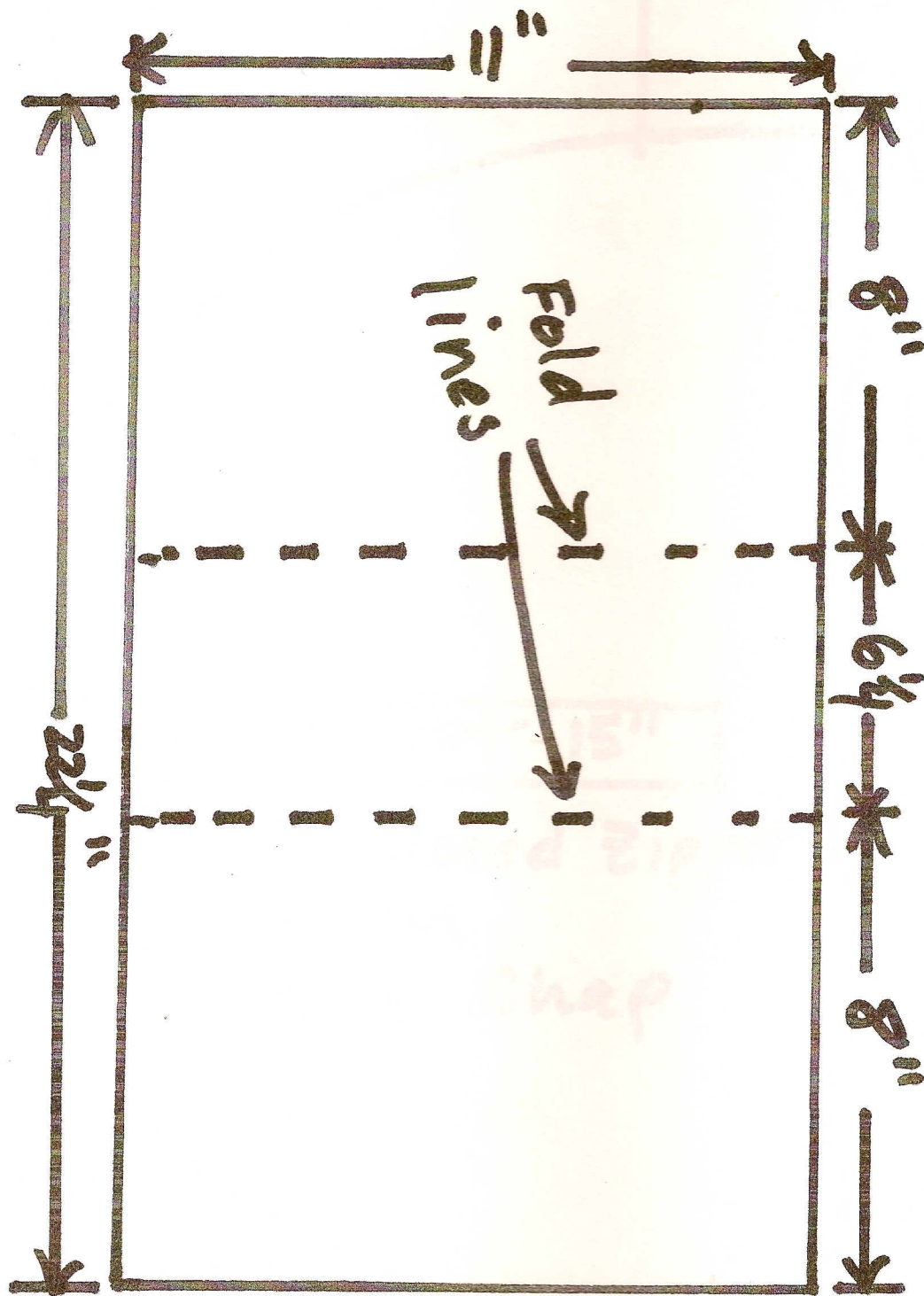
Lining - 2/3 veg tan - approx 24x12

Masonite 1/8 inch stiffener - 9- $\frac{1}{2}$  x5- $\frac{1}{2}$  inches

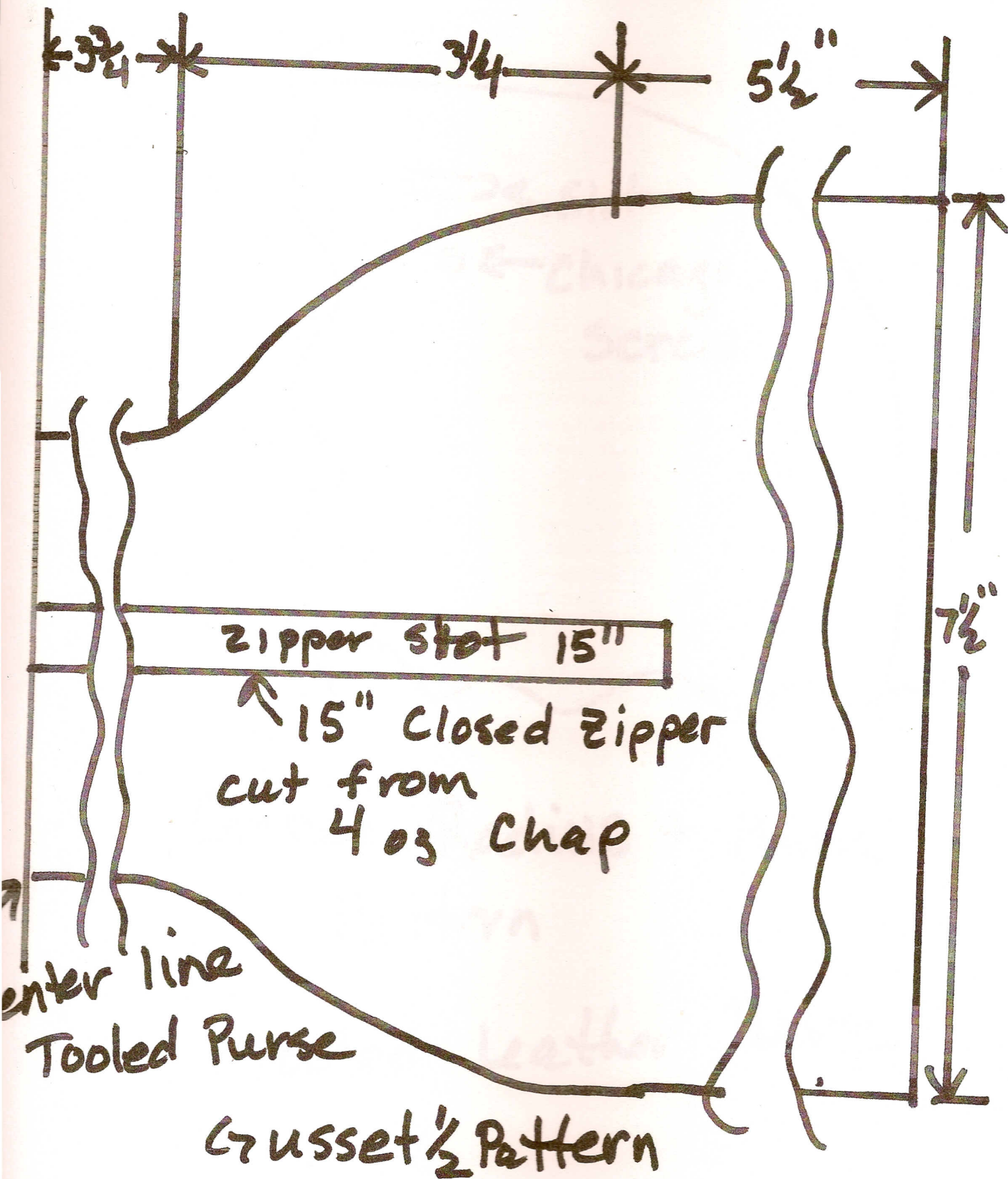
Gusset - chap leather- 25x7- $\frac{1}{2}$  inches

Zipper - 15 inch closed zipper

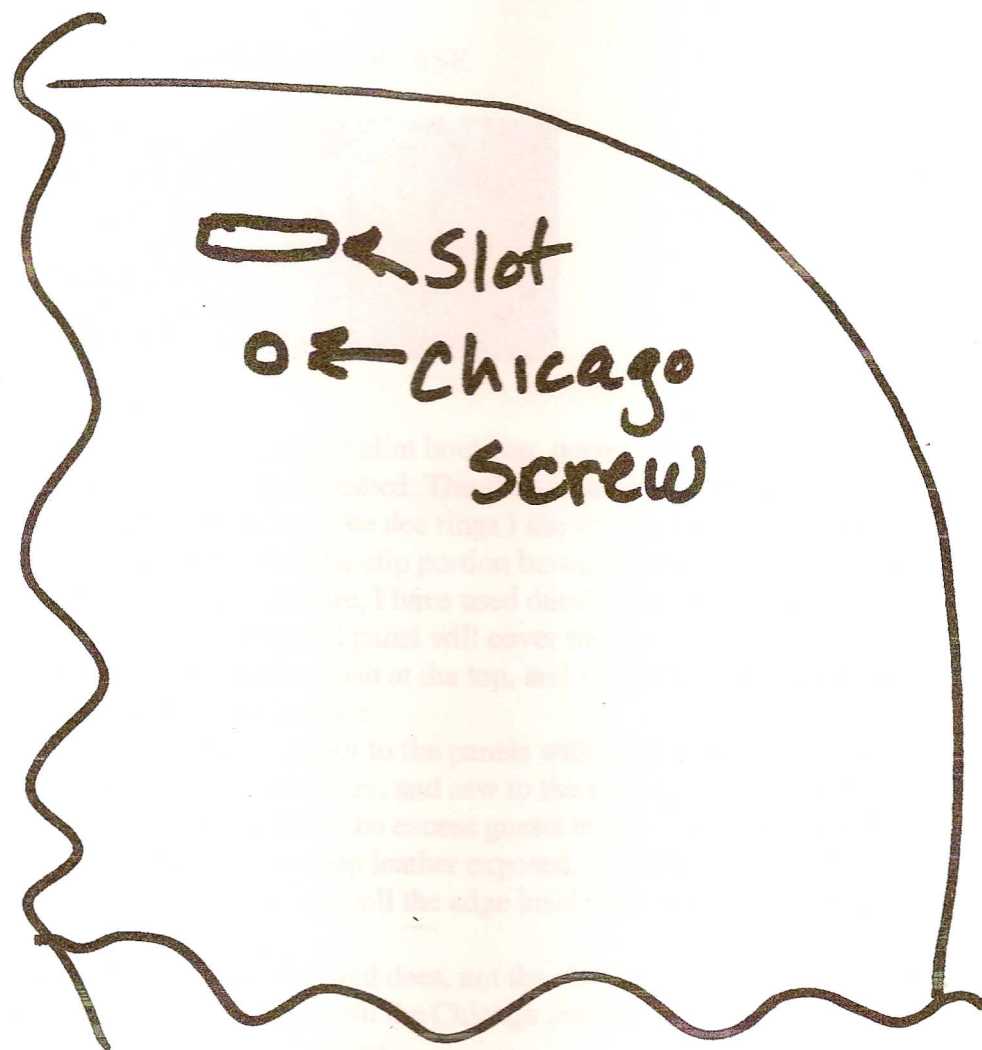




Tooled Leather Purse







Corner Radius + Punch  
Pattern

Tooled Leather Purse

## SHOPPING BAG PURSE



1. One of the easier styles, used as a shopping bag, splint boot bag, purse, etc.
2. The tooled portion is tooled, oiled, edged and finished. The slots are cut first, and the appropriate holes for the Chicago screws punched. The dee rings I use on this one are the 1 inch clip and dees, commercially available. I sandwich the clip portion between the tooled leather and the chap leather body. If the customer wants a closure, I have used durable dot snaps and magnetic catches, if so, install them now. The tooled panel will cover them.
3. The tooled portion is positioned on the panels, flush at the top, and a  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch or so margin on the sides. Secure with clips or cement and sew in place.
4. Another project sewn inside out. Secure the gusset to the panels with clips, and sew leaving a  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch margin. I use gussets a bit longer than necessary, and sew to the top edge of the panels. Trim the excess leather and turn right side out. Trim the excess gusset length from each side. I have done most of these with the raw edge of the chap leather exposed. For a more finished look and higher fee, leave a margin at the top as well, and roll the edge inside and sew a bead line to have a cleaner look.
5. Punch only the Chicago screw holes for the clip and dees, not the slot.
6. Slip the clip between the two layers and secure with the Chicago screw.
7. Apply the final finish and appropriate length handles.



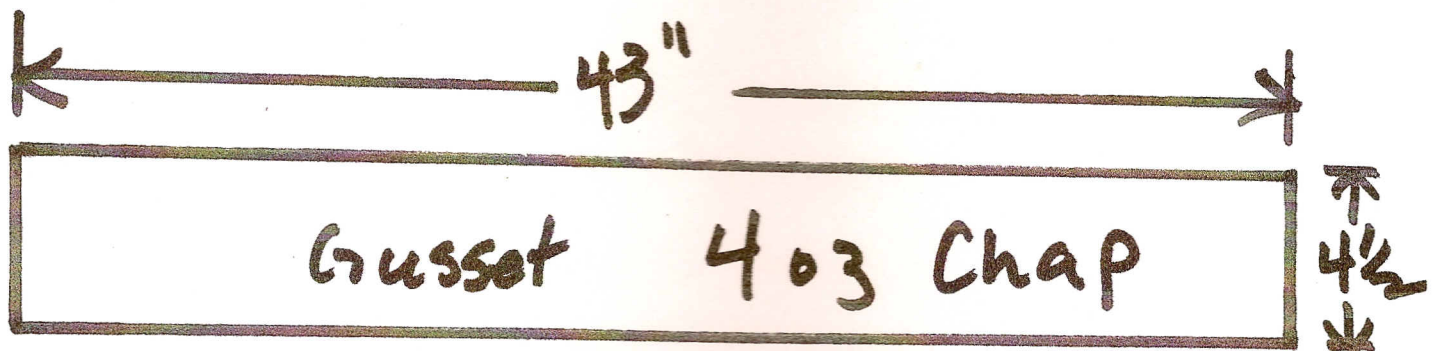
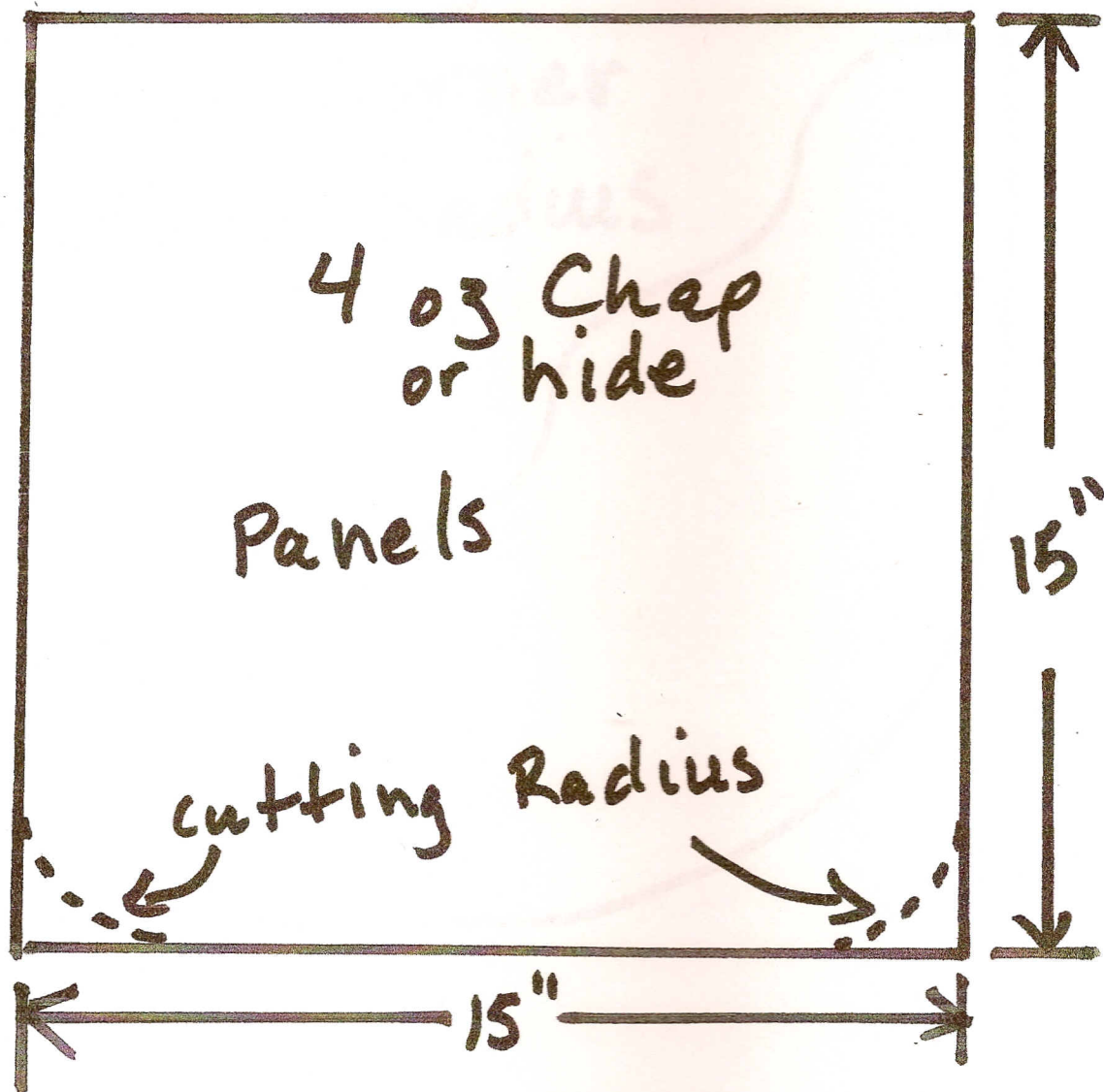
# MATERIALS LIST - SHOPPING BAG/PURSE

Panels - 4 oz Chap - Two pieces - 15x15

Gusset - 4 oz chap - 4-1/2x43 inches

Tooling Panels - two pieces - 4/5 -6/7 veg tan - 7x7 inches

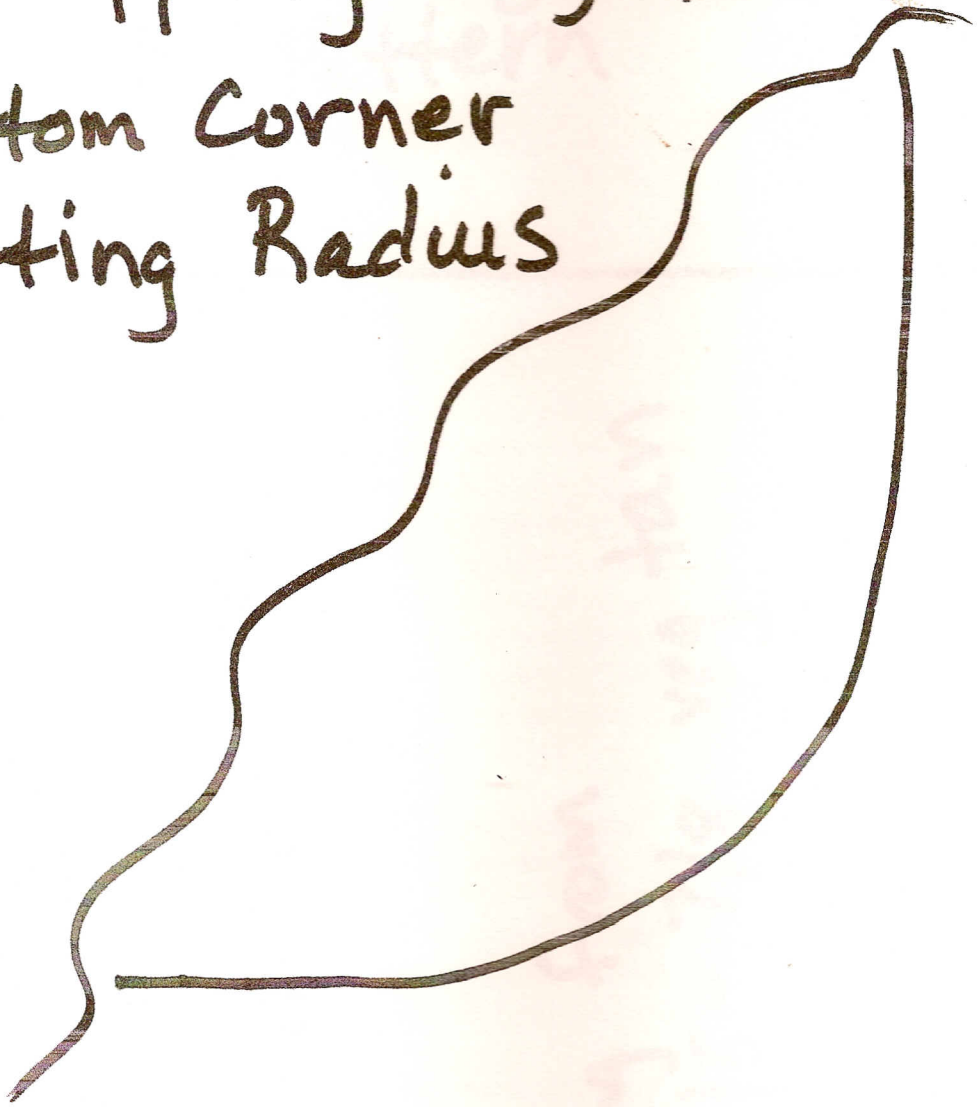
# Shopping Bag/Purse





# Shopping Bag/Purse

Bottom Corner  
cutting Radius



# Shopping Bag/Purse 1/2 Pattern



o ← Chicago Screw

cutting from  
4/5 - 7/8 veg tan



## HIDE PURSE



First off, I have to share the background of this purse. The owner is the wife of a World Champion bull rider, and one of the original PBR founders. She wanted a purse that screamed "bullrider's wife" when she went to the PBR and NFR rodeo finals. Originally she wanted no flap, just an open top. As expected, flopped open for all to see and remove contents. Then she decided on a narrow strap over the top, still pooched open at the ends when carried. These were all test fits by the way. Then went to a full width flap. It had a magnetic catch by this time, and the pressure on the ends from the strap when carried worked against the flap and popped open the catch at times. Soooo, we left a 1/2 inch gap at each end, and when it is picked up, the ends butt up against the edge of the flap and close it up. Moral of the story, keep trying and be open to customer expectations, but be able to adjust if it isn't right.

This purse now moves up the difficulty scale a bit. The gusset must be designed first as it tapers in at the ends to accommodate the narrower width of the dee ring. This purse was also lined with natural pigskin lining.

1. After cutting and cementing the lining in place on the parts, fit the dee ring onto the gussets. I lined the folded over area with 2-3 oz commercial oak leather. Punch holes for the Chicago screw and insert it now to help with the fitting process. Fold the gusset in half to establish a center registration mark at the bottom.

2. I fit the front in place first. Start at the registration mark and clip the front in place (hair side to hair side) until it gets in to the narrowing area of the gusset. This should be the same height on both sides, mark it. Unclip and trim straight across the top of the front piece to the proper height. I now use the front to make a matching pattern for the back. The flap is cut so that there is 1/2 inch or so gap to the gusset. Sew it in place now. The two piece back and flap allow the hair to lay properly.

3. This particular purse has spots the were an after thought, but not that big a deal to set them on the heel of my shoeing anvil.

4. Now clip the front and back to the gusset, and binder clip heavily. Hair on hide tends to really slip in one direction. Sew in place leaving a 1/2 inch or so margin, and trim the excess. Turn right side out. As the original plan called for the big concho on the front, the prongs of the "stud" portion of the magnetic catch is covered by the concho. Otherwise, bury it under the lining earlier.

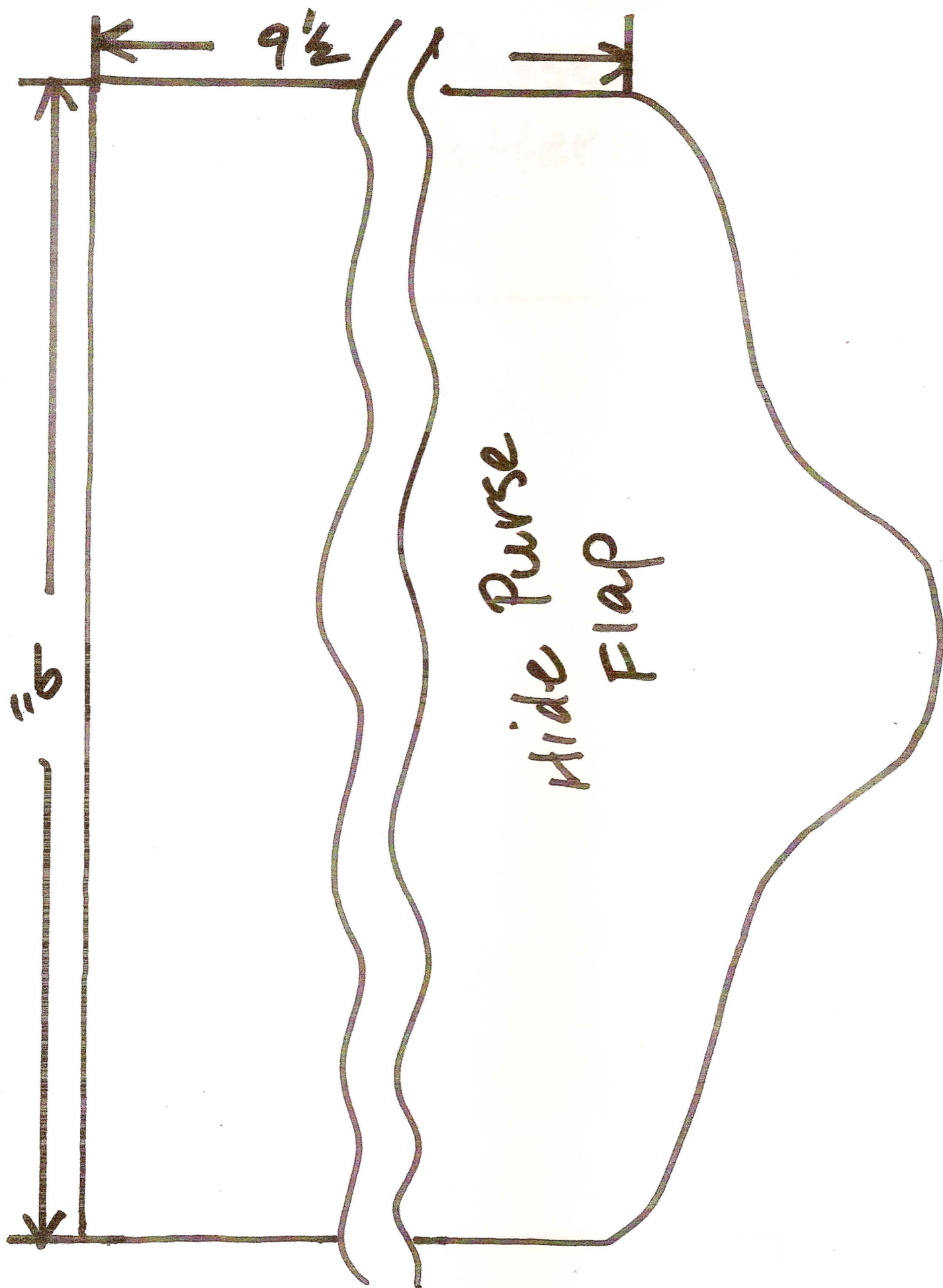
5. I finished the raw edges of the hide with a black dye first, and then light coats of Leather Sheen. When the edge was pretty hard, I smoothed it with a worn fine grit sanding wheel on a Dremel, redyed, and more Leather Sheen. Added an shoulder strap to match, and she loved it.

MATERIAL'S LIST - HIDE PURSE

Panels - hide or chap - two pieces - 12x7 inches

Gusset - Hide or Chap - 5x32 inches

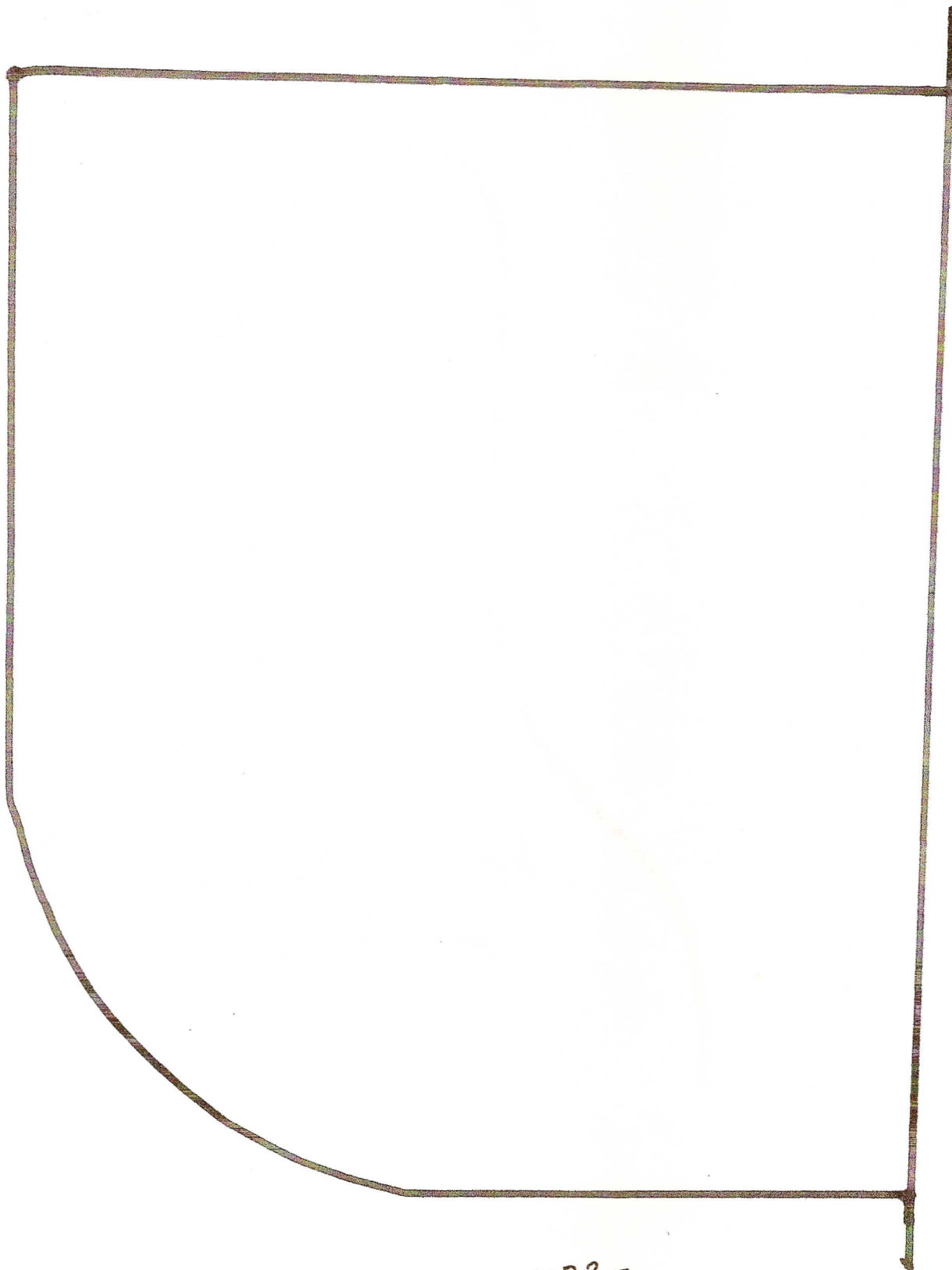
Flap - Hide or Chap - 9x9-½ inches



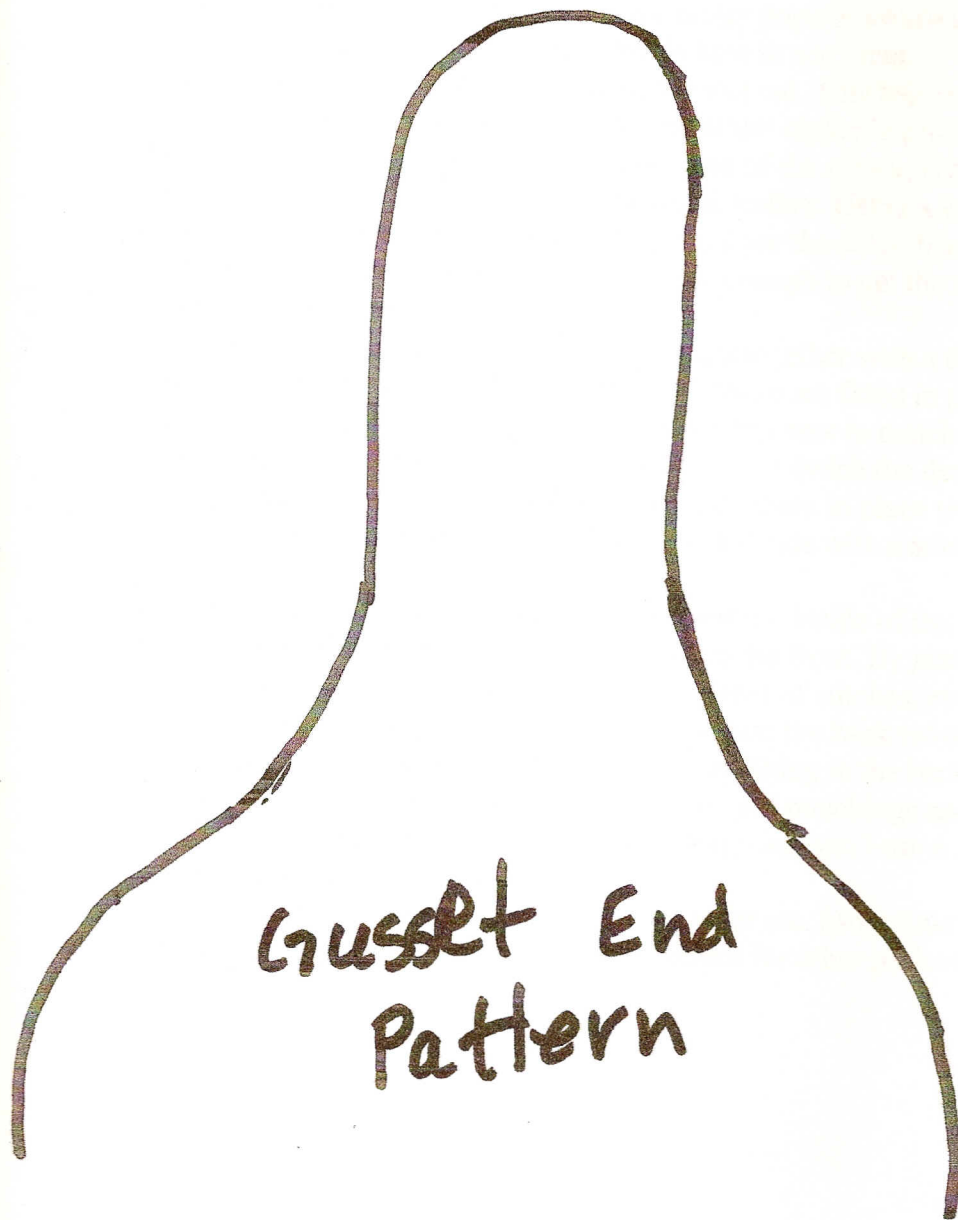


# Hide Purse

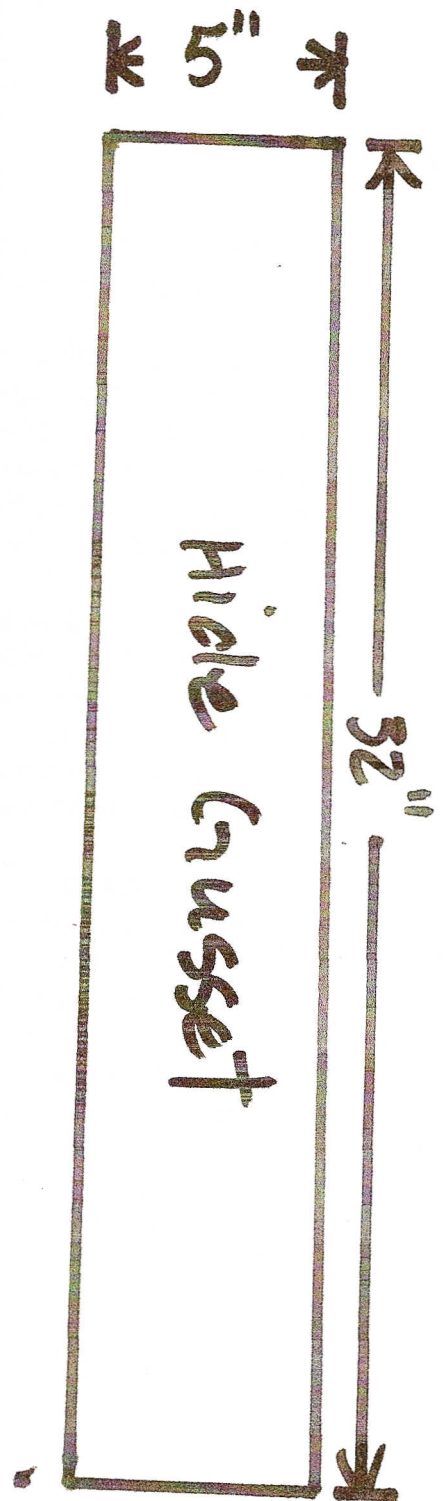
## Body $\frac{1}{2}$ Pattern



# Hide Purse Gusset



Gusset End  
Pattern



## ZIPPERED TOP BAG/CASE



Although this bag really is more of a train case or cosmetic case, they have been used to carry camcorders, and used as purses. They are pretty popular award items for barrel racings and queen contests. I just make them, they can decide how to use them.

1. The body is tooled, oiled, and the zipper slot cut. This bag is stiff enough that no pull tab is needed at the ends of the zipper slot. I cement the zipper in place to the top, and then cement to the lining. With no cement on the bottom side of the zipper, it does not stick to the lining. I then sew the zipper in place through both layers of leather. Using a very sharp scalpel blade or point knife I cut out the zipper slot from the lining. I use the stitch line as a guide, and lift the leather to the blade once I get a slot cut. Don't cut deep enough to get the zipper cloth. I finish the cut with a sharp French edger.

2. I then lace (deluxe version) or sew the edges together with a double crossing continuous cruciate stitch on the back. The top and the bottom are fitted in place, and trimmed as necessary to achieve a tight, but not bulging fit. Tool the top now to match. I mark and punch slots for the 1 inch clip and dees for the handles to attach to. I sandwich the dees between the top and lining. Lining is cemented to the top and bottom. I tack them in place with a few basting stitches every so often. I sew in a groove, and mark the top and side with a stitch marker to be even on both places.

3. I butt the inside of the lid and bottom against the inside of the top and bottom, and sew by hand, piercing the awl at an upward angle from the front. By piercing from the front I can keep my stitches more even, and have the same number of stitches, even going around the corners on top. You will have to go through some holes from the back twice, similar to a good job on a cantle binding of a saddle. I start and end my stitching in the back where it is less noticeable.

4. I punch four holes in the bottom corners and use punchings and brass Chicago screws for feet.

5. The handle is fastened to the top with Chicago screws. I use a scrap of chap leather to make a zipper pull, bleed it on and I am set.

5. Again, Leather sheen is the finish of choice for me. More time in this one due to the hand sewing, but easy enough to do and get proficient for other projects with square corners.



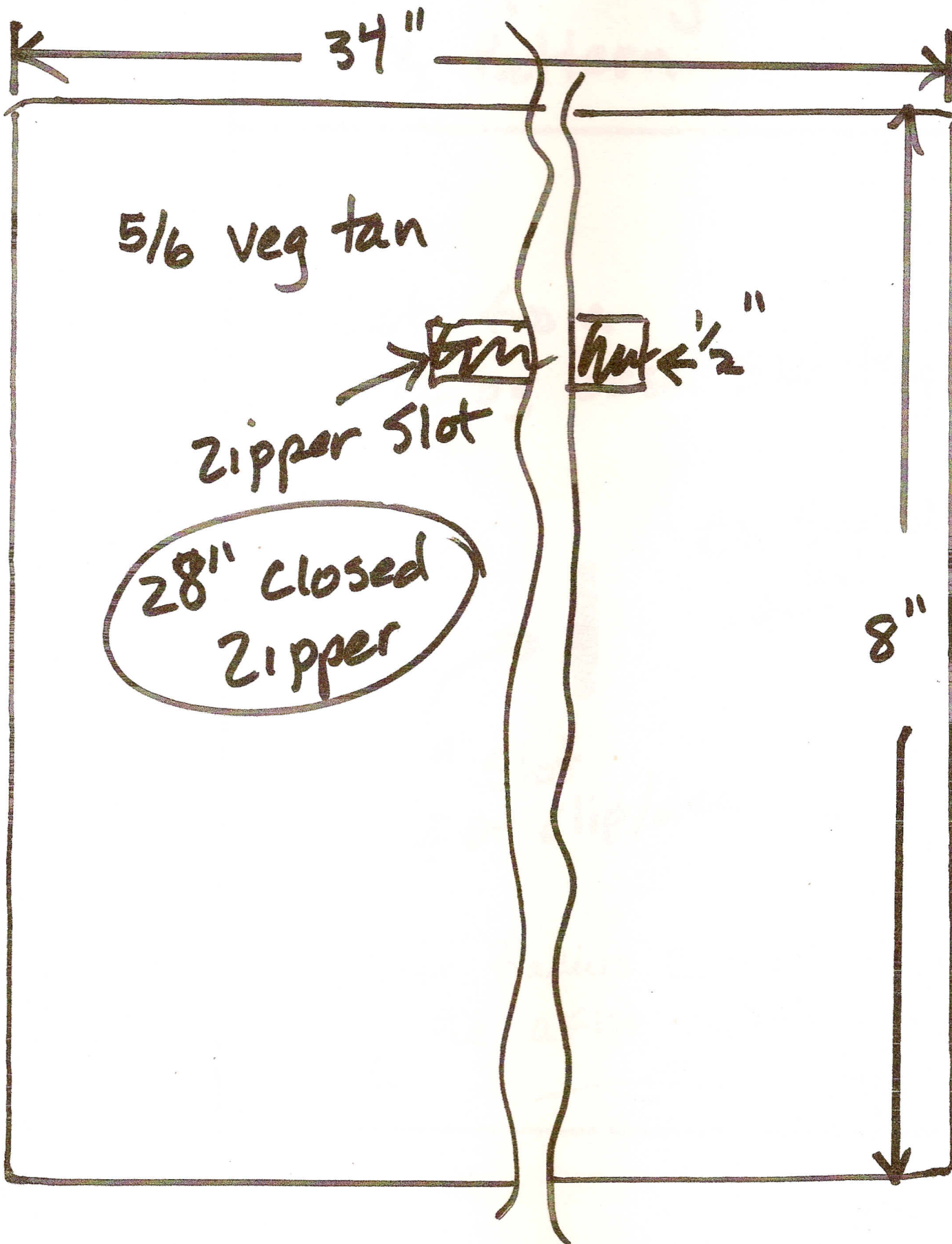
# ZIPPERED TOP BAG - CASE

Body - 5/6 veg tan - 8x34 inches

Body Lining - 2/3 veg tan - 9x35 inches

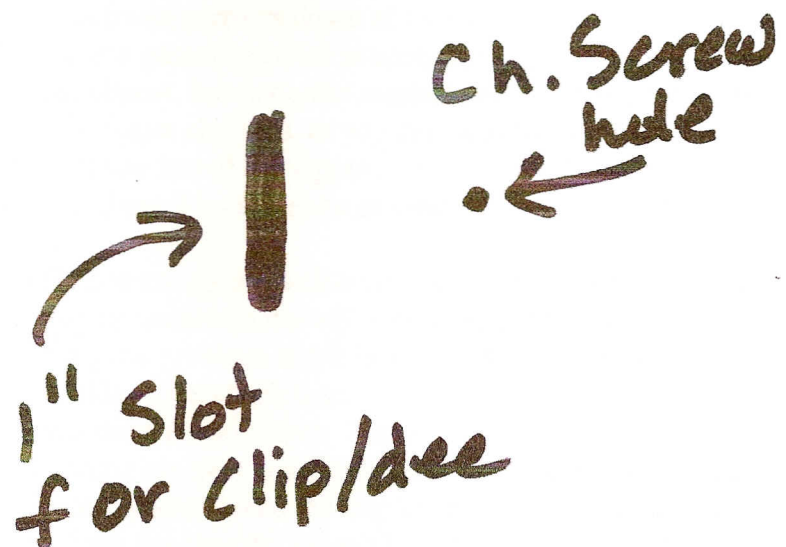
Top and bottom pieces - two pieces - 12 oz skirting - 11x7-½ inches

Top and bottom piece lining - two pieces - 11-½x 8-½ inches



# Zipper top bag/case $\frac{1}{2}$ Pattern

Cut from  
12 03 orso Skirting



Corner Radius Curves  
Cut to fit after assembly  
body.



## BOTTOM YOKE SOFT SIDE PURSE



OK, here's the most requested. Also the most difficult to do the first time. This one has the owner's cattle brand, and one of my old flower corners. She liked the light oil, and highlight border dyeing. A little sunlight, and this will really look good, and not so "new".

1. Tool, dye, oil, edge and finish the front and rear yokes. Clip or cement them onto the front and rear panels, and sew them down. On the side view this purse narrows down at the top and the top gusset is about 2 inches wide. I leave about 2 inches of excess gusset material at each end.
2. Center the gusset and cut out a zipper slot that almost, but not quite reaches each side of the panels. Make registration marks. There is no need for the zipper slot tabs, as you can hold the dee ring area to pull against when working the zipper. Cut the slot and install the zipper.
3. I fit the bottom gusset next, and also allow for about 2 inches extra at each end. Make registration marks when everything lines up.
4. Using a bunch of clips secure the panels to the bottom gusset inside out, and make sure everything is lined up and square. Sew right up to  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch from the points on the top corners of the panels.
5. Center the top gusset, and sew in place, meeting the previous stitch line from the bottom gusset at each end. Trim the excess leather away from outside of the stitch line.
6. The gaps where the top and bottom/side gusset meet are still open. I done three things. First - sew them closed from the inside. The dee ring and hanger are then handsewn on the ends through the open zipper when the bag is turned right side out. Second option - turn the bag inside out, slip the dee ring hanger between the two gussets and sew across from the outside. I don't like to have a sewn line transverse to the tension, so I don't like this, but a heck of a lot of commercial bags are done like this and hold up. Thirdly, turn the bag right side out, bring the excess gusset material up through the gap. They will be flesh to flesh, roll the top corners inside until they make the width of the dee ring. This will roll the edges all the way down on both top and side gussets. You may need to trim a bit at the top to get them to roll enough without overlapping. Cement each tab on the flesh side and roll the edges inward to the correct width. This will make a tab that tapers (narrows) toward the top to the width of the dee. Do the same with the other matching gusset end, i.e. match the top gusset excess to the side gusset excess. Do the same on both ends. Make sure the resulting tabs are the same height. I sew the gusset tabs together with a matching thread on the sides and top. Then I make a tooling leather dee tab to match the concho size, and either sew it down or just trust the concho and screw to hold it in place. This last method has become my preferred one, just a little neater look, but more finesse.
7. Because of the tapering gusset to the top, you need the zipper to be as long as possible. This will make it easier to turn the bag right side out, and also easier to get a hand into to use.

## MATERIALS LIST - BOTTOM YOKE PURSE

Panels - Chap or Hide - Two pieces -  $11\frac{1}{2} \times 9$  inches

Top Gusset - chap -  $3 \times 20$  inches

Bottom gusset - chap -  $32 \times 6$  inches

Yokes -  $\frac{4}{5}$  to  $\frac{6}{7}$  veg tan -  $6\frac{1}{2} \times 10$  inches

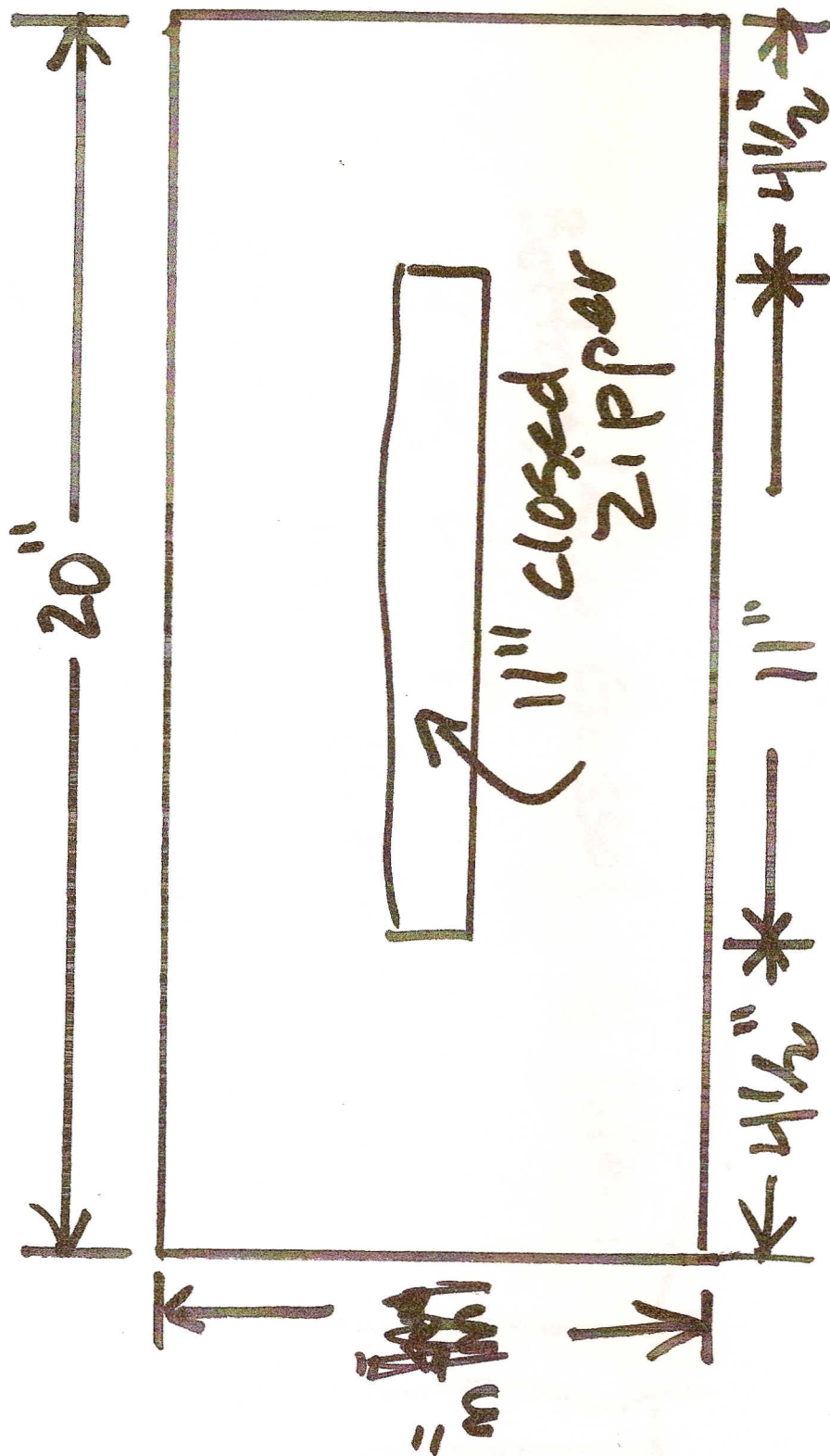
Closed end zipper - 11 inches

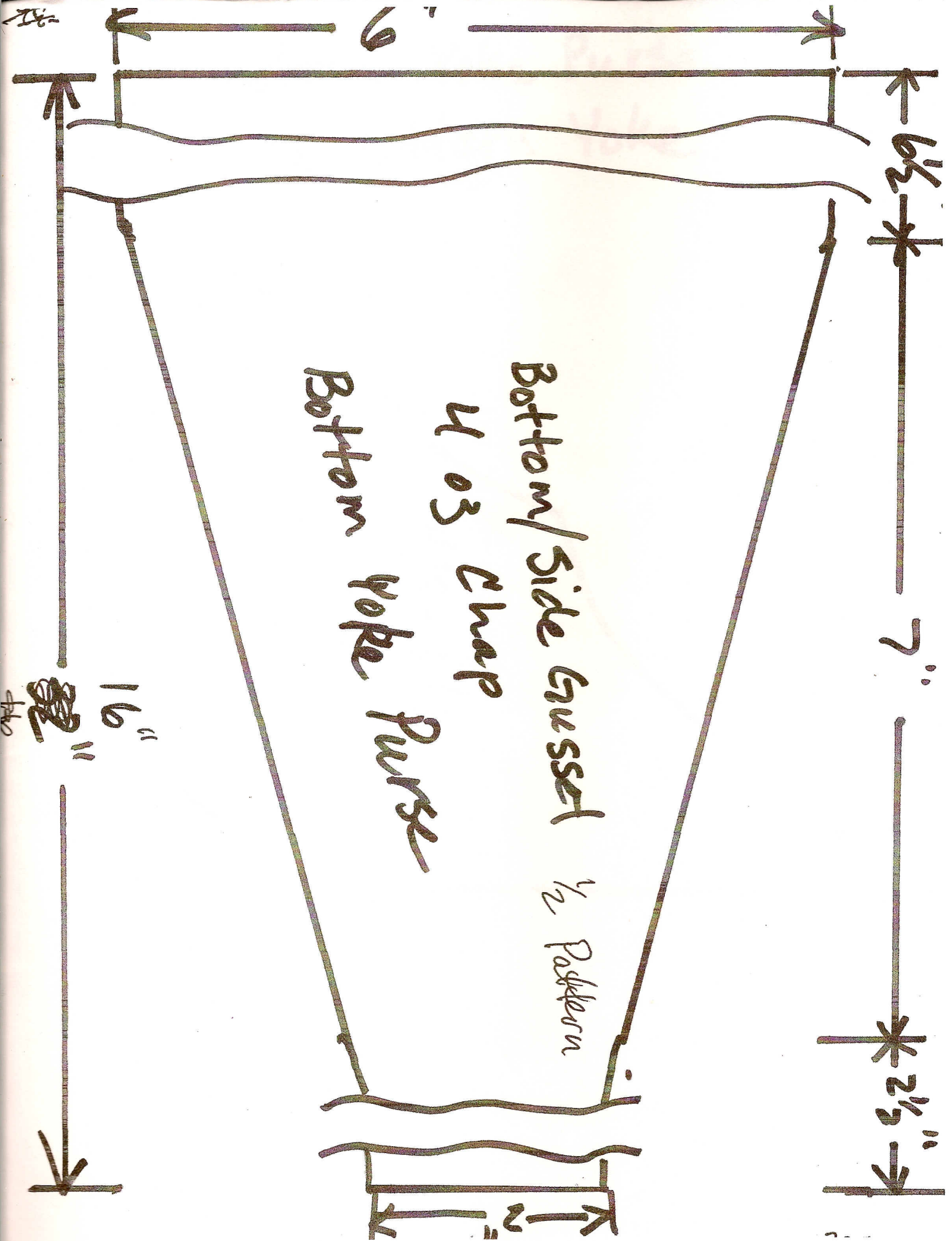
Bottom Yoke  
Soft Purse  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  Pattern  
Panels

403 Chap  
or  
hide



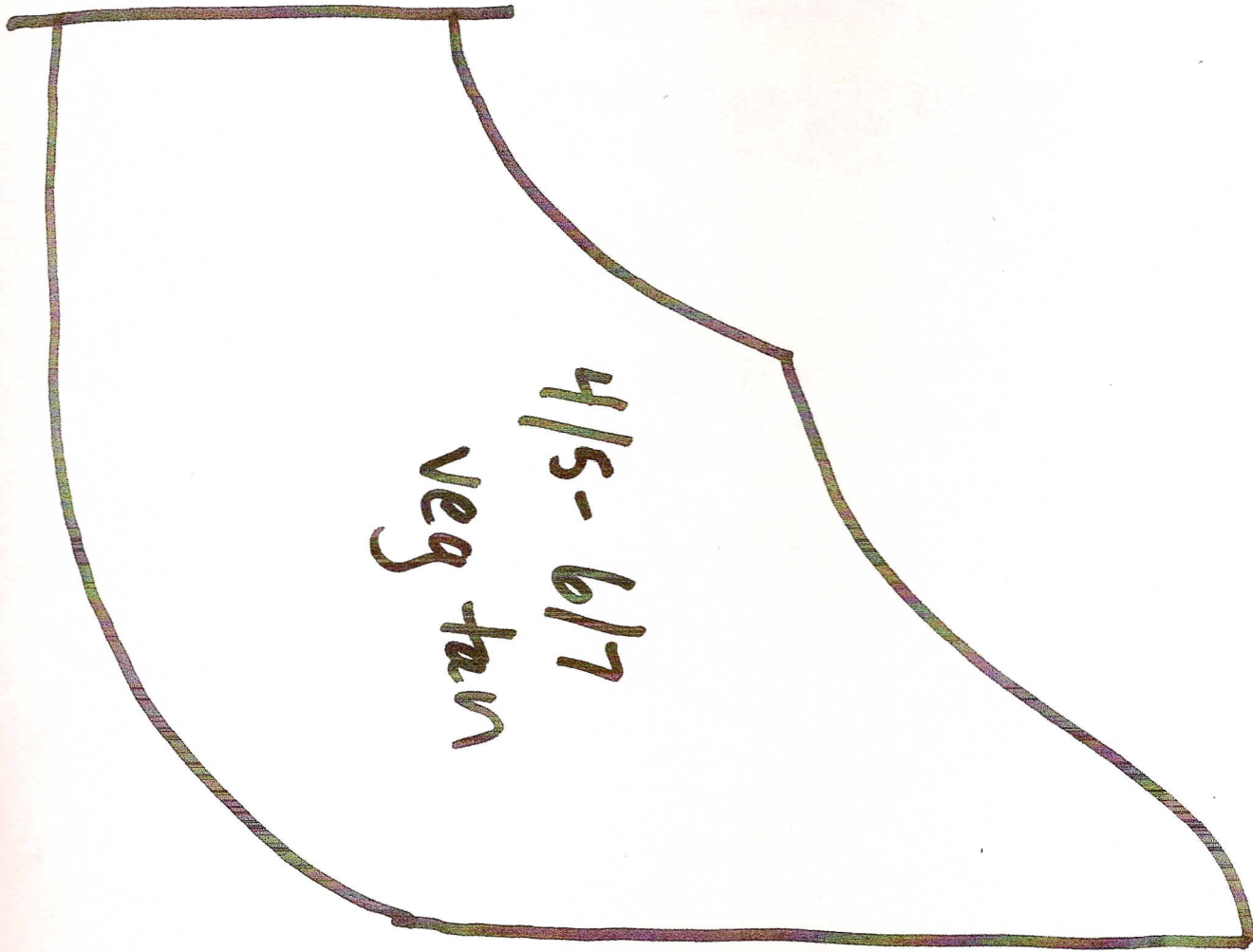
# Top Gusset Bottom Yoke Purse





# Bottom Yoke Purse

## $\frac{1}{2}$ Pattern Yoke





# $\frac{1}{2}$ Pattern Yoke

