

## Mind-the-Gap Blouse Covers Hole in Women's Fashion Market



The Mind-the-Gap Blouse. Photo Credit: Betabrand

Many women know the struggle all too well of finding a button down shirt that fits. For larger busted ladies, the button down causes the dreaded gap, which doesn't convey a professional image in the workplace.

Brianna Wooten, a master's student in Fashion Journalism at Academy of Art University, understands this problem. "Button down shirts typically fit me in every area besides my chest. There's always a little peep hole that forms, even if it isn't there when I first button the shirt. It looks like the blouse just doesn't fit and makes me feel fat even if the blouse is my size."

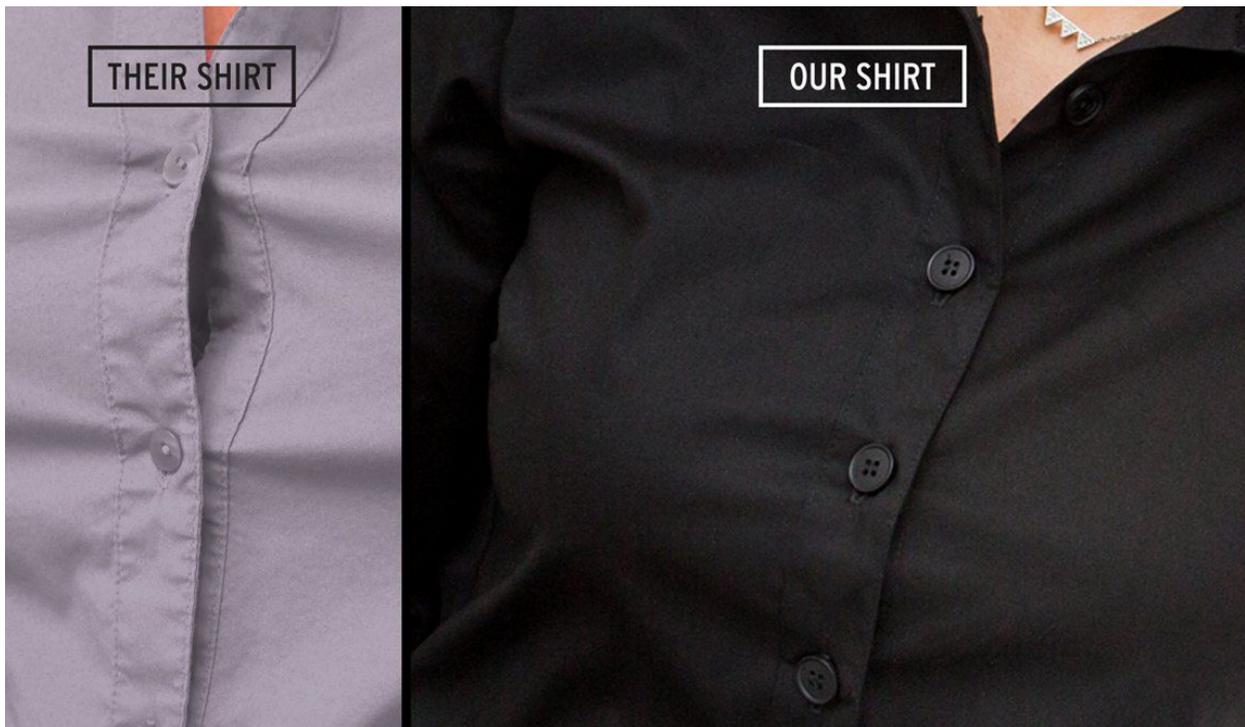
Chrissy Weeks, owner of Stems Sewing Studio in Atlanta, has solved the problem. While making a button down shirt for her husband, she decided that she wanted one for herself. Chrissy needed to adapt the pattern so much that it seemed ridiculous. "Instead of just making everything bigger overall, I came up with the idea of stretch panels," said Weeks. "I needed a little bit of give in certain spots."

She used buttons that are about 10% bigger to alleviate the tension that is placed on small buttons found on shirts. The larger buttons, combined with a wider placket and stretch panels, made the blouse a lot more wearable.

After coming up with a design that worked, Chrissy wanted to market her blouse. While on vacation in Scotland, Weeks saw some black sheep roaming on a field. "Do they do stuff with black sheep wool?" she wondered. "When we got to our apartment in Scotland, I googled black sheep wool and found a company called Betabrand. They make black sheep wool sweaters, and they were having a design contest. I had been working on this shirt anyway and decided to send my design in." Weeks ordered a sweater to check out the company and entered the contest.

Although getting started with Betabrand was fairly easy, Chrissy admits there were some challenges. "I drew out a design and sent them a prototype, and they sent it back wanting to change this, this and this. Sometimes in making those changes, I felt like they weren't staying completely true to my design. I'm 85% satisfied with how it came out. I wanted things to be a little different and they wanted to be true to their brand. They made the button a little smaller than I wanted, but it is bigger than a normal production button. They made it a little bit shorter than I wanted. But, they know what sells."

Betabrand showed the Mind-the-Gap Blouse at Silicon Valley Fashion Week 2016. Chrissy did not attend the event. Betabrand recently informed her that the blouse is one of their top sellers.



Larger buttons and stretch panels eliminate the pucker in button down shirts. Photo Credit: Betabrand

"I'm constantly working on finding things that fit better," says Weeks of her next project. "I'm working on clothing that is geared towards people who have small frames but got fluffy like me."

If you hold up an XL and a 1X at Target, there's 3 inches difference between them. But if you hold up a small and an XL at Target, there's not that much difference. There's this huge gap in the market. I'm trying to find ways for people to look really put together, stylish and fun. If you get clothes that are too big they look frumpy; too small and they don't fit right."

Chrissy's ideas interest Wooten. "I've had jobs where I was required to wear a button down shirt and I always had to wear an undershirt underneath," says the graduate student. " I have to wear shirts larger than my actual size just so that my breasts will fit into the blouse without looking like it is too small."

"There are a lot of designers out there that make pretty things," says Weeks. "My tip for new designers would be to make things that are really useable and attractive. You can buy a white shirt at a million places. But can you buy one that is stretchy on the sides with buttons that stay closed? There needs to be things that make your product actually *work* for people. There are so many brands that just whip all this stuff out and half of it doesn't work."

The Mind-the-Gap Blouse can be purchased at [Betabrand.com](http://Betabrand.com) for \$88 and is available in black and white.



Chrissy Weeks at her studio in Atlanta. Photo credit: [chrisseyweeks.com](http://chrisseyweeks.com)