



# THE MAKER'S ATELIER

The Essential Collection

Sewing with Style

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## Contents

006	Introduction
010	Choosing and using fabrics
014	Measuring, making a toile and fitting a garment
016	Pattern One <b>The stretch pencil skirt</b>
030	Pattern Two <b>The drape-front top</b>
046	Pattern Three <b>The cigarette pants</b>
064	Pattern Four <b>The tie-neck blouse</b>
080	Pattern Five <b>The book bag</b>
094	Pattern Six <b>The raw-edge coat</b>
112	Pattern Seven <b>The wrap skirt</b>
128	Pattern Eight <b>The over-sized t-shirt</b>
142	Resources and Acknowledgments
143	Index



# Hello, and welcome to The Maker’s Atelier Essential Collection

My name is Frances Tobin and I started The Maker’s Atelier to publish my own dressmaking patterns. My background is in the fashion industry where I worked as a designer, but wherever I’ve worked and whatever clothes have been available to me, I have always preferred to make my own. The whole making process fascinates me and has done since I was a child.

Looking back, I was so lucky; I come from a large family with brothers and sisters – all with their own sense of style – and a mother who was quite happy to let us experiment. Every time she took me clothes shopping we could never find anything that I wanted to wear. The clothes available to young girls did not look like the clothes I was seeing in my older sisters’ fashion magazines. The cut, the colour or the feel of the fabric were wrong; at the age of six I aspired to look like Jean Shrimpton. So my mother would end up making my clothes, allowing me to choose the fabric and style. She would get me to watch as she cut out and made my clothes, and that is how I learnt to sew.

By the time I was in my teens I would spend all week at school dreaming about what I was going to wear on Saturday night. I was constantly changing my image so I would usually have to make or reinvent something. I had to be quite creative as there was always a lack of time and money. I’d see what I could requisition at home, or scour the local charity shops for fabric or clothes that I could cut up and remake.

It was inevitable that I would become a fashion designer; I had little interest in anything else. My first degree was in fashion textile design where I specialised in knitwear. I learnt about fibres and yarns, dyestuffs and colour, fabric construction and garment design. This led to an MA at The Royal College of Art and a career in fashion.

I love fashion, it is constantly changing, reinventing and challenging what we see as desirable; but beyond fashion, I love style. Style is different from fashion; fashion is of the moment, whereas style is a way of doing things. It is how you put your look together. It doesn’t have to be extraordinary or challenging, it’s what feels right to you. I have developed my own style through my dressmaking. Through the process of choosing fabric and deciding what to make, I have learnt what suits me. I have found I do not like very fitted clothes – they do not flatter me and I find them too restrictive. I like to be able to move freely in a fluid shape that skims the body. I like to keep things simple and uncluttered, and then layer on a few accessories.





Like most people who sew, I love finding beautiful materials and spend hours in fabric shops looking for inspiration for what to make. One fateful day I was in my local fabric shop, Ditto, when Gill Thornley, the owner, suggested I publish my own patterns. Though I haven't used shop-bought patterns for years – they just don't have the look I want – I was sceptical of this idea at first. But then I realised that here was an opportunity to create something special. I wanted to bring back the excitement I'd felt as a child watching my mother and older sisters discuss the latest styles in the Vogue designer pattern range. Those styles were far more fashionable than the clothes available in the shops of our provincial high street.

So the idea for The Maker's Atelier came about. I would take the key shapes from current fashion trends, refine them into wearable styles, and translate them into clear dressmaking patterns. A range of patterns that was desirable, wearable and make-able.

The Maker's Atelier isn't for everyone; it has a distinctive style, but one that resonates with women of all sizes and ages. Women who know how to dress well but can't always find what they want in the shops. It is a style that has evolved through my years of making clothes and working as a fashion designer. I have found that it is my simpler, more pared-back styles that are the most successful; I like the fabric and the cut to do the work, rather than fancy detail.

*The Essential Collection* is an extension of The Maker's Atelier. For this collection I have taken the styles that I have found indispensable over the years and refined them further to create a range of versatile separates made up of three tops and three bottoms, with a piece of outerwear and a really useful accessory. The clean lines and simple shapes mean that each garment works beautifully in a variety of fabrics and will flatter a broad range of sizes.

Each piece in the collection has been given its own chapter in the book; you will learn how the shape evolved and I offer suggestions for how it can be worn. Illustrated, step-by-step instructions are given for how to make the garment in one form, followed by a section on how to vary this to create two or three very different garments; not only through using different fabrics, but also by changing elements or details of construction. The patterns are in a full range of sizes (see page 14 for more on sizing), and can be found in the envelope at the back of the book.

I hope that you will be inspired by *The Essential Collection* to not only make what you see here, but also to develop your own ideas, in the fabrics you like, creating a collection that's unique to you and your style.

**Frances**



# Choosing and using fabrics

One of the most exciting parts in the dressmaking process is finding your fabric. I spend hours looking at fabrics, checking the ‘handle’ to see how they drape and move. I can’t separate fabric from clothes: when I see a fabric, it inspires what I want to make, and when I get an idea for a garment I know the sort of fabric I will need to make it. Fabric is an endless source of inspiration.

I find fabrics and trimmings all over the place, from fabric shops to flea markets and thrift shops. When I see something I really like, I’ll buy three metres, even if I’m not sure what I’ll use it for immediately. I know I’ll regret not buying it. I never stop experimenting with new fabrics that I come across; I like to see what happens, some times with disastrous results, but I always learn something and broaden my sewing skills. When I’m working with a new fabric, I try out the stitch I’m thinking of using on offcuts of my fabric to perfect the finish before starting on my actual garment.

In *The Essential Collection* I have used a variety of fabrics. The pared-back style of the designs mean that the garments can be made in more than one fabric type. For every project there is a definitive garment, followed by variations created in different fabrics. Each fabric has a different effect on how the garment looks and can be worn. I hope you’ll be inspired to be adventurous with your fabric selection, but still work with what feels right for you.

Choosing fabric can be overwhelming, there’s often too much choice. When I can’t decide, I ask for small samples that I take away so I have time to think, even if it’s just while I have a cup of coffee. Try not to buy on price alone; some of my ‘bargains’ have never been used.

Here is a brief overview of the types of fabric I have used in this book, and some tips on working with them.

## Woven fabric

Basic woven fabric is constructed with threads interwoven at right angles to each other. The threads running the length of the fabric are called the warp and the threads that run across the width are called the weft. This construction usually creates a fabric that is non-stretch in the warp or weft direction, although flexible on the bias – the angle of 45 degrees to warp or weft. Terms such as denim, canvas or twill, refer to the type of weave pattern.

There are also stretch woven fabrics where elastomeric yarn (such as Lycra) is included in the weave construction. These fabrics can stretch in one or both directions, depending on how the stretch yarn is added in the weaving process.

The other form of stretch woven is called a mechanical stretch. This is when a chemical finish is applied to the flat fabric causing it to shrink, and so creating a stretch when pulled. This stretch quality is not as strong or long-lasting as the stretch in a fabric with elastomeric yarn woven in to it, and



will not keep bouncing back. For example, if a tight-fitting skirt is made in a mechanical stretch fabric, it will ‘seat’ (the area around your bottom will become baggy) and not bounce back until it is washed again.

To sew with woven fabrics is fairly straightforward. Use a universal needle and straight stitch setting on your sewing machine. Vary the size of needle and stitch length to suit the fabric weight.

### Knitted or jersey fabric

Knitted fabric is more complex in construction than woven fabric. In its most basic form it is made from a series of interlocking loops formed by a single thread looping through the last row of loops created. The resulting fabric is much more flexible than a woven fabric and can stretch in any direction.

In a similar way to mechanical stretch woven fabrics, if there is no elastomeric content in the yarn used, tight-fitting garments will ‘seat’. T-shirts are often made from basic jersey with no added stretch, whereas the fabric used to make leggings will usually contain 4–6% stretch fibres, and performance sportswear and swimwear require a high percentage, approximately 18%.

Terms such as single or double jersey refer to the looped construction created by the needle bed set-up of the knitting machine. Single jersey is knitted on one bed, either flat or circular, so the loops always fall to the same side, creating a right and wrong side. Double jersey is knitted on a twin-bed set-up so there are usually two right, though sometimes differing, sides to the fabric; it is generally thicker and more stable to work with than single jersey.

To sew with knitted fabrics, use a ballpoint or jersey needle, which are designed to push the threads aside as they stitch. This prevents any laddering resulting from broken stitches.

Selecting the best sewing stitch for jersey fabrics is dependent on the amount of stretch required. Too little stretch and the sewing thread can break when the seam is stretched. For most side seams I like to use a plain straight stitch, but I apply a little tension to the fabric as I feed it under the machine foot. For waistbands and hems I use a zigzag stitch to allow for more stretch.

If my jersey fabric splays out, I generally use a steam iron, without pressing the fabric, to relax the fabric back into shape. In The Stretch Pencil Skirt there are a number of alternatives given for tackling hems in different ways (see page 29).

### Technical fabrics

This is a term that refers to either woven or knitted fabrics that are coated or bonded with a chemically produced fabrication. PU and PVC are terms used for imitation leathers: PVC is a coated woven fabric with a high sheen like

patent leather, and PU is a coated jersey fabric with a sheen finish and stretch qualities. Neoprene or scuba fabrics are bonded imitation rubber-like fabrics with a jersey backing for increased flexibility.

For technical fabrics with a jersey backing, I’ve found I get the best results from using a ballpoint or jersey needle. For woven-backed technical fabrics I use a universal needle, but if that has difficulty puncturing the fabric, I use a leather needle. I also lengthen the stitch length to get a smoother result.

The shiny surface of these fabrics can stick against the presser foot or machine plate. To avoid this, use a Teflon foot and make a template of non-stick baking parchment and secure it over the machine plate with tape.

For some PVC fabrics it can be impossible to pin seams in place before stitching, so try using a double-sided basting tape, or hold the pieces together with small bulldog or paper clips.

Keep technical fabrics rolled rather than folded to avoid permanent creasing.

### Fine silky fabrics

I find these the trickiest fabrics to work with, but sometimes I can’t resist them because of the luxurious, delicate handle.

Always use a fine needle, whether it’s a universal or ballpoint needle. You can also get specialist needles for microfibre that I have used on natural silks as well as synthetic silky fabrics.

For buttonholes, try using a stick-on fabric stabiliser as used by embroiderers; I use Stitch and Tear. This will stop the fabric puckering up as you stitch.

### Leather

I have used leather for versions of the original Raw-edge Coat (see page 106) and The Book Bag (see page 92).

When sewing with leather, select skins that are reasonably lightweight and flexible. If you have never sewn with suede or leather but would like to have a go, most suppliers have offcuts or part-skins at reduced prices, so you can try stitching before investing in the materials for a whole garment.

Leather has a tendency to tear at the seams if there are too many stitch perforations. To avoid this, increase the stitch length and always use a leather needle; its spear-like point cleanly cuts the stitch hole. Try out the strength of the proposed seam on an offcut.

As with technical fabrics (see above), it can be impossible to pin leather seams before stitching, so try using a double-sided basting tape, or hold the pieces together with small bulldog or paper clips. As with technical fabrics, keep leather or suede rolled, not folded.

### Preparing fabric

Check the washing instructions for fabric when you buy it. If the fabric is washable, then wash it before cutting and making. The reason for doing this is that during the manufacturing process, fabrics are often ‘stentered’: that is, they are pulled into a uniform width and length and a finishing chemical is applied. The problem with this is that when the fabric is subsequently washed, it ‘relaxes’ back, or shrinks. So by pre-washing it before making it up, you can make sure that the garment you sew doesn’t shrink.

If washing information isn’t available, buy extra fabric to do a wash test. To do a wash test, cut a square 20 x 20cm (8 x 8in) and wash it at 40°C. Then, when it’s washed and dried, re-measure it to check shrinkage and to review the handle of the fabric. If you don’t like the result, make sure you only dry-clean the garment you are going to make.

Before washing lengths of fabric, unfold them and iron out any creases. Loosely load the fabric into your machine and use a liquid detergent. These steps should avoid any unevenness in colour fading, especially with indigo and pigment-dyed denim, or coloured linens.

Do not wash suede, leather or PVC, though I have washed PU – not because it would shrink but because it can have an unpleasant chemical smell.



# Measuring, making a toile and fitting a garment

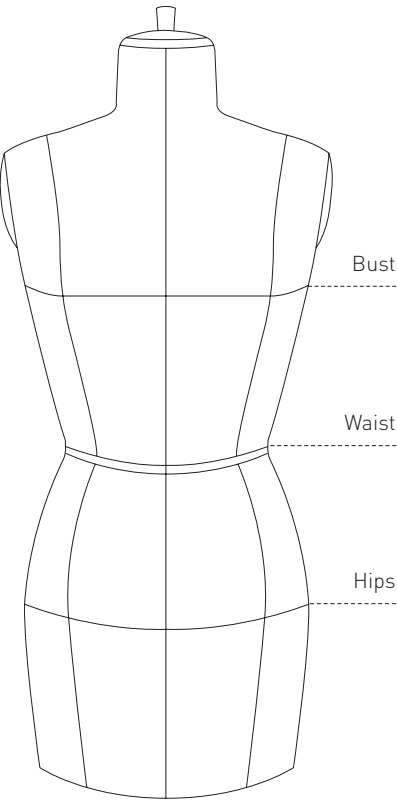
One of the benefits of making your own clothes is being able to get a fit that suits you. Very few people are a perfect match to a universal size chart, so here are some guidelines to help you get a great fit.

It is important to measure yourself accurately and then compare those measurements against the size chart given for each garment.

**Bust:** Measure the fullest part making sure the tape is level front and back.

**Waist:** Measure the narrowest part, just above the navel.

**Hips:** Measure the fullest part, usually at the top of the legs not at the top of the hipbone.



The size range for the patterns in *The Essential Collection* is from an 81cm (32in) bust up to a 116cm (46in) bust, spread over eight sizes for fitted patterns and four sizes for the looser styles. The measurements given in the sizing chart for each garment are the finished measurements of that garment and so include any ease that has been designed as part of the style: the majority of the styles are designed to be relaxed and comfortable to wear. The body measurements the garments are designed for are given in the charts on the page opposite.

The samples modelled in the book are all made in Size 3 for fitted garments and Size 3/4 for relaxed-fit garments. The women wearing them have varying body shapes, so you can see how the garments will fit and suit different figures and ages.

If your measurements fall between the sizes given, you can mark the variation on the paper pattern before cutting it out. For example, if your waist measurement is for a Size 3, but your hip measurement is a Size 4, then you can carefully draw in a personal pattern line graduating from one size to the other at the appropriate points. If you are slightly larger than the biggest size or smaller than the smallest size in the measurements chart, it is possible to grade the pattern up or down a little, but you should only attempt this if you are an experienced dressmaker.

Whether you have made adjustments or not, it is a good idea to make a toile (also known as a muslin). This is a practice garment made in inexpensive fabric to test a pattern out. For a very basic toile it is possible to purchase calico or unbleached cotton jersey for a fraction of the price of quality fabric. Make a simplified version of the garment, omitting details such as facings and hems. Then try on and alter the toile as necessary until it fits. Copy these amendments onto the original pattern or some plain pattern paper to make a personal version of the pattern.

Alternatively you could make a 'wearable toile'. This is the garment made up fully, but in an inexpensive fabric. It is a great way to practise the techniques required for that style and check for any sizing issues, and you will have a garment that at worst you can wear around the house or while gardening.

All fabrics respond differently, so throughout the making process, try on the garment inside out and check how it's fitting. This way you can mark any further alterations you wish to make – either with tailor's chalk or by pinning – and adjust accordingly. Remember to keep a note of any adjustments for when you want to make the same style again.

## Fitted garments

The Stretch Pencil Skirt (see page 16), The Cigarette Pants (see page 46), and The Wrap Skirt (see page 112) patterns are in these eight sizes.

Size	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Centimetres								
Bust	81	86	91	96	101	106	111	116
Waist	64	69	74	79	84	89	94	99
Hips	89	94	99	104	109	114	119	124
Inches								
Bust	32	34	36	38	40	42	44	46
Waist	25	27	29	31	33	35	37	39
Hips	35	37	39	41	43	45	47	49

## Relaxed-fit garments

The Drape-Front Top (see page 30), The Tie-Neck Blouse (see page 64), The Raw-Edge Coat (see page 94), and The Over-Sized T-Shirt (see page 128) are in these four sizes.

Size	1/2	3/4	5/6	7/8
Centimetres				
Bust	81-86	91-96	101-106	111-116
Waist	64-69	74-79	84-89	94-99
Hips	89-94	99-104	109-114	119-124
Inches				
Bust	32-34	36-38	40-42	44-46
Waist	25-27	29-31	33-35	37-39
Hips	35-37	39-41	43-45	47-49

## Preparing to sew

If you can't find an exact match when choosing a thread to go with your fabric, opt for a slightly darker rather than lighter shade.

Iron out any incidental creases before laying out the pattern pieces. Always follow the grain line arrows printed on the paper pieces.

Once you have cut out the pattern pieces, but before you remove the paper, snip any notches to 5mm (1/4in) and slip a stitch through any sewing points.

Note that seam allowances are 1cm (3/8in) unless otherwise stated.

If you are unfamiliar with the fabric type you are using, save the off-cuts. Use these to test straight and zigzag stitches, and buttonhole abilities. This is especially useful with stretch and jersey fabrics. If you are not a confident dressmaker, hand-tack seams first. Take your time sewing, especially curved seams, sleeve-heads and collars.

When sewing, do not try to follow the path of the needle with your eyes, but instead keep an eye on the edge of the fabric against the footplate guide; this will give you straighter seams. Always use the correct needle for the type and weight of fabric.

Reverse to make a few backstitches at the beginning and end of each seam, so that the stitching doesn't unravel later on.

PATTERN ONE

# THE STRETCH- PENCIL SKIRT







## THE STRETCH PENCIL SKIRT

# Developing the stretch pencil skirt

When I was planning The Maker’s Atelier, I knew that a stretch pencil skirt would be in the first set of patterns. It is so fundamental to my wardrobe that I also knew I would have to include it here in *The Essential Collection*.

Christian Dior designed the first pencil skirt back in 1954 as part of his H-line collection. Dior named his collections using letters of the alphabet to reference the changing silhouettes (we still use his term A-line for the flared cut it describes, as in an A-line skirt), and the H-line silhouette was the result of Dior’s move away from his ground-breaking New Look, which with its tight waists and full skirts had dictated fashion from 1947 to 1950. The H-line shifted the emphasis from the waist to the hip, tailoring the skirt to curve over the hips and narrow towards the knee. This silhouette not only looked different, it felt radically different to wear. The more restrictive shape encouraged women to walk with a wiggle – think Marilyn Monroe in *Some Like It Hot*.

Since the 1950s, the pencil skirt with its tailored smartness has become a key piece in women’s working wardrobes. Through the decades the hemline has risen and fallen, depending on the prevailing trends and the economics of the day.

In the 1970s, elastomeric fibres (best known under the trade name of Lycra) became more widely used in fabric production, adding stretch and recovery properties to both knitted and woven fabrics. These fibres have been the single biggest influence on modern dress. Without them we would not have the whole sports and leisurewear industry, with garments that cross from the gym to everyday casualwear. Tight-fitting clothing is no longer restrictive but flexes and moves with the body, allowing the wearer much greater ease of movement.

My pencil skirt is a contemporary, stretch version of the classic pencil skirt. I find rigid, tailored pencil skirts too restrictive and uncomfortable, even on a ‘thin’ day! This stretch version doesn’t restrict my movement in the same way, but it does make me aware of how I stand and move and as a result I think it improves my posture.

The fit I like to achieve is snug over the hips, but not so tight that it becomes unflattering. Then the fabric’s stretch qualities allow the skirt to follow the line of the leg without the need for a kick pleat, so giving a really clean silhouette.

At the last count I have a staggering twenty-five versions of this skirt in my personal wardrobe. They cross from casual to formal through to eveningwear; the common denominator is the stretch element in the fabrication. As this skirt takes less than a metre of fabric and a couple of hours to make, I find I can’t resist great stretch fabrics that I come across when I’m fabric buying. As long as there is enough stretch I know I can create a fool-proof skirt that I will wear time and again.