

# Welcome

Hello!

It's my hope *The Dressmaker's Companion* will be a great blessing to you. It's the book I wish I'd had when I was learning to sew and had moved beyond the basics.

This book attempts to illustrate some of the many ways of making clothes, gleaned over the years from knowledgeable teachers and colleagues who generously shared their sewing ideas. The more I learned from them, the more I was astounded by just how many different ways there are to sew clothes! The part I loved the most (and still love) is the transformation of a roll of fabric, by skilled hands, into clothes.

I certainly don't want this book to be seen as a Book of Sewing Rules or that my way is The Only Way. *Your* sewing is how *you* choose to do it and the decisions are yours. Take opportunities to try different methods, examine finished ready-to-wear clothes, talk to others who sew, read sewing books, magazines and websites and try to learn something everytime you sew a garment. Continually add to your bank of knowledge and experience.

If you're an absolute beginner, the very best way to learn sewing is to get yourself a teacher. Either join a class or get someone who sews to start you off, then mentor you. Remember, no-one was born knowing how to sew; every professional started in the same place you are now.

You might like to know about me: I trained as a clothing patternmaker in 1990-91 in Adelaide, Australia, however, my first job as a young fresh-faced graduate was as a junior cutter. It was in a ladies wear factory, where we made ski pants, body suits, swing coats, power suits and box pleated skirts by the zillions. After six months they closed down and I got new job in a swimwear and sporting wear factory. It was a remarkable place with very talented staff; they made a huge variety of things out of lycra. They also took on unusual made-to-measure jobs such as unitards for a circus trapeze act.

The early 1990's was an interesting time to work in fashion with many new types of fabrics available. There was microfibre, micro peach, fabric printed with photographic prints, stretch wovens, hologram printed lycra, coolmax fabric, long-lasting polyester swimsuit fabric, UV protection fabric, and I remember seeing my first pair of parachute tracksuit pants (a friend had brought them back from America—little did we know how popular they would become). After the swimwear factory, I did a short stint as a bulk cutter in a school uniform factory, then lived in London working as a temp patternmaker for a fashion agency. I look back on my London era (late 1990's) with special fondness. Not only was it professionally enriching, it was also an exciting time and place to work in fashion. Back in Australia I went to work at a badly-run bridal studio before they went bankrupt, then five solid years as a clothing cutter, cutting individual garments for corporate uniforms. I estimate I cut 10,000 garments in my time there and actually wore out a pair of scissors. Perhaps unsurprisingly, a wrist injury made me decide to leave and I went to work as a patternmaker at a designer's studio. We did twice-yearly ranges, wedding dresses, mothers of the bride and race wear. Most of her clients were over fifty (apart from the brides) and we used beautiful, expensive fabrics from European fashion houses.

The designer was heading towards retirement and I changed to part-time hours, and began to do patterns seasonally at other places for the next several years; I thrived on the variety. I also began teaching sewing at a private sewing school. It was a steep learning curve because I had never taught before (but I knew my stuff). However, they took a chance on me and I enjoyed teaching and became more confident. Often a student would ask me to recommend a comprehensive sewing book, and the best I could suggest was *The Reader's Digest Complete Guide to Sewing* (a great book, by the way). A sewing book. *Hmm, I could do that*, I naively thought. I started writing this book and much of the material I tested on my classes.

Ten years later, here I am writing the introduction to what I thought might take a year. My life has changed from factories and studios and I now live in the country with my young family.

There isn't really anything new in this book, but I learnt it all the hard way. I hope you enjoy *The Dressmaker's Companion*.

Cheers!

Liz Haywood  
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