

Dressing Dolls In Style

A Handbook of Sewing Skills for Professional Results

Presented by
aworldofdolls.com

This book is dedicated to Rachel Hoffman



Doll on left is an antique wood-bodied F. Gaultier, 1860s
Middle doll is a reproduction Carl Armstrong Rohmer, 2019
Doll on right is an antique Smiling Bru, 1870s
More on their clothes in the Afterword

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Favrite Imprints
P.O. Box 225
El Verano, CA 95433

Dressing Dolls in Style

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Dressing Dolls in Style

Preface

The intersection of dolls and sewing came together for me at an early age. A small Ginny doll, a metal hand-crank sewing machine clamped to a card table, and I was lost in my own world. Ginny, one of the original hard plastic dolls that began to be mass-produced in the early 1950s, was a diminutive eight inches tall, long on charm, and I adored her.



With a few supplies and an idea, I would lay my doll on the fabric, draw around her tiny body, cut out the pieces, and sew away with an intense concentration that knew no bounds, turning that handle as fast as I could.

These early creations taught me the fundamentals of sewing: seam allowance, ease, pattern development, structure, and design. Undaunted by my early failures, I continued to pursue an instinctive talent with single-minded determination. Many hours were spent with the simplest of materials and the rudiments of skills. I even remember my first real commercial doll pattern. I spread it out over my bed and was in awe of all those tiny pieces.

Somewhere along the way Ginny left my life. I don't remember much about her particulars, not the color of her hair or eyes or what happened to her. I do remember her sweetness and simplicity and her adaptability to my ministrations and to the clothes created for her. Over the years, she haunted my memory, and I always looked for her in my forays for things antique.

Hooked on sewing, I progressed to the creation of a four-yard gathered skirt worn with seven petticoats in junior high. In high school, I continued to sew, mostly self-taught. My passion later followed me to college where I majored in Home Economics and bought my first full-sized sewing machine. Then came a teaching career, where I shared my insights and knowledge with other young sewing students, from junior high beginners through high school and community college advanced couture tailoring classes.

Today, that fascination continues on a more sophisticated level in a studio outfitted with the latest technical equipment, supplies to fit each task, fabric that spills out of the cupboards, as well as an abundance of patterns and ideas – all the tools of the trade.

The process is still the same – an idea, a piece of fabric, and a feeling that the end product is irrelevant. Success is measured by a sense of accomplishment that comes from the process, from the sensual feel of a piece of fabric laden with possibilities, the choice of a pattern, the execution of the techniques that make a garment exquisite, to the overall look of the finished product. Here is a process that satisfies today as it did so long ago.

Over the years, my attempt to find another Ginny doll seemed in vain. I could find reproductions, yet they just didn't match her oh-so '50s look. Finally, through the wonder of online auctions, I was able to find and collect these original cherished dolls, along with patterns and books from the height of her popularity.

Poring over the many references that documented Ginny's outfits, I looked for fabrics and trims reminiscent of that era and created outfits that matched her original look. Again, I lovingly made clothes for her—this time with my computerized sewing machine and all the gadgets that have brought sewing into the modern age. (See picture above of my original Singer sewing machine and a vintage Ginny with clothes newly sewn.)

Success in finding Ginny dolls led me to amass a collection of dolls from the mid-1850s to the modern era. This collection contains dolls that needed help, which has caused the creation of new clothing that emulates what the doll might have originally worn. This book is designed to provide information on that process—planning and executing doll clothes that present a doll in all her glory.

Having always called myself a craftsman, I am evolving again and finding that I can now call myself an artist. As the artist paints from a memory or a scene, I to am creating through my sewing projects from ideas that arise from a deep internal urge.

Exercising creativity, utilizing the tools available, and creating a unique garment in the mode of the original is a testament to an individualized way of looking at the world. In my sewing room, surrounded by my doll collection, I reconnect with an earlier era that seems simpler, experiencing the same contentment felt by that nine-year old so long ago at her sewing table.

This booklet is designed to share that enthusiasm and process with you in the hopes of expanding your thoughts, ideas, and skills so you can enhance your creative expression.

Dressing Dolls In Style

🌹 Introduction 🌹



Dressing dolls combines two of the top hobbies of today, doll collecting and sewing. Whether it's antique French Fashion dolls, reproduction dolls, composition dolls, mid-century all-plastic dolls, or more modern ball-jointed dolls, opportunities abound to create a new outfit.

Perhaps a new reproduction doll needs a new dress. Maybe an antique or vintage doll came with no clothes. And then, there is that one doll that is gently loved and in need of TLC. Many times, these are bargain dolls that, when brought back as close as possible to their original condition, can provide both monetary and psychological value to their owners.

The dolls above are antique French Fashion dolls. The one on the left is Lily from the workshop of Madame Leverone Perronne and dates to the mid 1860s. On the right is a Jumeau from the 1870s. The red and white check dress fabric that emulates antique fabric is from the Carmel Doll Shop Boutique, while the turquoise dress uses antique fabric from Diane Cucci, whose shop is on Ruby Lane. The trims are new, vintage, and antique.

The process of dressing dolls includes research to recreate costumes that emulate the time period in which the dolls were made. This can be a very rewarding process as it provides an opportunity to create a one-of-a-kind outfit that is unique to you and the doll.

The decisions that go into determining what to create for a doll can often take as much time and consideration as the making of the dress. A good source for inspiration is often Pinterest pages that others have developed to showcase various dolls and their eras. Taking these photos and putting them into a personal Pinterest page can save designs for future use.

Here are the inspiration photos for the two dresses above



Finding a design that is appealing and appropriate for the doll is the first step. Next is finding the appropriate fabrics and trims. While antique fabrics emulate the time period, often they are quite expensive. Some shops and web sites offer reproduction fabric from original designs.

This booklet is about dressing any doll in your collection in the style of her era or a style that is pleasing to you. Here you will gain information about how to make decisions on design selection, how to find fabric and trims to match your inspiration, how to create patterns for your design, and how to develop sewing expertise that will allow you to create professional results of which you can be proud.

Dressing Dolls In Style

Chapter 1

Putting Together A Sewing Kit

Using the best equipment and tools makes sewing a professional product easier and more authentic. This includes sewing machines, presser feet for the task, as well as needles, threads, irons, scissors, pressing and marking tools, and a flat space for cutting out patterns. Always buy the best you can afford. These tools will last longer and give more professional results.

BASIC TOOLS

Sewing Machine - The best sewing machine is the one that works the best for your style of sewing. A favorite for heirloom sewing is the Singer Featherweight machine. The 221 machines, produced between 1933 and 1969, can only create a straight stitch and has one of the best stitch tensions, which gives seams a similar look to those seen on clothes made in earlier eras.

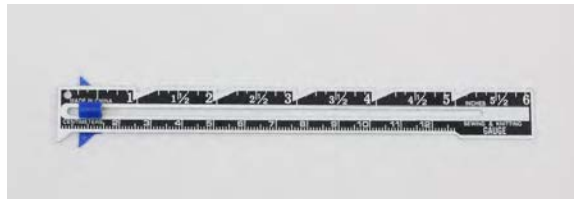
Here is a Model 222K, a “free-arm” machine, which allows for easier sewing of hard to reach areas. In the picture, you can see the lines where the machine bed can be removed, revealing the narrow free arm. This machine was produced between 1953-61 in Scotland for the USA market. →



Whatever sewing machine you use, use the narrow throat plate with the small hole for straight stitching when sewing doll clothes. Also, when not in use put a piece of fabric on the throat plate and lower the presser foot lifter. This takes the strain off the presser foot lifter.



← **Tape Measures** -- Best is one made of plastic starting with the 1” line on opposite ends of the tape. I like to have several tape measures of different lengths. The one on the left is 120” and the one the right is 60”



6” Seam Gauge - This is a very useful tool in doll sewing, to ensure that seams are even and the correct length. Use the slider to measure anything from 1/4” up, measure hems, as well as to compare two different sides of matching seams (such as center back seams) to show they are even.

Fabric Cutting Shears - These have a bent arm so that the blade can sit on top of the fabric as you cut. Since I am left-handed, all of my shears are true-left handed, which means that the handles accommodate a left hand as well as the blades being reversed to better show the cutting line. →

When cutting, always have the fabric to the inside of your hand.



Other Essential Scissors

Gingher 5" Knife Edge Craft Scissor - G-5C



Considered an essential tool for their versatility, these are heavy-duty scissors that cut all the way to the tip. The two blades are slightly different. The knife-edge tip can easily pierce through layers of fabric, such as a buttonhole. (See larger Gingher scissors in picture on the left.



↑ **Small scissors** – Pointed 3"-3-1/2" are handy for snipping threads and trimming seams. In my sewing kit, I also have some small scissors with rounded ends for safe use when sitting on the couch sewing with my dogs nearby. (Middle set shown above)

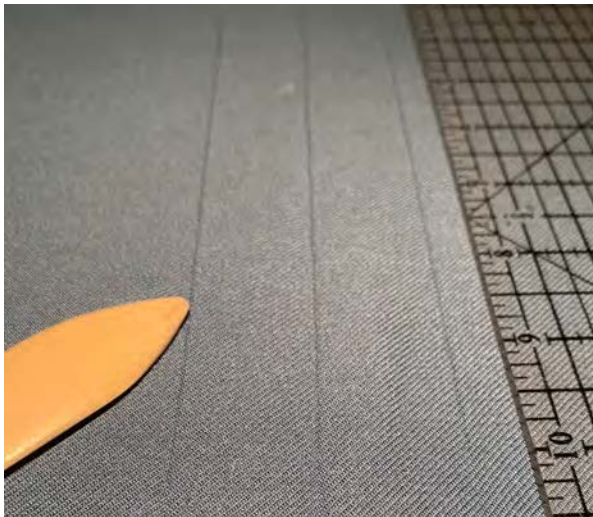
The Helpers: Lily, Daisy, Iris, and Brady



"Is it movie time yet?"

Fabric-Marking Tools

There are many tools for marking fabrics. Among the most used are tailor's chalk and a chalk wheel, (especially good for wool) and air or water-soluble markers. Old standards include making tailor's tacks and snipping edges for making darts. A relatively newcomer is the Friction pen, which erases with heat. Nothing is totally foolproof. Certain methods work better depending on the fabric choice. Having a variety in your arsenal and trying them out on the specific fabric is essential.



↑ Another useful tool is a bone marker. Various kinds are available. (See above) They can be made from bone (like the top one used in bookbinding), plastic, polymer materials, as well as wood and metal.

← The picture on the left shows the marking made by a bone marker, which can be helpful in making tucks, darts, etc.

Pleating Fabric & Ribbon →

There are many aids for pleating fabric and ribbon. The pleater on the left is a vintage board that I've had for many years, while the one on the right is one of three sizes carried by the Carmel Doll Shop Boutique.



OTHER TOOLS

Seam Ripper

Definitely essential. Especially important to have more than one, as one always seems to be hidden from sight when it's needed.

Rotary Cutting Tools

Cutting mat, clear ruler, and rotary cutter. A French curved ruler is also helpful for creating patterns from existing doll clothing.

Walking Foot

A walking foot is a good item to have in your arsenal, particularly if you sew heavy fabrics or need precision in matching stripes and plaids.

Flexible Ruler

This tool is useful for measuring curvatures and transferring that curve to a flat paper. →



Dressing Dolls In Style

Chapter 2

On Pins and Needles

There are many choices for sewing equipment in today's world. This is particularly true in selecting pins and needles for your project. Will you be sewing by hand, which is quite common in making clothes for antique dolls with antique fabric? Or, is this a project that utilizes machine sewing for all stages? Perhaps this project combines both hand and machine sewing. Whichever construction method is chosen for a project, there is a perfect pin and needle to suit the job.

With pins, the head is the most distinctive part, and it can be made from various materials, including glass, metal, or plastic. Glass-head pins are easy to grip and won't melt if touched by a hot iron. Silk pins, also called dressmaker's pins, have very small heads with slim, smooth shafts making them ideal for work with lightweight fabrics.

Large pins can easily damage silk as they can create holes that might show after removal of the pin. Plastic-head pins are not recommended (by this author) for sewing doll clothes, as they are not heat resistant and often have larger shafts, which can create holes.

The following is excerpted from a *Threads* magazine article. All comments represent their opinions.¹

Any pin is just the sum of its parts

The seemingly endless variety of straight pins can be daunting, unless you break each pin down into its five main components: head, point, thickness, length, and metal content. Just figure out what your needs are in each of the five areas, then seek out a pin with those qualities.

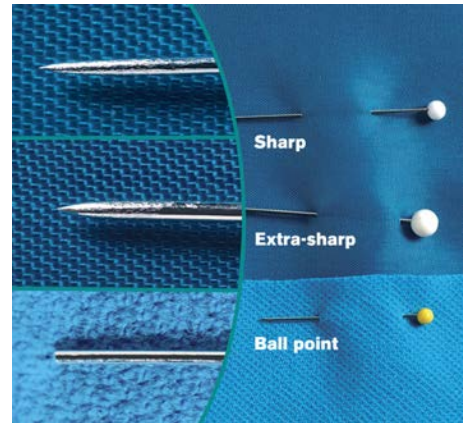
Point: The points of pins should slide cleanly into fabric without causing snags or unsightly holes. Different fabrics require different types of points.

Sharp: These all-purpose points are a fine choice for loosely woven, medium-weight, and heavyweight fabrics.

Extra-sharp: More defined and tapered, this point passes cleanly through delicate fabrics.

Ball point: Created especially-and only-for knits, this point is rounded so it slips between the loops of the fabric and doesn't pierce or pull the yarns.

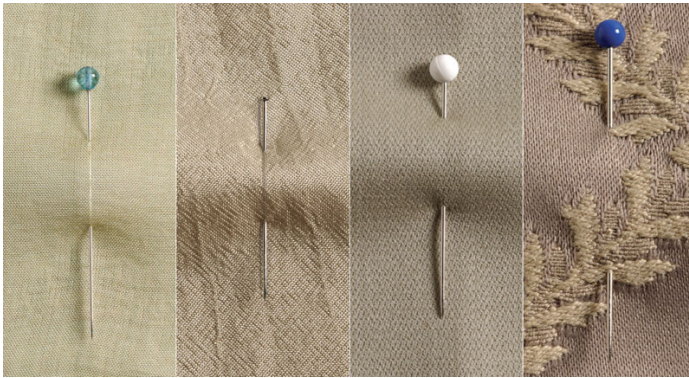
Length: Some sewing projects require long pins; other ventures may do better with short, stubby pins. Pin length used to be listed on packages as sizes (size 12 = 3/4 inch long, etc.), but most pin manufacturers now just list the actual lengths. Here are three different sizes:



¹ <https://www.threadsmagazine.com/2008/11/11/a-pin-for-every-purpose>

Thickness

To avoid marring fabric with pinholes, choose the thinnest pin to accomplish the task at hand.



Unfortunately, we discovered that the naming convention, as it relates to actual diameters, isn't consistent among manufacturers. So the best thing to do is roll a pin between your fingers to gauge its actual thickness.

← .4mm, .5mm, .6mm and .7mm or .8mm

.4mm The thinnest traditional pin we found was a .4mm "Patchwork Pin (Fine)" by Clover. It passes beautifully through the finest of sheers.

.5mm Called "extra-fine," "super-fine," "silk," or "satin," these .5mm pins are recommended for fine, lightweight fabrics, including some sheers.

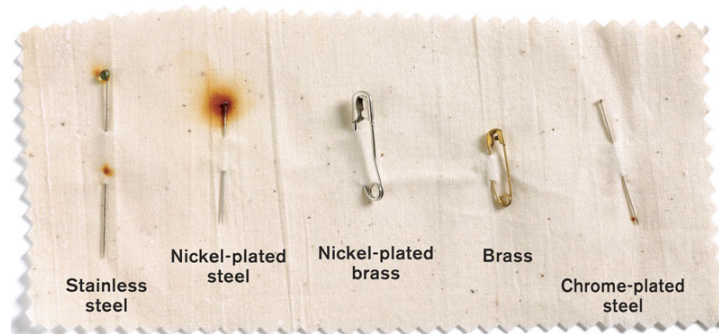
.6mm Most all-purpose pins are labeled "fine," and are best paired with medium-weight fabrics.

.7mm or .8mm Although harder to find, these diameters are great for thicker fabrics like heavy wools, denim, and quilted layers. But they do leave large holes in their wake.

Metal content

A pin's content is important, especially if you are allergic to certain metals. There are six types: stainless steel, nickel-plated steel, nickel-plated brass, brass, and chrome-plated steel, which is the strongest option. If you aren't sure of the metal, test it with a magnet; stainless steel and brass pins won't cling.

Put through a salt-water test, only nickel-plated brass passed. To test the rust-resistance of various metal types, we spritzed each pin with salt water. The results were surprising, as nickel-plated and chrome-plated steel should only rust if the plating is damaged; stainless steel should offer the best resistance. Brass tarnishes, but any residue washes out.



Left to right: Stainless steel, nickel-plated steel, nickel-plated brass, brass, and chrome-plated steel. (End of *Threads* magazine article)

Magnetic Pin Caddy →

There are many ways of handling pins, including tomato or other homemade pincushions, plastic containers, etc. Perhaps the best to use is a magnetic pin caddy. As the bottoms are also magnetic, they can be used to pick up pins where they accidentally fall.

The one on the left in the picture is from The Singer Featherweight Store: (singer-featherweight.com)



← Pictured left is a small magnet with an adhesive backing that can be attached to the metal part of a sewing machine. This is useful for holding pins that are removed while sewing on a sewing machine.

Here's a new magnetic tool that I just found. It's a telescoping magnetic tool that is extendable up to 31"–now, we won't have to stoop to the floor to pick up those pesky pins. On my floors, pins can only be seen from an angle and at a distance. Running this around the floor finds those pesky critters before they can cause damage.



Hand Sewing Needles & Thread

A general guideline is to use the smallest needle with the largest eye that you can see to thread. There is a whole cornucopia of needles available for hand sewing, making the ultimate decision a little more complicated than in the past.

Here is a “Needles Guide” from John James, a UK company and excellent purveyor of sewing needles:

https://www.jjneedles.com/images/needles-guide/Hand_Sewing_Needle_Size_Guide_Type_Length.pdf

Hand sewing needles are categorized by type, size, length, type of point, and shapes of the eye. Choosing an appropriate needle for a project can make sewing easier. Larger needle sizes indicate that the needle is shorter and finer.

Here is a list of common needles for hand sewing for doll projects. My suggestion is that you try multiple sizes of needle to see which work best for a specific fabric and your sewing style. The following needles should be considered for your sewing basket.

Sharps: General all-purpose needles with a round eye, fine and sharp, with a generally shorter shank. Most popular for general sewing.

Milliners/Staws: Long sharp needles used in hat making as well as for making decorative stitches. Very useful for basting.

Betweens: Sharp points, a round eye, which is slightly larger. Generally used for hand quilting and fine needlework



In a recent kit from Carmel Doll Shop Boutique that utilizes a delicate silk fabric, Sheryl Williams recommended hand sewing using Aurifil 50 or 80-weight thread and Clover Black Gold Needles, size 10-12 for the project. These needles are fine, like a quilting needles, yet have an eye easily threaded with the thinner 50 and 80 wt. thread.

Personally, having used Aurifil 50 wt. for many antique doll projects, and now having tried the 80 wt., I can attest to their benefits in making doll clothes, whether by hand or by machine.

In addition to Clover, another favorite of mine is a French company, Bohn, which makes high-quality nickel-plated steel hand needles. Piecemakers, an American Company that has its needles made in Japan is another desired choice.

Most everyday sewing thread is 40 wt., and this is useful for most projects. All-cotton thread is recommended for sewing cottons. Silk thread is the best for sewing silk and wool; however, cotton thread may also be used.

A good quality cotton thread in 40 wt. is Mettler Silk-Finish Cotton Thread, which comes in 250 different shades. Most colors also come in 50 or 60 wt. Cotton-covered polyester can be used for cotton blend fabrics, and all polyester thread is used for polyester fabric, particularly swim suit fabric.

**Secret Sewing Skill*

When hand sewing, it is best to use no more than 36" of thread; this can be measured from the tip of the nose turned away from the opposite hand that is stretched out from the body. On most people this is about a yard. When doubled, that is 18" of thread, which is a good length for hand sewing without causing knotted threads.

Beeswax or other thread-enhancing conditioners

Beeswax is very helpful in eliminating knots that naturally occur in hand sewing. After running the thread through the beeswax, the next--and most important step is to iron the thread. This melds the wax to the thread evenly.

Beeswax can be purchased in many different molds. (Picture is from Etsy shop, Peony Stitches)



Other thread conditioners available can be found with an online search for “sewing thread enhancing conditioners.” Using one makes for easier hand sewing.

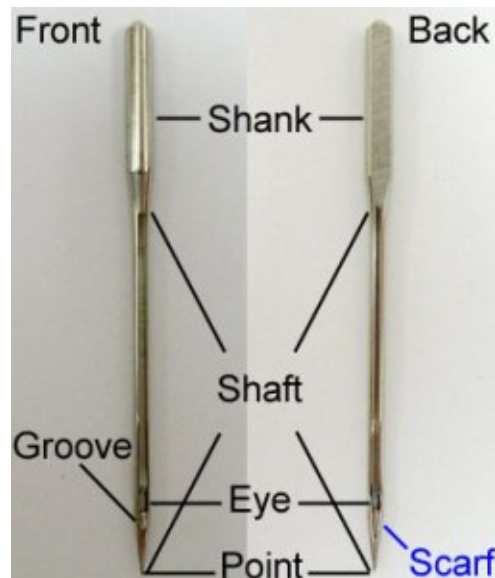
Machine Sewing Needles

Just like hand sewing needles, there is a profusion of sewing machine needles to select and each project must be evaluated to determine the best needle to use. As well, needles need to be checked before beginning a project to make certain there are no “burrs” that will prick the fabric and create snags.

Sewing machine needles have the same basic parts, with variation by shape and length of these parts. The shank is the upper part of the needle that is inserted into the needle clamp on the sewing machine. Shanks have a flat side and a rounded side so as to determine how to correctly install on a specific machine. There is a groove along the side of the needle into which the thread lies.

The following is taken from the website:

<https://samssignatureseams.wordpress.com/2014/11/23/sewing-machine-needle-guide/>



Needle Anatomy

The shank is the thickest part of the needle. It has a flat side on the back, and is rounded on the front so that it can be inserted into the needle clamps correctly.

The point is the first part of the needle that touches the fabric and can do the most damage. If you have a larger needle, it will make a bigger hole. See below for the correct point size for your fabric.

The shaft is the longest section of your needle.

The eye of the needle carries the thread to the bobbin casing and makes a stitch.

The groove leads into the eye of the needle.

The scarf is on the backside of the needle just above the eye. It allows the hook of the bobbin casing to get close to the eye of the needle to catch the thread and form the stitch.

The Universal needle, with its slightly rounded point and elongated scarf, is the standard machine needle.

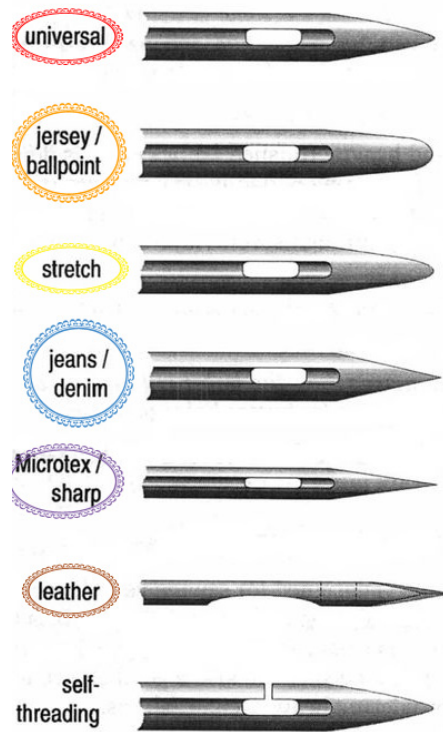
Jersey/Ballpoint needles have a slightly less rounded point so as to penetrate fabric threads rather than pierce them and are used for knits and fabrics that have some stretch to them.

Stretch needles are used for an assortment of knit fabrics that are super stretchy, such as ribbed knits, jersey knits, and cotton knits. If you love sewing baby onesies, this needle is your best friend.

The Jeans/Denim needle is super sharp and is for heavyweight woven fabrics such as denim and canvas.

The Microtex/Sharp needles, with an acute point, are for sewing microfiber, synthetic leather and precisely sewn edges.

The Leather needle has an arrowhead shape point and is used for leather.



In summary, use the best needle for the project and change needles as needed to secure a perfect-size stitch without incurring snags.

Needle Sizes

The best machines needles to use for sewing most doll clothes are a Universal needle in size 8-12. The 8-9 is very fine and useful with fine fabrics, such as silk, voile, organza, and antique fabrics. The 10-11-12 sizes work well with most medium weight fabrics, such as cotton and wool. For best results, do a test sample to check how the stitch looks.

Dressing Dolls in Style

Chapter 3

Pressing vs. Ironing

Perhaps you remember from days past when clothes had to be ironed. You'd sprinkle them with water, roll them up, and put them aside until they were evenly moist. Then, you'd take the iron and push it across the fabric until there were no more wrinkles. That's ironing.

Pressing is placing the iron on a specific area, then lifting it ever so slightly and moving to another area. This is the preferred manner for wool fabrics. A pressing cloth, which is sprayed with water, is used between the iron and the fabric.

If there were only one suggestion for making professional looking doll garments, it would be to use your iron every time you sew a seam. As seams cross and swirl, if the first seam isn't pressed correctly, the end result will show. Seams should be ironed or pressed, depending on the fabric, directly after sewing to set the stitch.

As you sew, press the closed newly sewn seam flat on both sides before opening it. This locks the thread to the fabric, giving a smooth, uniform result. Then, open the seam, finger press to give it some definition and then press, first on the inside and then on the outside of the seam. This procedure has you ironing or pressing each seam four times. There are a few exceptions; in particular, sleeve caps are not pressed on the outside after inserting.

Much of the difference between pressing and ironing is revealed through the fabric choice. Most cotton and linens can be ironed. That is, you can put the iron directly on the fabric, usually with a medium to hot temperature, and move the iron back and forth.

Pressing is lifting the iron just enough to release it from touching the fabric and to move it to another section of fabric. This prevents stretching and distortion. Wool and knits must be pressed. Wool is best pressed on a moderate heat and with a pressing cloth, such as fine cotton, between the iron and the fabric.

Silk and most rayon fabrics are another matter. They have their own moderate temperature on most irons and can either be pressed or ironed, determined by the individual characteristics of the fabric. It is best to experiment on a spare piece of fabric to see if the finish becomes shiny or changes characteristics by ironing or if using a press cloth and pressing makes its own mark. Either way, silk and rayon require care and thoughtfulness.

Many fabrics today contain synthetic yarns. While today's polyester is much better than earlier versions, it is still a synthetic fiber and resists attempts to tame it. Often, especially with small clothes for dolls, the seams must be stitched down to make them lie flat. One suggestion is to open the seam over a seam roll, give it a lot of steam, and then press a clapper over the seam until it cools. Another suggestion is a diluted white vinegar/water spritz. (one part vinegar to three parts distilled or filtered water)

Equipment

Irons

The secret to professional/couture sewing is all about the iron. Pick the best for your needs/wishes. There are irons that shut off, irons that don't shut off, and tailoring irons, which are heavy duty irons with a hanging water container, mostly used for wool fabrics. There are times when using steam in an iron is helpful and other times when a dry iron works best.

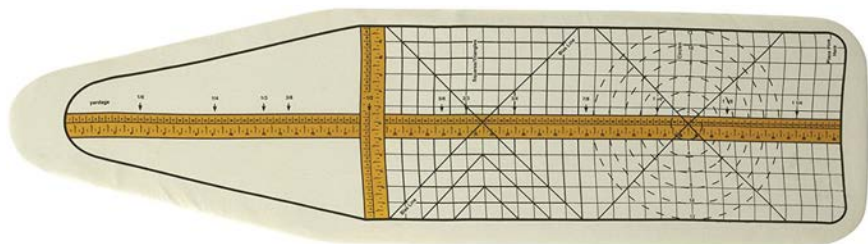
Irons by Rowenta are my personal preference. In particular, I use their iron without the automatic shut off. Having said that it's my favorite, my last one began to leak water; and, ultimately needed to be replaced. I still came back to Rowenta. →



Advice online is to always pour out any water in the tank after each use, which has become my new procedure since the iron was replaced. I also plug it into a surge protector, which I turn off when the iron is not in use.



← There are also specialty irons that are helpful when sewing for dolls. Here is a "puff iron" that can be used to iron doll sleeves.



Ironing Boards ↗

A regular ironing board is indispensable. Ironing board covers with measurement are available, which can be helpful. Know, though, that these measurements are not always accurate, so check them with your tape measure.



←Doll Ironing Board –

This doll-sized ironing board is a must for sewing for dolls. Here is one from the Virtual Doll Convention website. The Carmel Doll Shop Boutique also has sold these smaller ironing boards.

Pressing Cloths

These can be purchased specifically for use in sewing or you can use fabric “left-overs.” They should be white or natural in color and vary from lightweight batiste to a muslin fabric.

Velvet board

This is a must-have for sewing with velvets and velveteens of all types. There are many available. Here are two choices. The top white is a June Taylor board. The bottom is homemade from a piece of thick upholstery fabric with a substantial nap. →



←Hamming it Up!

Hams and clappers are indispensable in sewing. They provide crisp seams on all fabrics, especially wool. They help tame curved seams. A clapper works to take out excess steam and to flatten seams. The red plaid has two sides, a wool side and a canvas side. You can slip your hand into either side to use in pressing seams.

General Guideline for Pressing vs.

Ironing:

1. Silks - usually a dry iron with medium heat works. Sometimes, if the silk has deep wrinkles, a little spritz is helpful. A good spray bottle with a very fine mist along with a press cloth is best.
2. Cottons - can use a hot iron and lots of steam
3. Wools - need a wool setting with a pressing cloth sprayed with water for moisture or a good steam iron.
4. Polyesters – may need special treatment, e.g., sewing seams flat, using vinegar solution, or a clapper to get flat seams.

****Secret Sewing Skill***

After sewing a seam, press or iron (depending of the fabric) both sides of the seam flat (before opening it) to set the stitches.

Then open the seam, finger press to flatten it slightly, then press or iron on both wrong/inside and the right/outside.

Each seam should get four different pressings. Always press as you sew each seam.

This will make a difference in the finished garment.

Dressing Dolls in Style

Chapter 4

Basic Hand Sewing

Hand sewing can be especially satisfying, connecting us to one of the most ancient practices. All it takes is a piece of fabric, a needle, some thread, and scissors, and we are performing a task that goes back centuries.

This practice is also very low tech and allows for a simple introduction to sewing. As a beginner, you can learn basic stitches and discover whether this is a skill you'd like to add to your repertoire before greater investment. Often, you are able to borrow these simple tools from a sewing friend to determine your level of interest.

Introduction to Hand Sewing

The first step is to choose a needle and thread appropriate to the fabric, using the smallest needles that you can for the fabric being sewn (See more information in Chapter 2—On Pins and Needles). If you are a newbie, start your first project with a cotton fabric and cotton thread, find a simple pattern for one your dolls, and hand sew to get the satisfaction that comes from this hobby.

The Best Way to Thread a Needle

With thanks to *Threads* magazine. Reference the video:

<https://www.threadsmagazine.com/2015/11/23/video-a-secret-to-threading-a-needle>

Thread is made of several single strands, called “plies,” which are twisted together. When you cut the thread and then thread the needle from the cut side, the thread can twist in the wrong direction and snarl while sewing. Thread has a grain and best to use thread as it comes off the spool.



***Secret Sewing Skill:**

When threading a needle, it is best to pull off some thread, thread the needle, and then cut the thread.

Because the thread spirals as it comes off the spool, the thread will now be much smoother as it glides through your fabric.

To thread a needle, first cut the end of the thread coming from the spool at an angle. Then, hold the needle with your thumb and middle finger, with your index finger free above and next to the needle eye. Moisten the thread and needle slightly, and then take the NEEDLE TO the thread. When the thread is within the eye of the needle, push your index finger up to pull it through the eye. If you find, after two or three tries, that you have still not captured the needle, re-cut the thread, as it will have started to fray. Use a magnifying glass, if needed.

How to Begin Hand Sewing a Seam

When starting a seam, a method must be employed to anchor the thread so that it is stable and does not come out. Taking a cue from quilters, there should not be a large knot at the beginning or end of a seam. One method to avoid this is to make a small stitch at the beginning of a seam, leaving a tail of about an inch, and then make a tiny backstitch to keep the thread imbedded in the fabric. This is a good method for tightly woven fabrics, such as cotton and linen.

The second method is to make a small knot by making a circle of the last inch or so of thread and pulling the end through the circle. Then, place your finger and thumb on the knot and cut closely. When inserted into fabric, this makes a very fine knot that easily pulls through the fabric, so this method also involves making a tiny backstitch at the beginning of the seam. When using a double thread, make the knot as above, insert the needle into the fabric, put the needle through the double thread, and pull up to anchor the knot. This is a good method for fine woven fabrics, such as silk and fine cottons.

After finishing sewing the seam, make a tiny stitch, wrap the thread around the needle twice, and pull through as if making a miniature French knot. Bury the thread by inserting the needle near the knot, making a stitch of about a ½” between the layers and then cut. This is an invisible stitch that embeds the thread inside the seam so there’s less chance of the stitches coming out.

Basic Hand Stitches

Visual directions for most hand stitches can be found in video or picture instructions using a search engine. If you like video or pictures instructions, find your favorite online. Basic information is below.

Straight or Running Stitch – This stitch is made with in and out stitches of equal length and is used for seaming, basting, and gathering. If a garment is completely hand sewn, these stitches should be quite small. Be careful not to pull up the thread too tight, which will make the seam shorter. To do this, check tension every inch or so and make a backstitch to reinforce.

Backstitch – This is a strong and useful stitch for creating a completely hand sewn garment. A backstitch is made by taking the needle into the fabric behind the previous stitch. This stitch creates triple layers of thread, making it easy to pull up so that seam could become slightly gathered. To help alleviate this gathering effect, smooth out the fabric and make a small knot periodically.

<https://www.threadsmagazine.com/2012/10/02/how-to-master-the-backstitch>

Threads magazine is a resource for sewing this stitch. The magazine is an excellent sewing resource, even though it is not doll specific.

Basting Stitch – This is a longer version of the straight stitch and is used to temporarily sew two seams together.

French Seam – This seam finish encases raw edges by sewing the seam twice, first wrong sides together and then turning the seam and sewing right sides together. Many antique garments through the early 20th century utilized this seam finish. On doll's clothing and even women's garments, these seams are quite narrow, even as small as a finished 1/8.”

Buttonhole Stitch – This is an edging stitch that completely binds the cut edge of fabric. When hand sewing buttonholes on doll clothes, thread mark both ends of the buttonhole. To determine the length of the buttonhole, add the length and width measurements of the button. Then, make very small running stitches or machine sew a rectangle around the buttonhole measurement, about 1/8” from the centerline on both sides. Cut the centerline and use the buttonhole stitch while catching the running stitches. This keeps the buttonhole thread from pulling out.

Ladder Stitch – This is a very useful stitch to join two pieces of fabric that need to match on the outside, such as plaids. This stitch is worked from the right side of the two fabrics being joined. To prepare the fabric, press the seam allowance (1/4” usually on doll clothes) of the top layer. Then, place the pressed seam allowance on top of the lower fabric seam allowance and stitch together from the right side, pulling up threads to make them invisible. If the outfit is to be machine stitched, the fabric can now be put right sides together and the seam stitched. This is also useful for inserting sleeves into small openings.

Catch Stitch – This is a cross-stitch that secures stitches so that they lie flat, usually used in hemstitching. It creates tiny, almost invisible stitches on the outside of fabric, with larger x-shaped stitches on the inside. This stitch is sewn backwards.

Pad Stitch – This is a tailoring stitch consisting of slanted stitches worked perpendicular to the line of stitching. This stitch is designed to hold fabrics firmly together to maintain accuracy when sewing. Often used to stitch a main fabric to a lining fabric prior to cutting and sewing.

Invisible Stitch – This is also known as blind hem stitch and is a hidden stitch that is invisible on the inside.

Overcast Stitch – This is also known as a “whip stitch” and consists of short diagonal stitches to encase an edge or two edges, such as the inside seams of a sleeve, so as to avoid raveling.

Dressing Dolls in Style

Chapter 5

Basic Machine Sewing

The sewing machine came into use in middle-class homes in the 1860s. If you are a purist, clothes made for dolls manufactured before this time would be sewn by hand and clothes made for dolls manufactured after this time can include machine sewing.

Tips for using the sewing machine to make doll clothes:

1. Machines need periodic service. This means occasionally taking them to a professional to perform a thorough servicing. Routine home maintenance between professional servicing includes cleaning and oiling the machine. Every machine has an instruction manual to follow for this process. Many instruction manuals are available online.
2. Before starting a new project, clean the lint from the machine, and check the needle to make certain it is still sharp with no burrs. Especially when sewing with antique or specialty fabrics, start with a new needle for each project. Use the appropriate needle size and type as well as the proper thread for the fabric being sewn. See Chapter 2, *On Pins & Needles*.
3. Machines each have their own personality and idiosyncrasies. Knowing your machine's quirks will make your sewing more accurate. Doll clothes are small, and small variations in sewing can make the difference between perfect fit and no fit at all.
4. When an error is made, don't throw everything away and give up. Put it aside for a few days while ruminating on what can be done to salvage the project.

Every project has the potential for challenges. Even experienced seamstresses can make mistakes or have things “run amok.” These challenges ought to be seen as opportunities—to discover a new technique, utilize a formerly unthought-of design, learn a new skill, plus many other ideas. There are many “ah-ha” moments that come from these trials. This is a lifetime learning hobby so give yourself permission...(fill in the blank with your own permission)

Dolls are Not Hard on Their Clothes

As a result, clothing made for dolls does not need to be over-constructed. For example, taking a clue from the quilting world, doll seams do not need to be backstitched. Rather, at the beginning and end of a seam, put the machine stitch length to zero and stitch a couple of stitches, which will secure the beginning and end of a seam.

When using sewing machines to sew a seam, because of the action of the presser foot, the top fabric will move slightly faster than the bottom fabric, which could create unmatched seams. There are several tricks to handle this issue. When stitching, keep the shorter seam on top; hold the front of the fabric in your right hand parallel to the sewing machine bed, and sew with a normal stitch.

Use a “pad stitch” to baste two seams together before machine sewing. This is particularly helpful on slippery fabrics, such as velvet, rayon, and silk. Use a “ladder stitch” to effectively match plaids, patterns, or stripes. See Chapter 4 *Basic Hand Sewing*

If matching plaids, patterns, or stripes, pin fabrics together with the lines of the top fabric slightly ahead of the corresponding lines of the bottom fabric and baste using the pad stitch. Check the right side to verify accuracy of match. For me, having the top fabric just slightly ahead of the bottom fabric makes for a perfect match after machine sewing.

Machine-made Construction

Machine sewing includes all the sewing that goes into the construction of garments and the seam finishes that are only seen from the inside. The first priority is to fit together all the pattern pieces so that a beautiful garment emerges. Only then do we look to the inside. When constructing a gorgeous garment, the inside should look as good as the outside.

When sewing curved pieces, particularly those that curve in opposite directions, such as princess seams, do not be concerned with matching the entire seam before sewing. Place a pin at the beginning of the seam and the end, and then stretch the ends slightly to pull them into union. Start sewing the seam, lining up the two sides for ½” or so, stitch that small section, then line up the next ½” and continue to sew and match the sides. In the beginning you may not be able to get them to match; practice and you will become an expert. Remember to match seams at the seam allowance and not the edge of the fabric.

Doll clothes are usually made with ¼” seams. Remember, when you reduce or enlarge patterns using your copier, the seam allowances will also change. Either cut seam allowance off the pattern before printing or change the seam allowance after making the adjustments.

Machine-made Seam Finishes

Modern sewing machines offer an extensive selection of ways to finish seam edges. Some of these seam finishes are appropriate for vintage and antique dolls. A wider array of seam finishes is available on computerized sewing machines when sewing for modern dolls.

Pinked Seam: This seam finish is appropriate for both modern and antique doll clothes. In the 19th century, “pinker” machines with a wheel and a flat bed were used to edge fabrics. The fabric is rolled along the bed by turning a wheel, and the pinker makes the cut. These machines can still be found through auction sites. Today, pinking shears do the same thing, although the earlier pinker machines often have fancier cut edges.

French Seam: This seam finish is most appropriate for antique dolls, yet can still be used for modern dolls. For antique adult and doll clothing, French seams were a favorite method of sewing straight seams, particularly on longer skirt seams. Many of these seams, even on adult clothing, are 1/8” finished width.

A French seam on doll clothes can be sewn by hand or by machine. To sew by machine, place fabric pieces wrong sides together, stitch 1/8” from the edge, iron both sides, and then trim seam allowance to 1/16.” Press seam allowance to one side, then turn and place right sides together, making certain the fold is accurate. Sew seam at 1/8” allowance.

Turned and Stitched Seam: →

I first saw this seam on a silk evening dress in an exclusive dress shop in San Francisco many years ago. The finished seam was 1/8” on each side of the stitch line. Here is a garment made on the bias of slippery silk that I made. Extra steps beyond the instructions below are needed. The seams are just slightly over 1/8” wide.

To make this seam finish on doll clothes seams, first sew the seam at the regular 1/4” seam allowance. Press open, and then turn under each side of the seam allowance and top stitch. You can top stitch the seam edges separately if you don’t want any stitching to show on the right side. Or, you can edge stitch them, attaching them to the fabric; the stitching will then show on the right side of the garment.



Serger Seam: The serger is appropriate for clothes made for dolls from the late 1960s to the present. Once mastered, a serger makes sewing seam finishes a quick task. For dolls, use a three thread narrow stitch. Another good serger stitch for doll clothes is the rolled hem.

I have a doll from around 1910 that came with a lovely outfit—well-made, appropriate style, fabric, and trim for the era—yet the inside was finished with a serger. While she looks good from the outside, the dress is definitely not appropriate to her era. *She keeps tapping her foot for a more appropriate dress. Hopefully soon, I tell her.*

Dressing Dolls in Style

Chapter 6

Meet Sophia, an 1850s China Head

Making doll clothes to convey a desired image for a particular doll involves many design and construction decisions before even starting a project. The good news is that researching what a doll would have worn when first manufactured has become easier than ever before.



Let's start with a doll and look at possibilities. These are the steps that you can follow with any doll up to and including modern ones.

Here is an early China Head unmarked doll, purportedly from the early 1850s. She arrived all bundled up in clothing that, while it was old, did not enhance her charms. What did work were her pantalets, a slip, and her knitted brown cotton stocking and leather boots.

← Here she is as she came to me.

Sophia, meaning wisdom, became her name. At almost 16" tall, she appears to be similar to the current reproduction dolls with the Dollspart body. She looks to be a young girl, perhaps early teens, which means an *Enfantine* style would work for her. This style features a shorter skirt that shows her stockings and boots.

Because she is close to the size of a Dollspart body, the first thing I did was put a dress on her that was made specifically for that body. →

As noted, the dress fits in all places except the upper chest, shoulder, and neck area. Thus, any pattern made for the Dollspart body can be adapted to her with some modifications.

Finding established patterns to use as a basis of a new doll can be the easiest way to create a new pattern.



Comparing Measurements

	Sophia	Dollspart 12.5" body
Chest/Bust	9"	8-½"
Front Chest Width	4"	3-½"
Back Shoulder Width	4-½"	3-½"
Waist	7-½"	7-½"
Hip	9-½"	9"
Back Waist Length	3-½"	3-½"
Sleeve length	5"	5"

The measurements above show where modifications need to be made: Chest/Bust, Front Chest Width, and Back Shoulder Width.



← Her measurements were taken with the full array of underclothes that would have clothed her during the time period she represents. Here she is with her pantalets, a chemise, corset, corset cover, a hoop skirt, and a slip.

Now that Sophia is ready to be clothed, we must determine a dress design, fabric, and pattern that will accent her charms.

The silhouette of the 1850s was a full skirt, a tight waist and broad rounded shoulders, often with layered ruffles. For dolls, this style is known as *Enfantine*. A basic garment of this area was a chemisette with blousy sleeves and tight cuffs, lace trim, pin tucks, and lace. Jackets with pagoda-shaped sleeves were also popular, as were the Zouave bolero jackets.

Fabrics were cotton, silk, linen, and wool. Petticoats were made in the same style as the dress patterns—cotton in the summer and flannel in the winter. A ruffle at the bottom created fullness without layers. The color palette for that era includes muted shades of greens, browns, red, and purple (the purple in antique fabrics of that era have today faded to brown), with emphasis on plaids and stripes

Outerwear for winter included hand-knit or crocheted shawls, often trimmed with fringe, ruffles, flounces, or braid. Plaid tartan was popular. A cape-like top with long lapels, called a *pelérine*, was popular. Capes, both short and long circled the shoulders, ending at the elbow line. Finally, a muff protected the hands.

A lady never left home without a bonnet of straw or fabric that complemented the dress, often decorated with flowers, ribbons, and feathers. Further completing an outfit were gloves, a small bag or reticule (a pouch hung from the waistband), handkerchief, parasol, jewelry, and often a hand fan.

Hairstyles showed a part down the center of the head with ringlets smoothed over the ears for young girls; women's style were lightly waved and smoothed to a back bun, with a net or snood.

Now that we know the details of a silhouette, next is the decision of what to make for her. The Internet provides ample opportunities for finding and recording ideas. Creating a Pinterest page for early China Head dolls or any specific doll will create a space to amass various outfits that might be from her era. This can include early dolls from that era including Huret, Rohmer, Barrois, and others.

Research Design Options

Here are some ideas from a Pinterest page set up specifically for Sophia:



The next step is to find patterns that have elements of the designs and pair them with correct fabrics, including a fashion fabric and the understructure that will support the outfit. This includes, among other things, the under-linings or interlinings, interfacing, and linings that best suit the pattern and fabric choices

Fabric Design Considerations

Let's now look at fabrics that might fit into any of these outfits. First stop, since she is an antique doll, is to look for fabrics from that era. If antique fabrics are not available, there are many reproduction fabrics and new fabrics that might be appropriate.

To narrow down the choices, let's eliminate the brown and blue (middle picture, bottom row), as there is no fabric in my stash to do it justice. Also eliminate the burgundy and blue (left, bottom row and the pinky-orange (right, top row) because of fabric/pattern choices. That leaves the white (first row left), the white with orange flecks (first row middle), and the pink check (bottom right).

There were two choices in my stash to consider →

Because the pink check (on the right in the picture) is a reproduction fabric and the white patterned with pink (left) is an antique fabric, the first choice is to use the pink/white print fabric to make the orange print inspiration dress, leaving the pink check for a future project. Note that the C'est La Mode pattern looks remarkably like the antique pink with black trim above.



Now, we are ready to develop a pattern.

First, let's blow up the picture so that we can see more details:



Since one of the defining characteristics of this dress is the full sleeves, let's start with finding a pattern that mimics them. A pattern from a kit by Louise Hedrick from the Carmel Doll Shop Boutique can be used as a starting point. (See picture next page) The sleeve pattern appears to work with the slight modification of making the pattern shorter in the front to match our inspiration picture. So, using our measurements above, let's also use the front and back from this pattern to re-work the bodice to match our doll's measurements.

Fitting Adjustments



← Louise Hedrick's dress pattern.

Because the doll's shoulders are larger than the Dollspart body, as a starting point, the bodice front and bodice back of the original pattern designed for the Dollspart body was enlarged to 115%. Then, a non-fusing, non-woven, lightweight interfacing was used to create a sample to try-on the doll. ↓

The armhole and the bodice top seam allowance were stitched and folded back so as to check where the bodice front and shoulder would lie. →

Note that the bodice front is a little too wide, so a small fold in the center front brings it more in line with her body. The sleeve seams seem on the right spot, perhaps a little off the shoulder. However, looking at our inspiration photo dress, this appears to match that picture, and dresses from that era often were often off the shoulder.



Other changes include increasing the seam allowance at the bottom of the bodice to match her waist line, as well as increasing about $\frac{1}{8}$ " in the shoulder seam and rounding it off slightly to match her shoulders. These changes were marked directly on the interfacing so that this can become the actual pattern used.



← Here are the revised pattern pieces. Note the center front has been decreased by about $\frac{1}{4}$ " and the bottom edge has $\frac{1}{2}$ " added. The back bodice has an added portion that tapers toward the shoulder seam, so the front bodice needed a slight increase to make the seams equal. Notice also that the patterns have been made so that they can be laid out on a single piece of fabric, rather than a double fold, which provides more accuracy when cutting out these small fabric pieces.

The next step is to check the fit. We could make another sample; however, as the garment top will be lined, the bodice was cut from the lining fabric and the pieces were machine basted together to check the fit. The fit was perfect!

The basting was then removed, and the lining was used as the pattern pieces for the antique fabric. Before cutting, the two fabrics were hand basted together using a pad stitch. See Chapter 4, *Basic Hand Sewing*.



← Once the two fabrics were pad stitched together, they were treated as one. Next, cut out the pieces, and sew the shoulder seams together.

Sleeve Insertion



←↑ Here is a simple way to insert sleeves flat into a dolls outfit to create a “true” sleeve insertion. Before sewing the side seams, the sleeve is put in flat; however, it is not sewn all the way to the side seams. Stop about ½” before the side seams on both sides.

See two pictures above.

The next step is to sew both the side seam of the garment body and the seam of the sleeves. This leaves a gap at the bottom of the sleeve where it intersects the bodice.



← Turn to the inside and pin, then stitch the bottom part of the sleeve to the bodice.

This is usually a hand-sewing job. The bodice is ready for the trim.

On to the skirt:

The antique fabric was barely 20" wide. Because of the small size of the doll, I determined that one width would be ample for the skirt so the skirt width was cut.

For the curvature of the bottom of the top skirt, interfacing was cut to match the skirt width. The pattern was marked to determine the sections for the curved edge. →



← Ultimately, after trial and error, a curved edge was identified, and a pattern was cut from non-fusible interfacing, pleated, and tried on to determine the effect.



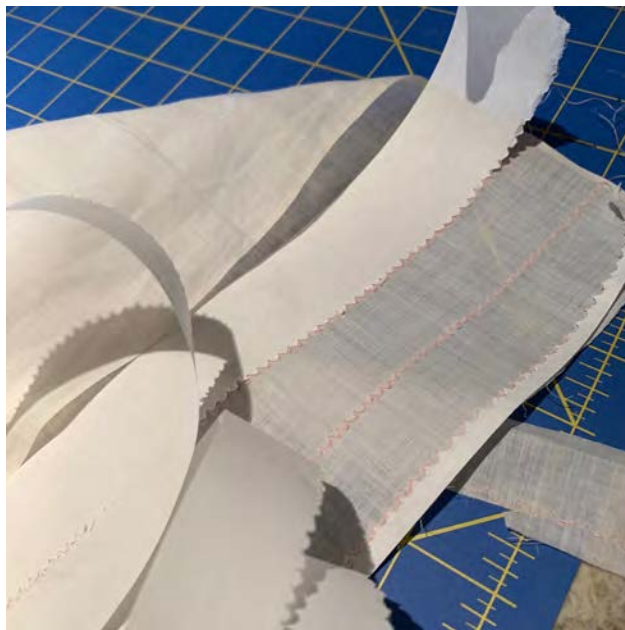
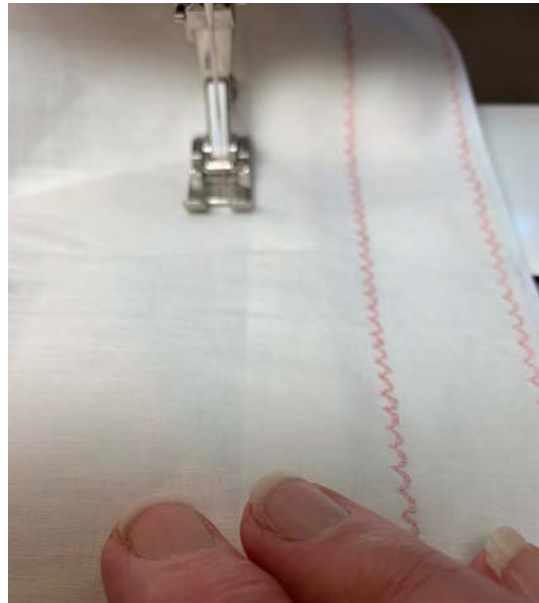
Both skirt layers were pleated as one to match the inspiration photo. As the inspiration photo seemed to show more of a saw tooth edge, the ultimate pattern was made more angular; however, to soften the angular nature of the pattern piece, the trim was sewn on with a slight curve.

Making the trim:

After an Internet search for appropriate trim was unsuccessful, I decided to make one with the embroidery function of my electronic sewing machine. Using antique fabric and spacing to allow for cutting the edge, a facsimile pink trim was created.

Several versions were made, with mixed results. Finally, a computerized edging was selected and the trim was sewn. A couple of times, the thread bunched up.

Here are some suggestions from my experience. First, hold the fabric straight at both the front and the back with a light touch to guide it through the machine. It should not be pulled, yet there needs to be even tension for the machine to make a good stitch.



← Second, back the fabric with paper. I used some old adding machine tape to help keep the stitch from bunching up, although there were still a couple of areas with minor issues. Once finished, the paper comes off easily.

Sew slowly and use your hands to guide the fabric, not pull it through.

To sew it on, the trim was pleated as one to the bottom of the upper skirt, and then sewn with slightly rounded seams at the points and indents.

Close the back right over left. Finish with hooks and eyes or buttons. (For women and girls the openings are always closed right over left, while for men and boys it is left over right.)



Making Even Gathers

Suitable undergarments were necessary to maintain the proper shaping of the Enfantine skirt. In my stash was an antique ribbon trim just the exact width needed for a slip. After cutting the proper length, the side edge seams were turned over $\frac{1}{8}$ " and stitched, then excess fabric was trimmed close to the stitching.

Then, the edge was turned again and hand stitched to complete the seam finish. →

A narrow hem was turned up at the bottom.

Gathering the top

As this was a stiff fabric trim, three gathering stitches were stitched at $\frac{1}{8}$ ", $\frac{1}{4}$ ", and $\frac{3}{8}$ ".



After pulling up the gathering threads, take hold of the top and the bottom of the gathers and pull slightly to get the gathers to fold neatly in place. ←

A tight weave cotton fabric for the waistband was pulled tightly around Sophia's waist and a pin was placed on both sides. →



Once the width of the gathers approximately matches the waist measurement, place a pin through the fabric parallel to the back seam opening and the seam width in from the edge. This edge is the closure overlap. ← Do this on both edges.

← The thread is then wrapped around the pin in a figure eight. This helps to hold the gathers evenly in place while the waistband is stitched.

Check for the correct waist measure. Make any adjustments needed to even the gathers. Remember to wrap a pin on both sides of the area that is to be gathered. Even out the gathers as you pin to the waistband. Sew on the waistband at $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance, then remove the pins and trim the extra threads.

Here is Sophia modeling the finished dress. The hat was created from a Sheryl Williams pattern from the Carmel Doll Shop Boutique. Shoes were made by Pat Hauser. Her stockings are from the Ruby Lane shop Finishing Touches. The background screen is from the Carmel Doll Shop Boutique. Her gloves are a crochet pattern from Mary Ann Shandor, (frenchdollfashions.com)



Here are two resources that were used in writing this chapter.

<https://vintagedancer.com/>

<http://www.vintagevictorian.com>

Dressing Dolls in Style

Chapter 7

Meet Anna, an Early 20th Century German Lady Doll

Here's a doll by Simon & Halbig with a lady body. She is marked 1159 S&H 5, and is approximately 15" tall. While her outfit is quite nice, it does not appear to represent her lady doll body nor her era of early 1900s.

Her coiled braided hair wig looks original to her, and her lady body (not noticeable in this picture) says she's becoming a young woman. Let's name her Anna, a very popular name at the turn of the last century and my maternal grandmother's name.



Let's first compare Anna to other doll bodies so that we can determine a basic pattern that might be adapted to an outfit from her era.

Here she is compared to the Dollspart body (left) and the Gildebrief doll body (right).



To start, we can see that they are all a similar height and that our project doll has narrower shoulders, a longer torso, and shorter arms.

Here's a chart showing comparison measurements between the three bodies.

Comparison of Doll Bodies			
	<u>Dollspart</u>	<u>Gildebrief</u>	<u>S&H 1159</u>
Height	15"	15"	15"
Bust	8"	8-1/4"	7-1/2"
Waist	6-1/8"	6-1/8"	5-1/2"
Hip	8-3/8"	8-1/2"	8-1/2"
Back Waist Length	3-1/4"	3-1/2"	2-3/4"
Back Shoulder Width	3-7/8"	3-7/8"	2-7/8"
Shoulder Seam Length	1-1/2"	1-1/2"	1"
Shoulder Seam Depth	1/2"	1/2"	3/8"
Shoulder to Bust	1-3/4"	2"	1-7/8"
Arm Length	5"	5"	4-3/4"
Upper Arm Circumference	2-3/4"	3-1/8"	3"
Wrist Circumference	2-1/4"	2"	2-1/8"
Hand Circumference	2-1/2"	2"	2-1/2"
Waist to Feet	9"	9"	9-1/2"

We can deduce that any pattern for the Dollspart or Gildebrief body can easily be adapted to the project doll, with minor adjustments. So, how to dress her?

A white dress was very appropriate to that era. Also skirts with white tucked and ruffled blouses. Here are some examples. Black and white photos courtesy of Pinterest. Color photo courtesy: oldrags.tumblr.com/image/5163184661



A white blouse with lace and tucks seems universal to a young woman of this era, with a skirt in a length from below the knees to just above boot height, depending on her age. Going through clothes that I had already constructed, there was a blouse that fit, with the only alteration being shortening the sleeves with a couple of tucks. A tissue-weight linen in brown matches her quite well.

The skirt pattern is relatively simple, with pleats (either loose or sewn down) and a slight flare. One picture shows tucked bottoms of the two skirts (bottom left above) while another shows some kind of trim sewn in triple rows (top center above). Either would help the skirt hang well.



←The pictures remind me of another outfit made for a doll from the same time period. Her name is Mrs. Horace Adams and she is a suffragette. She is wearing the colors of the movement, purple and green. She's a Suzanne McBrayer 16" reproduction Simon & Halbig 152 German doll (bisquebeauties.com).

Her skirt is between a quarter and a half circle and would work in a shortened version.

To determine whether the pattern will be successful for Anna, I will, as is my usual process, make a slip that will be worn with the skirt. That way, tweaks can be made before cutting into antique or expensive fabrics.

Here is her slip. →



Comparing it to our inspiration pictures above, it appears to be a good pattern that is worthy of an antique fabric.

Here is the antique linen fabric draped at her waist. It is lightweight and easy to sew.

↓ Below is the fabric after cutting out the pattern. Even though the slip wasn't quite a half-circle, the skirt was cut as a full half-circle to determine if this would make a better representation of our inspiration skirts. The extra fabric can always be cut away later.

Making the tucks at the bottom of the skirt was problematic as this portion of the fabric is on the bias, which means that when you fold over to make the tucks, one side is smaller than the other (as you can see with the curled edges in the picture).



← A folding line was marked with chalk, then turned and pinned. The difference from the bias of the fabric made it difficult to get an even tuck, so a basting stitch was sewn on the bottom seam line of the tuck and the fabric was slightly gathered before folding and hand sewing the tuck.

When on the straight of grain, tucks can either be hand or machine stitched. Because of the bias nature of the tuck on this dress, machine sewing didn't work because the bias twisted during sewing. The tuck was hand sewn.



← Here is Anna ready for school or an afternoon outing.

The blouse is made from a pattern for the Dollspart body, with some tucks in the sleeves to shorten them to her size.

Anna's boots are from the Virtual Doll Convention shop. Her socks are from the Ruby Lane shop "Finishing Touches," where Laura personally makes these stockings. →



Dressing Dolls in Style

Chapter 8

Meet Gertrude, early 1900s 16" Jutta Doll

Here's Gertrude, a German doll from the early 1900s. She's a 16" tall Cuno & Otto Dressel 1349 Jutta doll made with a Simon and Halbig body. She's marked 6-1/2. Here she is compared to two other German dolls. On her left is a Kestner 171 Daisy doll. On her right, is a Simon and Halbig Daisy doll. She looks right at home with a similar body style to her friends, although she is shorter.



Since Gertrude's body is a shorter version of the two Daisy dolls, let's look at the Daisy doll patterns to find one that might work for her. Gertrude's immediate need is for a pair of drawers.

Here is the Daisy pattern that contains the undies. These patterns are easy to find online.

#5954/Daisy's First Outfits

Authentic Copies of patterns from the Ladies Home Journal



This Green Gingham is Daisy's Morning Dress. It May, However, be Made of Any Color, With a Gimp of Striped Lawn



For Afternoon Wear it was Thought a Light Blue Lawn Dress Would Please Daisy. Nearly All Little Girls Can Do This Simple Embroidery of Eyelets and Scallops



Daisy's New Coat is One of the Latest Fashions. There are No Patterns for the Hats, Which are About the Same as Those in the Shops



A Picture of Daisy, but She is Once Again as Large as This



For a Very Best Dress or "Parties" Here is a Lovely Pink Silk. The Hat May be Trimmed With Different Colored Ribbons to Match Any Dress Daisy May Wish to Wear With It

Resizing Doll Patterns

When adapting patterns from one size doll to another with similar bodies, here is the formula for increasing or decreasing the size of the pattern pieces:

To determine how much to make a pattern larger, you divide the larger doll height by the smaller doll height. So, if we were to take a pattern for a 16" doll and change it to an 18" doll, we would divide 18 by 16, which is 1.125. On a copier, you would round off the number and enlarge the pattern by 113%

The other way to reduce a pattern for an 18" doll and change it to fit a 16" doll is to divide 16 by 18, which is .89. On a copier, you would reduce the pattern to 89% of the original. This is the percentage reduction used to reduce this Daisy pattern for undies.

**Secret Sewing Skill*

When enlarging or reducing patterns, the seam allowance also changes. This can be countered by cutting off the seam allowance prior to reducing/enlarging the pattern and then adding it back on the new pattern.

If you don't want to put in the time it takes to cut off and add back seam allowance, just adjust the depth of the seam allowance when sewing the garment.

Making a sample, at least of bodices, from a non-woven interfacing helps to determine adjustments in the seam allowance.



Here are some hints on making undies for dolls. Most undies have curved seams on the part that wraps under the crotch.

In this example, the curved seam is finished prior to joining the pieces. This is easier to do than finishing the seams after sewing the two sides together.

← Here is the process. Using the 1/8" presser foot as a guide, run a stabilizing stitch on the curved crotch side, then fold on the stitching line to the wrong side. Trim the raw edge to 1/16"

Once pressed and trimmed, it is easy to fold over and stitch the curved seam. →

Do not press the curved edge before sewing it, as the seam sews easier when not pressed ahead.



←Stitch the front seam of the drawers, creating a continuous line from front to back.

For antique dolls and when using antique fabric, the curved edge can be stitched by hand. To the right is a sample of split drawers sewn by hand from an antique fabric. →



←Here is Gertrude in her new drawers. We can now dress Gertrude in an antique outfit that fits her perfectly.

Here is Gertrude dressed in an antique outfit that was in my wardrobe of doll clothes.



Dressing Dolls in Style

Chapter 9

Meet Berthé, a special doll from Au Nain Bleu



Here is Berthé, a 15" French Bébé, 301, Unis France with original boutique label from Au Nain Bleu. Circa 1915.

Au Nain Bleu, founded in 1836, was a prestigious Paris shop selling high-end dolls in exquisite costumes from their own workshop.

Here are her distinguishing characteristics: Bisque socket head, brown glass sleep eyes, mohair lashes, painted features, open mouth, four porcelain teeth, pierced ears, auburn mohair bobbed wig, French composition and wooden fully-jointed body.

Marks: Unis France 71 149 301 (head) Bébé Vrai Modele (body label) Au Nain Bleu Paris (paper label on body). SFBJ

First to consider is how Berthé might have been dressed as she came from Au Nain Bleu. That means research into finding other similar dolls from the same period.

Let's start with clothing for children during this time period.

The following is from the article, "Children's Clothes in 1915" by Jamie Wilson.¹

¹ <https://oureverydaylife.com/childrens-clothes-in-1915-12496656.html>

In 1915, World War I had already had an impact in Europe. Cloth was in shorter supply than usual and thus more expensive. Women were moving toward more practical, shorter skirt lengths and fewer undergarments. They were also cutting their hair short. Tailored clothing gave way to store-bought, off-the-rack garments, changing the silhouette. Children's clothing was affected similarly, with lengths shortening and skirts losing volume to allow more efficient use of cloth.

Girl's Clothes

In 1915, girls primarily wore dresses or skirts that ended at about the knee, paired with knee or ankle socks. Dress yokes dropped to the thigh. Girls commonly wore middy blouses—shirts with a sailor-style collar and loose waist—and skirts to school. The growing popularity of sailor-style clothing for girls seems to have led to a corresponding drop for similar boys' clothing. Fabrics moved from fragile, easy-soiling muslins of the previous decade to prints and gingham in bright colors.

Shoes

Girls commonly wore single-strap, Mary Jane-style shoes, usually made of black patent leather. In cooler weather, they might wear lace-up oxfords. Girls also still wore the old-fashioned, button-up ankle boots commonly associated with the 1800s, but they were almost always dark colored on the bottom with a top side and ankle section in a lighter color. Boys primarily wore lace-up oxfords and high-top, lace-up boots similar in style to modern work boots. Unlike children's shoes of a few decades back, almost all children's shoes in 1915 were sensible in style, made of leather and in plain, well-wearing neutral colors ranging from beige to black.

Undergarments and Nightwear

Boys wore one-piece underwear, split in front like today's briefs for convenience, with light, sleeveless versions for summer wear and heavy, long-sleeved versions for winter. Girls' underwear was more complex, with short pantalets, a chemise, and sometimes a camisole. Nightwear changed little, with both sexes wearing a shift-like gown, adding a sleeping cap in the winter.

Because of her time period and similar marks to one of the *Bleuette* girls, she could wear clothes designed for *Bleuette* during the same time period. Here is a sample *Bleuette* French pattern from 1915.²

Berthé is also in the same time period as the German Daisy dolls, and outfits could be adapted from Daisy's pattern wardrobe. There are five original pattern sets, which are easily found through an Internet search.



² thebleudoor.com

Here are some Unis France 301 dolls from the same period.



Neither dress seems appropriate for Berthé; the first is too formal and the second looks as if it's for a younger child than she is. Berthé appears to be inquisitive and perhaps somewhat of a tomboy. She needs something simple yet elegant.

From the research thus far, her dress could have a lowered waist and fall just below her knees. A sailor outfit would also be appropriate. The fabric could be a solid, print, or gingham in bright colors.

Still undecided about the pattern to use, the search now is for some fabric matching that time period to provide direction.





← Here is Berthé in a slip that looks to be compatible with that period. The hat is made using a hat form from the PNB Doll Company.

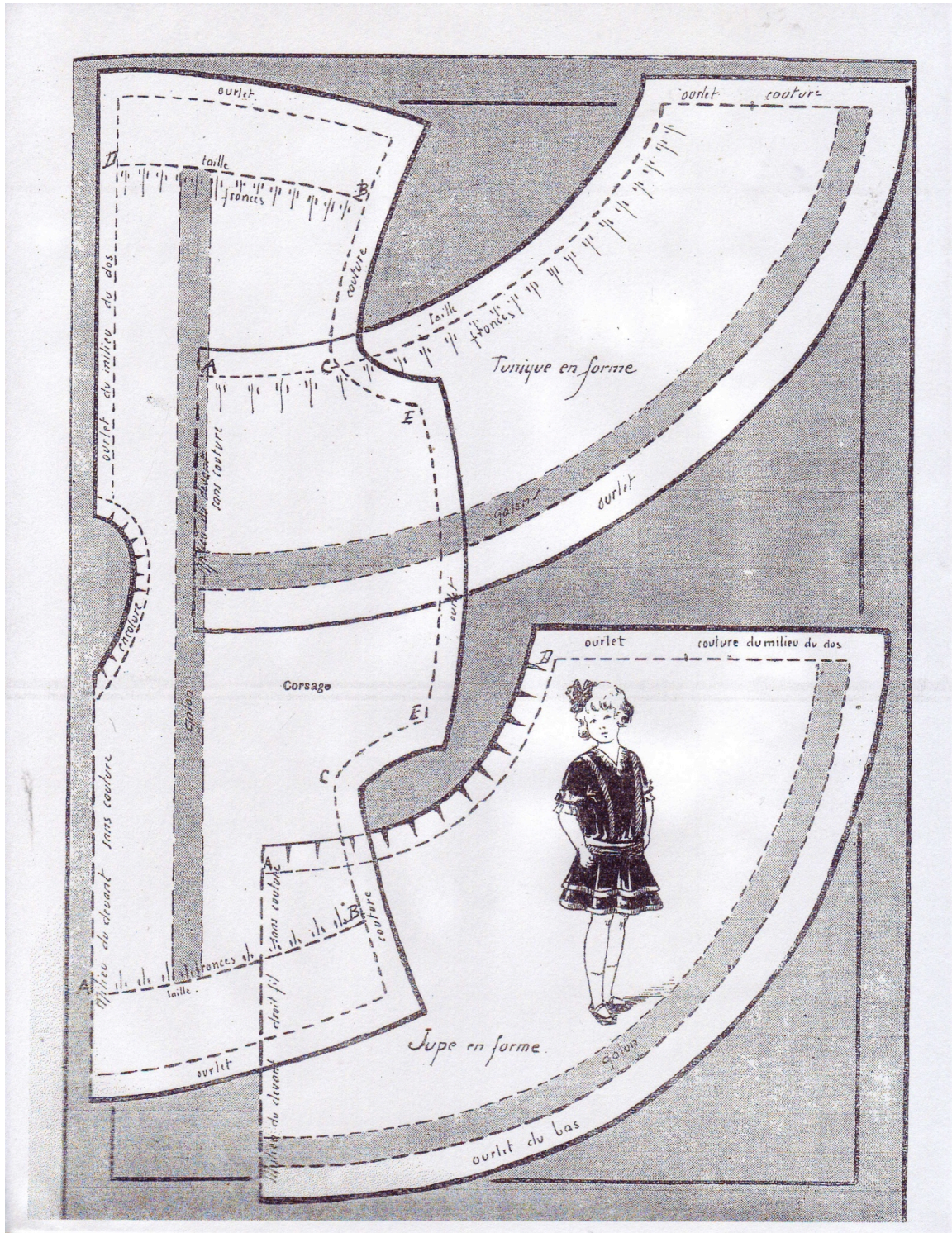
Here are some vintage fabrics from the early part of the 20th century. The plaid is probably a little later than Berthé. The two solids represent colors from that era even though they also are likely more 1930s-40s. →

The green velvet was taken from an original 1920s flapper dress. Even though it is a little worn, there is authenticity to its “flaws.”

Let’s use the 1915 Bleurette pattern above and the green velvet 1920s fabric. As this dress is made from velvet, it would be best to line it. Let’s go with a pink silk from the 1920s to match her undies



On the next page is the pattern from The Bleu Door. As this is in the public domain, it is shown here. This is not a full size version of the pattern. Go to thebleudoor.com to download the original pattern. The original Bleurette pattern was enlarged 125% from the original to fit Berthé.



On the next page is a translation of the pattern from French to English, as found on The Bleu Door web page.

English dress: This charming little dress can be simple or elegant, depending on the fabric chosen. In light linen or canvas, it will go for everything; in silk, velor or cloth, it will make a pretty formal dress. You only need three patterns to make it: the body, the skirt and the tunic. You will pick up exactly these three patterns and cut them carefully.

1. Dress Body --- This is a long waist, kimono-shaped bodice. It is cut from one piece. The pattern being given here halfway, you will place it on the double folded fabric, observing that the dotted line (middle of the front) must be laid edge to edge with the fold of the fabric. From this side, you will only cut the surrounds and the middle of the back. The dotted line - middle of the front - should not be touched by the scissors, as this front is seamless.

The body of the bodice of the dress is shaped by the seam that starts from E, goes through C and ends at the bottom of the bodice. This seam closes the kimono sleeve and the sides of the bodice.

2. Shaped skirt - The pattern being given in half, you will lay on the double folded fabric by putting its dotted line (middle of the front straight thread) edge to board with the fold of the fabric. But observe that this fold of the fabric must be on the grain. If you put on the pattern anyhow, the skirt wouldn't look right. Cut all around except on the dotted line, as the skirt, in one piece, has no front seam.

3. Shaped tunic - Same way to go. Lay the pattern on the double-folded fabric, its dotted line boarding at the edge with the fold of the fabric, and cut all around, except on the side of this fold.

With both skirts trimmed, first put the gallon down with a point in front of each board; then fold the edge back to hem, so that the hem stitch you are making is under the braid, and therefore does not cross. the hems made, the right braid to be found at the edge: look at the overall sketch.

With both skirts trimmed, first put the gallon down with a point in front of each board; then fold the edge back to hem, so that the hem stitch you are making is under the braid, and therefore does not cross. the hems made, the right braid to be found at the edge: look at the overall sketch. Same thing to do with the tunic

4. Assembly of the skirt - Put its point A (middle of the front) at point A of the bodice; and its two D points at the two D points of the bodice. You will then vary that the bodice is a little wider than the top circumference of the skirt. Gather to the right and left of point A to bring it back to the desired measurement. Sew inside out, and when the seam is done, you incise the inside edge of the skirt so that it does not wince.

Assembling the tunic - Put point A at point A of the bodice and the two hemlines behind at points D. Gather the tunic to bring it back to the size of the waist and lay it flat, that is -direc without retracting the board. This seam will be hidden by a belt of draped ribbon and without a knot or back panel.

The neckline is edged with a braid, the sleeves are decorated with a double pleated separated by a velvet strap.

***Secret Sewing Skill**

Whenever you have a slippery or difficult fabric, adapt the pattern so that it can be cut out on a single layer of fabric.

You will note that even cutting out the pattern through a single layer of the velvet fabric, it was still difficult to get the edges even. →

Then, the velvet fabric was placed on top of the silk lining fabric, and the pattern was placed on top of both. Even with careful cutting, errors can occur. I determined that it would be impossible to cut the two fabrics to match.



Working with such slippery fabric means that care must be taken at each step in the process to guarantee the desired end.

On the first pass, I placed the main fabric on top of the lining fabric and used the diagonal basting stitch to hold the fabrics together. Then, I cut out the lining. Big mistake. This

← In this version, the lining was not cut. Even the diagonal basting stitch does not guarantee that the fabrics can be cut to match exactly.

You can see where the pad stitches were cut in an attempt to flatten the velvet and match to the lining. As this also didn't work, it was on to Plan B



Plan B:

Here, I loosely cut out a piece of the lining fabric slightly larger than the velvet and placed the two fabrics right sides together.

The two fabrics were then stitched together one seam at a time. In this instance, the first seam stitched was one of the sleeve edges and next was the neck and part of the back seam.



As you can see from the lining side, it isn't pretty; however, given the nature of the two fabrics, it's workable. →



← Press well, remember to use your velvet board, then turn garment to the outside. Press again.

Do not yet cut off the excess fabric. Only cut after each seam is sewn, including the bottom.

Sew up the center back and side fabric and lining seams separately so the lining hangs on the inside of the dress.

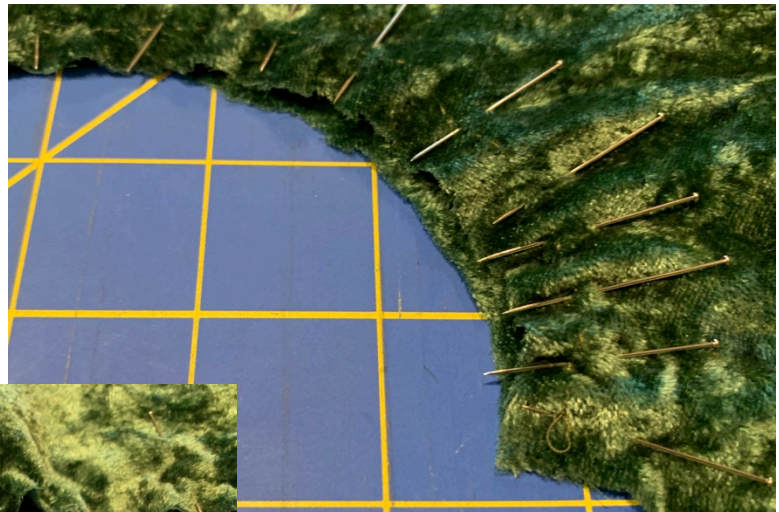


← Here is the top of our outfit after the seams are sewn and trim added. As the bottom of this bodice is gathered, it has been stabilized with seam tape (similar available through the Carmel Doll Shop Boutique) with a catch stitch to keep the tape flat and secure.

Adding the flounce.

The two flounces have different lengths and widths. The longer flounce must be “tamed” to match the shorter flounce without making gathers, which works, as this is a bias curve.

On the longer flounce, run a basting stitch $\frac{1}{4}$ ” from the top.



Note the deep gathers. . ↓



↑ Match the center and two ends of both flounces and gather up without making visible gathers. Baste across the top. To make this relatively easier, as you pin, fold the two fabrics over a finger. When sewing, flatten the curved fabric so that it lays flat.

Note to Self: There is always something to learn from every project.

This was probably the most challenging doll outfit I've ever made. Every step along the way was fraught with issues, and several times I wanted to quit and put it away. What kept me going? Perhaps it's just as simple as knowing this dress would look good on her. (Just don't ask to look at the inside.)

Secret Sewing Skill

If this happens, refrain from talking about and bringing focus to the issues you think make the dress inferior. When people praise your outfit, say "thank you" graciously and let the issues die in the shadows. Most concerns are unseen to even the trained eye – best to focus on two things: getting a good fit and pressing. These two practices will be more transparent than anything else.

Here is Berthé in her new dress. This dress does, after all, look good on her! Note how the right side of her mouth shows a slight upturn. She is a happy girl to finally have a lovely dress!



Dressing Dolls in Style

Chapter 10

Copying an Antique Dress for Desirée, a E. Barrois doll

Presented here is a dress that arrived with an antique Jumeau French Fashion doll. Not only was the dress very frail, it also did not fit that doll. However, it has an appeal for a doll from the late 1860s to the early 1870s.



So, let's consider making a pattern from the dress for a doll it will fit. Supposedly, this dress should fit a doll 17-18" tall

The front and the back of the skirt are easily measured for length and width. Next, a curved ruler was used to get the basic layout. Pattern pieces from another pattern that had similar lines were used for the top and the pieces combined.





← Before using an antique fabric to create the dress, a more modern fabric (a vintage Indian cotton with cream floral embroidery over a cotton off-white base) was used, which was purchased from The Carmel Doll Shop Boutique. This dress was made to fit an 18" doll.

After the basics of the dress were fitted, antique and vintage velvet ribbon, silk ruffled trim, and a wide satin ribbon were added to create a finished dress that closely mirrors the original, though not exactly. →



Now to create a dress more in tune with the original. Here are some fabrics that were auditioned for the role. Note that there are two different shade of blue on the front of the dress.



← The fabric in the upper left is the exact color of the original dress while the blue in the bottom right mirrors the center-pleated closure. Both are antique fabrics. The orange fabric matches the buttons; however, it is a fabric from the 1920s; and, other than the buttons, orange is not part of the original dress.

A design question to consider is whether to match the outfit exactly or take some liberties and add the orange as an accent.

The next step is to choose a doll for the outfit. Here is Désirée, an 18" Eugene Barrois antique French Fashion doll from that same era. She has a leather body and is dressed in her original wig and wedding outfit, which has some wear. It's only fitting that she gets a trousseau to match her beauty. As the dress above is for a different doll, even though they are about the same size, the pattern must be refit to this specific doll.

In determining the fit of a pattern, there are several ways of operating. As you saw above, a dress out of modern fabric provides the opportunity to perfect the pattern to a particular doll. Also, the skirt portion of a prospective pattern can be used to sew a slip that will support the dress.



← Her

is Désirée in her underpinnings. Of particular note is her original slip, which sits slightly below the waist and has a gathering string as part of the waistband. This was, for me, a new concept for slips for antique dolls and allows for less bulk at the waistline.

From a set of antique underwear, here is another slip showing the same characteristics. Here, a yoke with a gathering string supports the tightly gathered skirt. The slip is made from sheeting fabric.



It is worthwhile to examine and mentally deconstruct this antique slip because there are other characteristics that can be used to create authentic looking clothing for dolls.

The yoke has a channel stitched to keep the gathering string in place. It also has a button and buttonhole. →

The main fabric was folded over on the inside about an inch and very tiny (less than 1/16" cartridge pleats were made. Here is the inside of the slip. ↓



For the ruffles at the bottom, it appears as if the main ruffle fabric was folded, gathered and then attached into a tuck in the main fabric. →



View of outside. ↓



←
View of inside

What an incredible garment!

Now, back to the outfit for Désirée. The first step is to take the pattern that was used for the cream color copy of our inspiration garment and make a new pattern that will fit Désirée. A slip made from the skirt pattern is also needed to support the garment.

Unfortunately, I couldn't find some of the pieces of the original pattern. (Note to self: do a better job of organizing patterns after finishing an outfit.) Now let's put that in the past and create a pattern that works. I did have the skirt part of the original pattern and a slip created.

In sewing the slip, three gathering stitches are made: $\frac{1}{8}$ ", $\frac{1}{4}$ ", and $\frac{3}{8}$." The waistband is sewn to the skirt at the $\frac{1}{4}$ " mark, and the $\frac{3}{8}$ " stitch line is maintained. This creates true gathers rather than pleats.

Here is the slip. →

The slip is made from the same pattern that will be used to make the garment skirt. The lace is a deep machine-made vintage lace, gathered more in the back to create support for the dress.

Désirée will still need a bustle to complete the look of the outfit.



Wendy Feidt made the wig,
mohairwigsbywendyfeidt.com

To check the fit of our pattern top, a non-woven, non-iron-on interfacing was used to make a pattern. →

Note the curve to the dart. Always sew on the inside of the curve.



← Generally, when sewing for a doll, it is best to remove the wig so as to not mess the set.

← Désirée is also missing one of her earrings. It's somewhere around here, so let's hope it shows up for the final picture.

Other than the fact that the neckline is too high, the rest of the pattern fit well.

The blue satin fabric used for this dress was taken from two 20" panels of an original 1860s dress. Often, yet not always, you can tell how old a fabric is by the width, selvage to selvage of the fabric. The older the fabric, the more narrow. The 45" wide cotton fabric that we know today did not become popular until around the 1950s.

Because the fabric is so narrow, the selvages on these antique garments were left intact. Because they are woven tighter than the main body of the fabric, angled cuts were made to help the fabric relax.

Here, you can see the cuts. →

This makes a perfect seam finish, so this edge can be used on all long seams in the garment.

Because this fabric was lighter in weight than the fashion fabric in the original garment, our garment was underlined with silk organza, which is the white fabric in the picture.



The fabric exhibited significant flaws where the silk had begun to shatter, creating what looked like cut lines. The pattern had to be “fussy cut,” where pattern pieces have to be moved around to get the best cut rather than placing patterns to use less space. Because the fabric pieces were so large, there were areas that were thin. During the sewing of the garment, additional stress was put on the fabric. Some of the design elements were utilized to cover up some of these flaws.

Because of the fragility of the fabric, no pins were used except within the seam allowance. In addition, thread markings were made and then cut to identify to the front dart. →



← Here is a sleeve ready to insert. After inserting, it can either be sewn with a ladder stitch from the outside or turned to the inside and sewn with a running stitch.



When attempting to put a larger seam to a smaller one, put the large one on top and curve it over your finger or fold over a small circular ham. (See picture above of pressing ham) →

This project had its challenges, mostly having to do with the fragility of the fabric. Most of them were covered up with trims. One sleeve had to be taken out and totally re-done (twice). Don't ask!

Know that when you have issues, you're not alone. Keep going and a lovely creation will evolve. And, don't—under any circumstances—tell!



Here is Désirée in her newly created dress made from antique fabrics and trims. You will note that this is not the same dress that was envisioned at the beginning. The dress evolved—antique trims that matched perfectly with the dress fabric were found in the stash, flaws in the fabric were disguised, and the new design works even better than the original. Also, earring found! Thank you, doll angels!





Dressing Dolls in Style

Chapter II

Meet Grace Marie Fitzpatrick, a VDC doll

Here we have Grace Marie Fitzpatrick, the 2020 Robert Tonner creation and pride of Virtual Doll Convention fans. She's dressed in a style that appears to be very 1950s.

While many 1950s dresses had extremely full skirts, often with multiple petticoats, there was also a very sophisticated straight sheath dress, often with a jacket. ↓



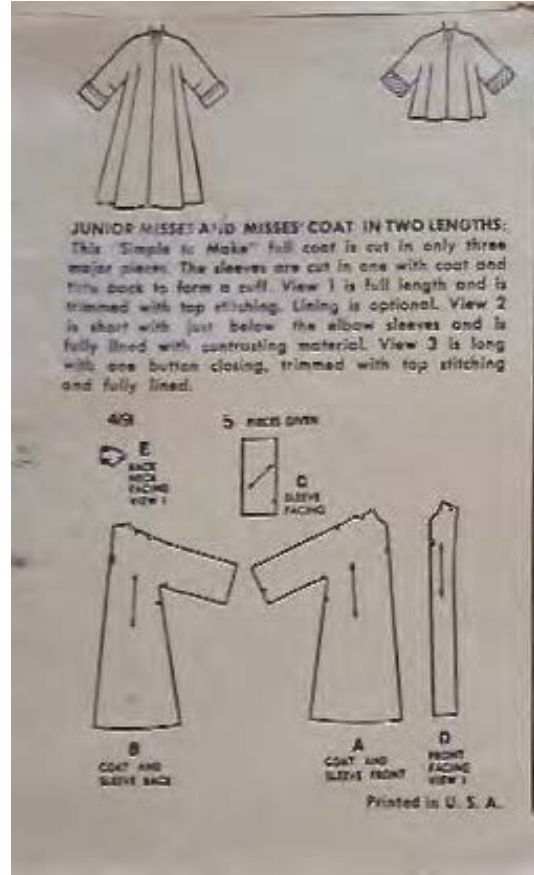
Here are two patterns that emulate that era. The first dress is similar to the Grace dress above. (See blue dress on far right above.) As linen was a popular fabric during that time, this jacket in white linen would add to her outfit. This pattern has dolman sleeves.

← The second pattern is a swing coat, also very popular during that time period.

One of the best ways to recreate a pattern is to look at the back of the pattern envelope to determine the shape of each piece.

The first pattern envelope didn't have a picture of the back; so, if we want to use that style, it's necessary to find another similar pattern.

Here is the pattern back for the swing coat. The pattern pictures give a structure to develop a pattern for the doll. This pattern also has dolman sleeves. →

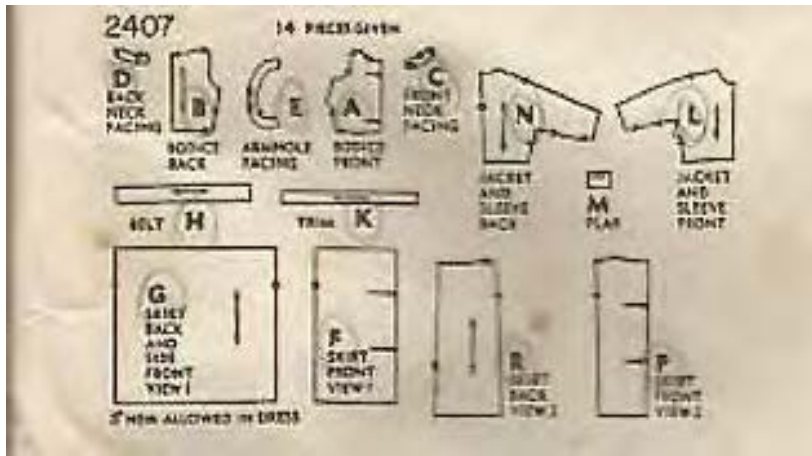


Below is a jacket pattern that is the same as the blue one above, with the dolman sleeves. Let's use this pattern for Grace's jacket. ↓



Here are pictures of the pattern back, showing the outline of the pieces. Let's examine them more closely. ↓

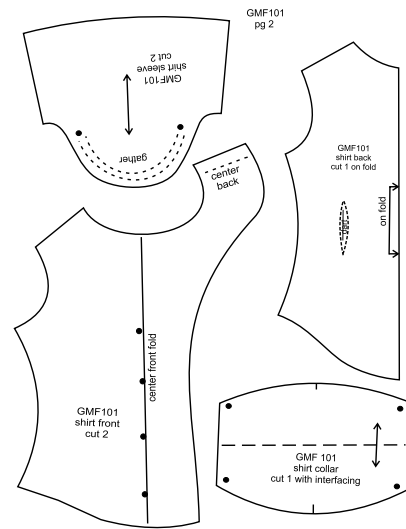




← Even though the picture isn't very clear, we can still see the basics. There are two pattern pieces, #N & #L (top right). Their shape is our starting point.

Let's take an existing Grace pattern and draft a new pattern that we know will fit Grace. Here is a pattern from the House of O'Brien that is currently for sale at the VDC Grace Boutique.

Here is page 4 of the O'Brien pattern, which shows the pattern pieces for a short-sleeve button-up shirt. This is the pattern that will be used to create a new pattern for the jacket pictured above.



← To make a new pattern some of the seam allowances need to be removed. The shoulder seams of the front and back pieces are removed. The side seams of the sleeve pieces are removed.

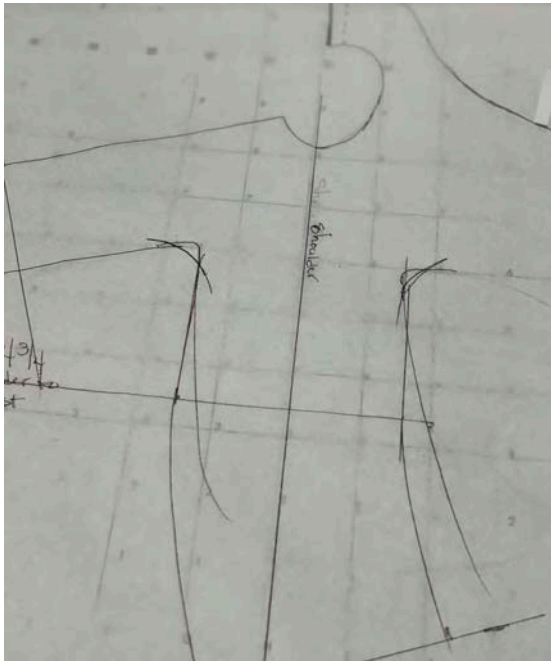
Mark the pattern pieces: "A" is the shoulder seam, "B" is the

neck seam, and "C" is the underarm seam. →

On a piece of paper with 1" lined grids, place the matching shoulder-lines "A" on a cross-mark on paper. This is the pivot point.

Fold down the sleeve cap and match the underarm seam of the sleeve, known as the bicep line, to point "C," pivoting "A" to match. Note that the back of "B" is slightly larger, as there is often planned ease over the back shoulder.



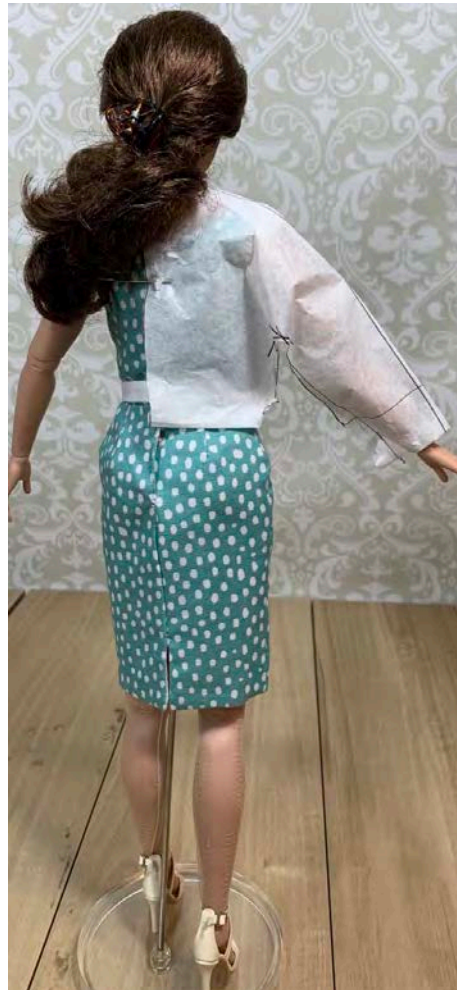


← Overlay a piece of tissue paper so we can see through to the pattern and roughly trace the pattern.

After cutting out and “tweaking” the pattern, I discovered that the front facing needed some adjustment. See below that the front facing was expanded ↓



A quick try-on with Grace showed this to be a good start from which to make a sample garment. ↓



Here is our pattern with the seam allowance added: →

Now, we need to make some decisions to determine pattern layout. Do we want to eliminate the sleeve seam? This would mean that either the front or the back would be on the bias.

Note pattern on right with a center back seam on the straight of grain. In this example, the front would be on the bias. →

Below, the front is on the straight and the back is on the bias. ↓



Let's do a trial run and make a jeans jacket out of a denim-style fabric. For a jeans jacket, I liked the idea of both front and being on the straight of grain.

Thus, the shoulder seam was cut and a seam allowance added. The center back seam allowance was eliminated and the center back was placed on a fold. Below are our two pattern pieces ready to cut out of a jeans-type cotton fabric. ↓



*Secret Sewing Skill

Reminder: When cutting out a pattern, always have the fabric to the inside of the cutting edge of the scissors. This makes it easier to get an accurate cut. Also, weights are helpful, particularly on small doll pattern pieces.



**Secret Sewing Skill*

As Grace is a modern doll, this jacket can be constructed with a serger, which makes it a quick project.

Sergers for the home market started appearing in the late-1960s when Tacony introduced the Baby Lock. Today's machines are very sophisticated and easy to use. A dress for any doll manufactured from about 1970 to the present can be sewn with a serger.

◀ Here is Grace in her new casual jacket. The fabric is made of two different colored threads: blue in the warp and white in the weft.

Here is a close up of the jacket. Using white thread to topstitch helps define the edges and make them stand out. ↓



◀ The only tweak recommended for the white linen version is a slight addition to the center front.

Putting our linen fabric over the dress shows its transparent nature. Because of this see-through quality, it will need to be lined. (Fabric is from frenchfashions.net, an online fabric store with small cuts for doll sewing.)

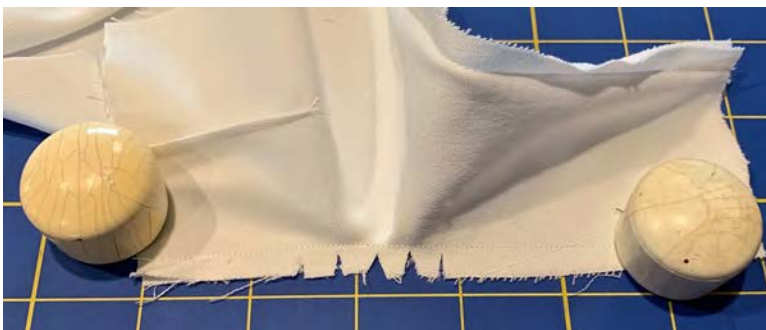
Choices for a lining are cotton or silk. Silk is used often in jacket linings because it is easier to slip an arm through it. However, lightweight cotton will be easier to sew with the small pattern pieces of this project. A silky cotton gabardine was chosen to line the jacket.

The pattern for this project does not need the facing, and a new pattern was created by eliminating the facing and adding $\frac{1}{4}$ " to the front seam plus a $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance. Because of the construction methods used, a seam allowance was also added to the center back.

A lined jacket basically consists of two jackets sewn together, one in the fashion fabric and one in a fabric that slides easily over the arms. If they are both the same size, the lining with gather on the inside of the jacket. The lining, then, needs to be sewn slightly smaller than the jacket. On this jacket, the shoulder seam and the center back seam can be sewn at $\frac{3}{8}$ " to $\frac{1}{2}$ " seam allowance, depending on the fabric. Experiment with a sample.

The darts in the jacket and lining are sewn and pressed in opposite directions. Darts on the jacket are pressed toward the center front; lining darts are pressed away from the center. This adds less bulk to the finished jacket. Sew a stay stitch line just inside the seam allowance at the bottom edge of the sleeve on both jacket ($\frac{1}{4}$ ") and lining pieces ($\frac{3}{8}$ "). Press to wrong side.

Next, the jacket and lining pieces are sewn separately and the jacket tried on Grace to check the fit. When sewing the center back seam of the lining, begin with a regular stitch, then about 1" down, switch to a basting stitch, returning to the regular stitch for the last 1." Use your seam ripper to make a cut at the beginning and end of the basting stitch.



The next step is to press open the underarm seam and stitch down both sides of it to flatten the curve. To do this, make a small running stitch about $\frac{1}{16}$ " from each side of the stitching line to stabilize the seam. If this is too difficult to do by machine, then stitch by hand. →



← In order to get the underarm sleeves to make a smooth turn, it is necessary to clip and stitch. Notice the straight line made after clipping.



← Press the seam flat. Note the stitching on each side of the seam.



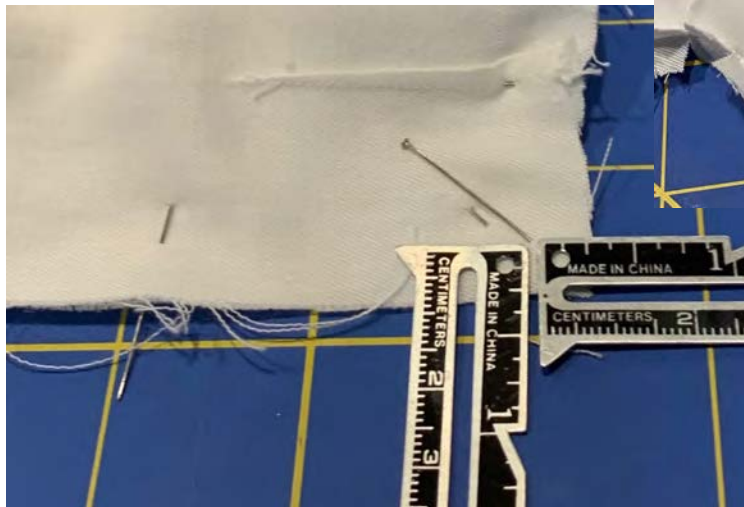
◀ Here is the outside of the underarm seam after pressing. If you look closely, you can see the stitching.

How to Bag a Lining

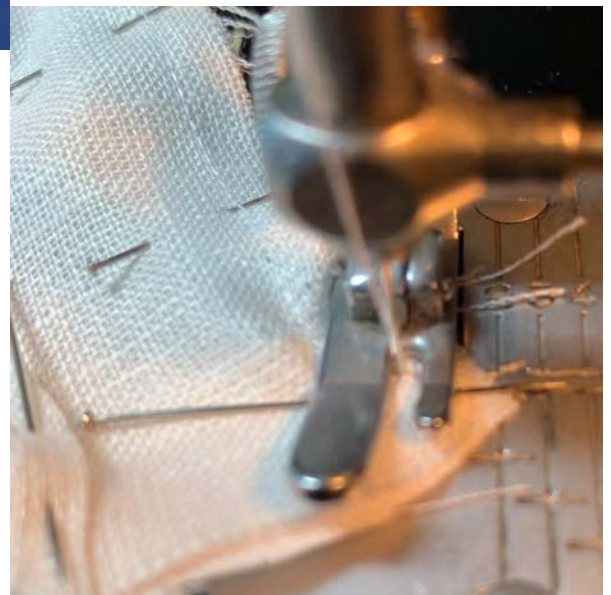
This is a process of sewing a jacket and lining together without an exterior exposed seam.

Pin the lining to the main jacket, right sides together. →

Before sewing, mark the four corners of the jacket ¼" in from each side. This mark will create a pivot point when the corner is sewn. Here a pin is used. ↓



Sew around the entire exterior of the jacket, enclosing the main jacket and the lining.



**Secret Sewing Skill→*

As you approach the corner ¼" mark, lower the machine needle one stitch before your mark, rotate the fabric at a 45° angle, take one stitch over the pin, then turn the fabric 45° angle again and sew along the seam allowance. This angled stitch assists in creating a very square corner when turned to the outside. It does work. even if it seems counter-intuitive.



← After sewing the jacket and lining together, press, then pin the two front edges together and check that the stitch lines of the two front sides are the same length.

Use your seam ripper to open the center back basting stitch and pull the jacket through to the right side, leaving the sleeves with the wrong side exposed. ↓

Fold back on the staystitch line on the bottom of the sleeves and insert it into lining sleeve bottom. Sew jacket main fabric to lining. In this jacket, I hand sewed with a small running stitch. The pins below mark the stitching line ↓

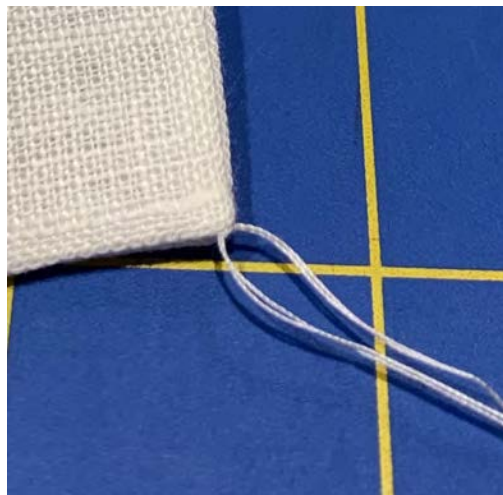


← This may take a little finagling; just stick with it and you'll be surprised. Make certain the top and bottom seams are lined up with their opposite. If this doesn't work, just pull the seams out to the right side of the jacket; turn down the seam allowance and hand stitch together with a small ladder stitch. The jacket should be about 1/8" to 1/4" longer than the lining.

• ***Secret Sewing Skill →**

Here's the biggest secret to square corners. After you have taken your point turner tool and pushed out the corners as far as they will go, turn jacket to the outside and finger press edges. Double thread a needle; and, on the finished corner, "pick" out the corner with a needle and pull to square corner as you iron.

Do not insert needle too close to the edge. Dig in until you can feel the stitching line and carefully pull until edges are square. Iron.





Attach the lining to the outer jacket at the shoulder seam, making certain that the seam of the outer jacket is positioned on the seam of the lining. From the lining side, stab the needle into the seam allowance, catch up a stitch of the jacket, and continue to make very small stitches to connect them. Close up. ↓

Last, hand stitch the back center seam of the lining, either with a ladder stitch or a catch stitch.

In the final press, the jacket fronts were a little floppy, so they were ironed with a touch of Faultless Light Finish spray sizing and rolled over one of the mini-pressing rolls from the Carmel Doll Shop Boutique.



Here is the finished jacket.



Here is Grace Marie Fitzpatrick decked out for an afternoon tea, 1950s style. Along with the dress and purse, she would also have worn a pillbox hat and gloves.



Dressing Dolls in Style

Afterword

Sewing has been a favored hobby of mine since I was nine and twirled the handle of that child's Singer sewing machine that could only do a chain stitch. As with any hobby, there is always something new to learn. I consider myself a life-long learner, and I am always on the lookout for new knowledge gleaned through books and magazines, on-line searches, and the study of old garments.



When Rachel Hoffman first instituted her virtual doll get-together, I saw it as an opportunity to learn new things and participate with others in the doll community. Now, I salute her prescience as this last year has proved how her original idea can be of help in bringing us all together during these trying times. This book is dedicated to her and salutes her enthusiasm, dedication, and unique contribution to the doll world. It is also my way of sharing my expertise with others, an expertise that can only be expanded through our involvement with each other. Thus, I invite you to add your knowledge to the database through my website: aworldofdolls.com. Sign up for the mailing list so we can continue this conversation.

You are also encouraged to let me know the skills and knowledge you would like to improve and the dolls you would like to clothe. In future Virtual Doll Conventions, this booklet will be expanded based on what you would like to learn.

TBC – a phrase I like to use, which means “To Be Continued.” As in life, we will continue to be the very best we can be.

Hugs, Patti

Title Page Pictures:

Doll on the left is an Antique F. Gaultier, 1860s, dressed in an outfit created from very faded antique fabric from Diane Cucci, Ruby Lane. The ruffled skirt has original gathers. Center doll is a Carl Armstrong reproduction Rohmer, 2019 from the Carmel Doll Shop Boutique. She is wearing a dress made from the “Palais Royale” pattern by Louise Hedrick with fabric from the shop. Doll on the right is an antique Smiling Bru, 1870s, dressed in an outfit made from a C'est La Mode pattern and antique fabric from Diane Cucci.



Link to my Pinterest pages: https://www.pinterest.com/pattiwwcr8s/_saved/
Link to my doll website: aworldofdolls.com

Inspiration Photos



↑ My original 1950s Terri Lee in a dress copied from a picture of a taffeta formal on a doll made for the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.



← A reproduction Bru doll on a Gildebrief body by Suzanne McBrayer, (bisquebeauties.com) in a dress from a kit by Alice Leverett, (justalice.com)

1940s Dewees Cochran 15" Barbara Joan doll, with outfit made from a vintage McCall's pattern from that era. ↓



← I'm a real sucker for a doll dressed in white. This is a Simon & Halbig 1159, 20 1/2" tall lady doll from 1910 in a dress made from antique fabric that was already tucked.

Here is an 1858 Rohmer doll in an original antique dress that had to be taken apart and re-sewn to fit her. (very carefully) →

