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Opening Extract from...

Ultimate Sewing Bible

Written by Marie Clayton

Published by Collins & Brown

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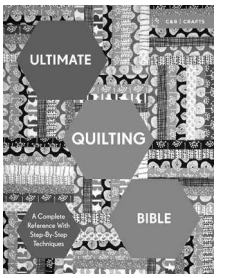

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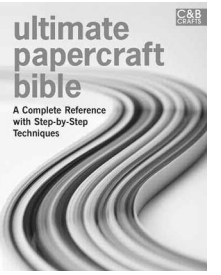

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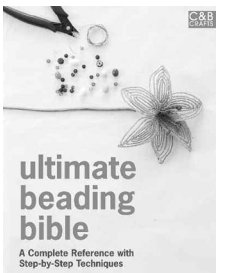

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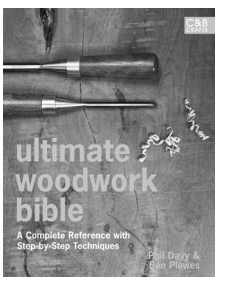

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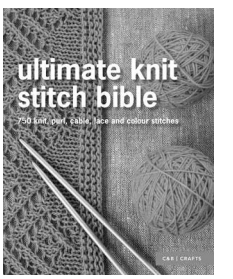

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introduction

If you are of the generation who never learned to sew at school, but whose interest has been stimulated by the 'sewing revival' of recent years (thanks to popular television series, YouTube demos, internet blogs, and exciting new magazines), this is the book you won't want to be without.

Learning to sew will not only save you money, it will also give you an outlet for your creativity, enabling you to create clothes that fit you perfectly, rediscover vintage styles, up-cycle favourite garments that may have seen better days, and furnish your home with fabulous fabrics without spending a fortune.

The *Ultimate Sewing Bible* is designed to cover all the information you will need to learn to sew, and to provide you with an invaluable source of reference for a range of techniques you will use constantly in your sewing projects. It is divided into seven chapters, each of which covers a specific area of sewing skill.

Sewing Basics covers the very basic details of what sewing equipment is available and its uses, and provides you with absolute confidence for getting started. It also explains how to set up a practical working area, how to store all your materials and equipment safely and conveniently, and how to choose the right sewing machine. The different compositions and construction of fabric are covered in brief, so you can become familiar with their characteristics and uses, although further information on fabrics is also covered in the Dressmaking and Home Furnishings chapters. Basic Techniques covers all of the necessary stitches, seams, and techniques that you will use time and time again, all explained with helpful step-by-step diagrams.

In Dressmaking you will master the various elements that make up a dressmaking project. In no time you will understand patterns, how to alter them to make a garment that fits, and how to make that first brave cut in the fabric. The Tailoring section covers rather more advanced skills, which will enable you to make clothes that are more structured and look extremely professional. The section on Home Furnishings will give you the skills to make everything from a simple napkin to a slipcover for a three-seat sofa.

Once you understand how everything is put together you will be able to make any item you desire using a commercial pattern and you could even develop your own projects from scratch should you wish to. At the end of the book there are some useful reference sections: Care and Repair explains how to look after and launder your projects and the Glossary is a quick reference you can return to again and again for a review of some of the more common terms used in sewing.

If you are new to sewing, start by selecting a very simple project, and use it as an opportunity to get to know your sewing machine and what is and is not possible using fabric and thread. This will give you confidence in your abilities and prepare you to try something a bit more complex, expanding your skills each time you sew. Before long you will be ready to begin using some of the more advanced techniques featured. If you don't have time for a full project, many of the techniques can be adapted to make purchased and ready-made items more 'individual'. Any kind of sewing is good skills practice and will build your knowledge, so don't be afraid to experiment. Remember, the only way to become accomplished is by sewing, sewing and more sewing!

equipment

Top-rate sewing is a combination of skills and materials. You will need a few pieces of special equipment, but most of the items are affordable, portable, and—even better—reusable. Start by purchasing the nuts and bolts: needles and pins, a tape measure, your choice of marking tools, fabric shears, and a seam ripper. Buy the best you can afford and add non-essential items as (or if) you need them.

Marking and measuring

Choosing which marking and measuring tools to use is mainly a matter of personal preference. At times, however, fabric and project types may also be factors.

Chalk pencil
This useful pencil has a chalk centre instead of lead and often incorporates a brush at one end. Marks can then be easily brushed away when they are no longer needed.

Water-erasable marker
Sponging with water or washing removes the marks made with this tool, so it may not be suitable for fabrics that must be dry cleaned or are difficult to wash.

Air-erasable marker
Marks made by this tool will slowly fade over time. The period of time it takes varies depending upon the fabric, so it may not be suitable for use on a project that will take a long time to complete.

Dressmaker's chalk
Solid chalk for marking fabric often comes in a triangular shape for ease of use and to make a range of line thicknesses.

Powdered chalk wheel
This clever utensil makes a fine chalk line on fabric, which can be brushed away. The dispenser can be refilled with different colours of chalk powder.

Pencil
An ordinary pencil is useful for marking paper patterns. A silver marking pencil shows up well on darker fabrics and can be washed off.

Marking tips

Always test your marking tool on a scrap of the fabric you are using first to make sure the marks show up and can also be removed safely.

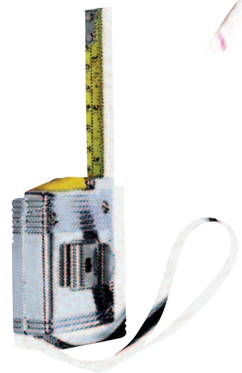
Transfer all the dots and notches from your paper pattern to the fabric.

There is no need to mark seam allowances—the base plate of your sewing machine has engraved lines showing the most commonly used seam widths, which you can use as a guide when stitching.

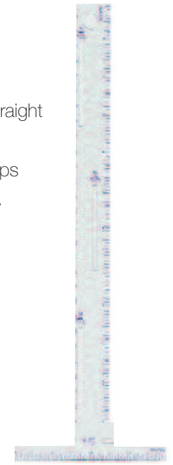
Tracing wheel and dressmaker's carbon
This is the quickest way to transfer continuous lines. The dressmaker's carbon is placed between the pattern and the fabric, and the tracing wheel is run along the lines to transfer lines of dots to the fabric.

Flexible curve
Ideal for drawing curved lines, this can also be used to measure around awkward shapes.

Tape measure
A flexible tape measure is useful to take measurements of the body or any three-dimensional item.



Retractable tape measure
Available in a variety of lengths, the most useful kind is marked with both metric and imperial systems. It is handy to carry around and easy to use.



T-square
Used for drafting straight lines and square corners, it also keeps drawn lines parallel.

Calculator
If you plan to make alterations or draft your own patterns, a calculator will be invaluable to get the perfect fit.

Set square
Practical for drawing short, straight lines at right angles to a base line, set squares can be a fixed shape, as this one, or adjustable so you can change the angle of the diagonal side.

Metal ruler
A metal ruler can not only be used as a measure but also as a reliable cutting guide that can withstand a knife blade without being damaged.

Adjustable seam gauge
This is a tremendously useful piece of equipment if you need to mark up a regular seam allowance around shaped pieces.

Plastic ruler
The big advantage of a plastic ruler is that it is transparent, allowing you to see everything as you work. Do not use it as a cutting guide, however, as sharp tools will damage its edge.

Yardstick
A useful item if you need to measure lengths of fabric or things above your head height.

Adjustable ruler
This extends to quite a length and is also reasonably stiff, making it handy for measuring areas where a tape measure might buckle, such as windows or beneath furniture.

understanding fabrics

There is such a wide variety of different types of fabric available today, in both natural and synthetic yarns, that they cannot all be featured here. However, there are some factors that are common to ranges of fabric, such as structure—woven, knitted, or non-woven—and available widths. If you are using patterned fabric or one with a pile or nap, you also need to be aware of pattern repeats and the direction of the raised surface, and take these into account when purchasing fabric and planning your project.

Woven fabrics

All woven fabrics are made up of two sets of yarn: the warp and the weft. The warp runs lengthwise in the loom, and is sometimes known as the floating yarn or threads. The weft runs widthwise at right angles to the warp, and is sometimes called the filling yarn, filler, or woof. Woven fabrics can be created with different patterns by using different sequences of warp and weft yarns. The selvedge is the border that runs lengthwise down both edges of a length of woven fabric. Since it is often woven more tightly than the main fabric to stop it fraying, the selvedge may pucker when the fabric is cleaned; therefore, it is generally discarded for sewing projects. The lengthwise and widthwise directions—or grains—of a woven fabric are firm, so fabric has very little give in these directions. However, if pulled diagonally—or on the bias—the fabric will stretch. True bias is at a 45-degree angle to the selvedge.

Knitted fabrics

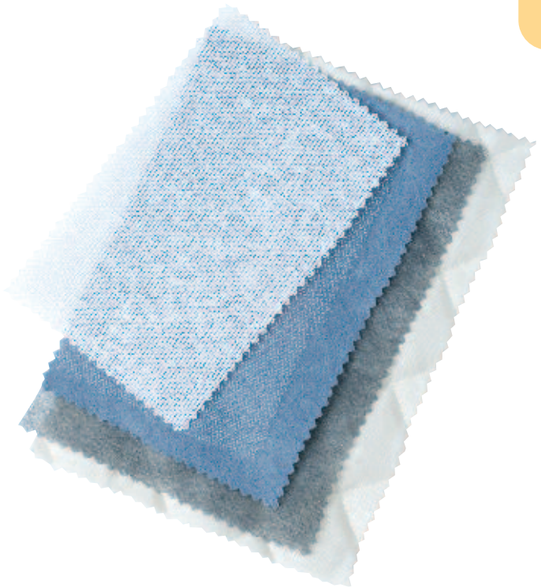
All knitted fabrics are constructed using one set of yarn running in the same direction. This is possible because the yarn looping around itself holds knit fabrics together. Some knits have their yarn running along the length of the fabric, others have their yarn running across the width of the fabric. The columns of stitches that run the length of a knitted fabric are called wales, and the stitches running across form rows. Because of its construction, knitted fabric has some give in every direction, making it ideal for form-fitting garments. It is used less often for furnishings.

Non-woven fabrics

This category includes fabrics such as felt, interfacing, lace, and net. Machine-made felt is made of compressed wool or acrylic fibre; it does not fray and can be moulded to a shape. Handmade felt is made from pure wool fleece, which is laid out in a design and then rubbed with warm soapy water so the fibres mesh together into a solid mass. Handmade needle felt is also made of wool fleece, which is stabbed repeatedly with a special needle until the fibres mat together into a solid mass. Knitted fabrics can also be felted by being washed at high temperatures and then tumble dried; this process is also known as fulling.

Interfacing is a compressed synthetic fabric used as a backing to the main project fabric, particularly in dressmaking and tailoring, to give extra body, shaping, and support.

Lace and net are made of yarns that are knotted into intricate patterns, and can either be machine or handmade.



Standard fabric widths

Fabrics are available in standard widths, but different types of fabrics have different standards. For instance, printed cotton used for dressmaking is usually 90 cm (36 in), 115 cm (45 in), or sometimes 137 cm (54 in) wide, but voiles for curtains may be 300 cm (120 in) wide, while pure silk may only be 45 cm (18 in). Some manufacturers weave in metric and some in imperial, so conversions may not be exact. For instance, a fabric woven on a 36-inch loom may be labelled as being 90 cm wide, but will actually be slightly wider. In the U.K., the conversion from imperial to metric has also meant some variety in the standards: a fabric that is woven on a 54-inch loom will actually be 137 cm wide, but the nearest round number for a metric loom is 140 cm, which is actually 55 in. For this reason it is important to measure the width yourself before purchasing if it is critical to your project.

Standard fabric widths	
45 cm (18 in)	137 cm (54 in)
90 cm (36 in)	140 cm (55 in)
112 cm (44 in)	150 cm (60 in)
115 cm (45 in)	300 cm (120 in)

Fabric buying tips

Check the fabric width yourself before purchasing if it is critical to your project. Metric/imperial conversions are not always exact and some speciality fabrics may come in unusual widths.

Remember to purchase an extra amount for matching if you are using a fabric with a pattern, pile, or nap. To figure out how much extra you will need, see page 23.

Buy thread and fabric at the same time; it is easier to match the colour with the fabric at hand.

fabrics for dressmaking

Whatever you plan to make, you will need some kind of fabric. Today there is such a wide selection of fibre types, weaves, patterns, and colours that it may all seem quite bewildering. Colour and pattern are your personal choice, but certain types of fabrics are more suitable for some uses than others.

Linen and cotton

Linen and cotton are both natural yarns. Linen is made from the cellulose fibre obtained from the flax plant; its natural colour is off-white or pale tan, and due to its wax content it has a natural lustre. Cotton is a natural vegetable yarn made from the soft white fibrous material found around the seeds of the tropical and subtropical cotton plant. Cotton is almost pure cellulose, and in its raw, undyed form it is a light to dark cream, although it may also be brown or green. Cotton is often classified by its geographical region of origin, hence Egyptian cotton, Indian cotton. Cotton and linen can both be washed easily.

▲ Linen
Linen can be woven in various weights, from very light weights suitable for handkerchiefs or scarves to heavier weights for suit fabrics. Pure linen is cool and comfortable to wear but creases very easily. Its distinctive crumpled look has often been very fashionable, but it can also be blended with other fibres to reduce the possibility of creasing.

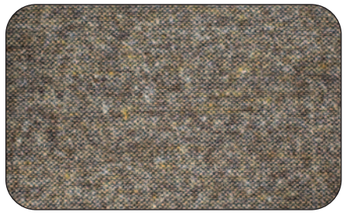
▲ Cotton/linen woven stripes
Cotton and linen blends are quite common. Stripes are always in fashion and woven stripes come in many different combinations and widths. Seersucker has lines of bunched threads that create alternate stripes of puckered and smooth finishes. The stripes on seersucker always run lengthwise in the direction of the warp and they are often blue and white: the puckered stripes are coloured and the flat ones white. Seersucker is often used for women's blouses, casual shirts, and children's clothing.

▲ Printed cotton
Cotton fabric is often printed with an all-over design, and there are countless different patterns available. Small floral prints on a contrasting background colour are very popular and are commonly used for dresses, aprons, and quilts. Printed cotton may be made of mercerized yarn, which has been subjected to a wet finishing process to make it stronger and more lustrous, and also allows the dyes to take better for brighter, deeper colours. Glazed cotton fabric has a glossy, polished finish.

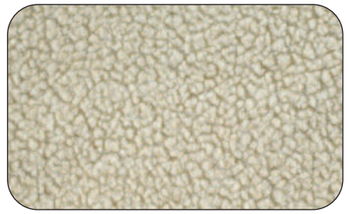
Wool fabrics

Wool is the fibre or fabric made from the fleece of sheep or lambs—lambswool is softer and finer. However, the term is also often applied to other animal hair fibres, including the hair of the camel, alpaca, llama, and vicuna. Some types of wool can be washed, but most should be dry-cleaned—always check the care instructions before laundering an item.

▲ Denim
A rugged, durable twill cotton fabric that is most popular in indigo blue, but also available in other colours. Denim is mainly used for casualwear, particularly for jeans. Denim shrinks considerably when first washed, but most commercial clothing is made of pre-shrunk fabric. Stretch denim has added Lycra®.



▲ Wool tweed
Tweed is a term broadly applied to a range of sturdy fabrics in coarser grades of wool, usually with colour effects created by stock-dyed wools. The most popular weaves for tweeds are plain, twill, and variations of twill, such as herringbone.



▲ Wool fleece
A fabric made primarily of wool that is knitted and then brushed to compact the cloth, trap air, and raise the fibres. The surface is then sheared to create a smooth, even finish. Fleece is soft, easy to sew, does not fray, and water-repellent. It is warm yet lightweight and ideal for outerwear.

Wash and wear

Always check the laundering instructions on the fabric bolt when you purchase your fabric.

Choose thread to match the composition of the fabric you will be using.

▲ Wool gabardine
A tightly woven, smooth, durable, twill-weave fabric with either a lustrous or a dull finish. It comes in various weights and generally wears extremely well, although it is inclined to develop a surface shine with wear. Wool gabardine is popular as a fabric for tailored suits and it is also used for coats, raincoats, and uniforms. Gabardine is also made in spun rayon, cotton, or various blends.

▲ Fine jersey knit
A soft, slightly elastic knit fabric mainly used for shirts and dresses. It is ideal for form-fitting designs as it clings to a shape but still drapes well where it falls. Jersey can be made in cotton, wool, or silk.