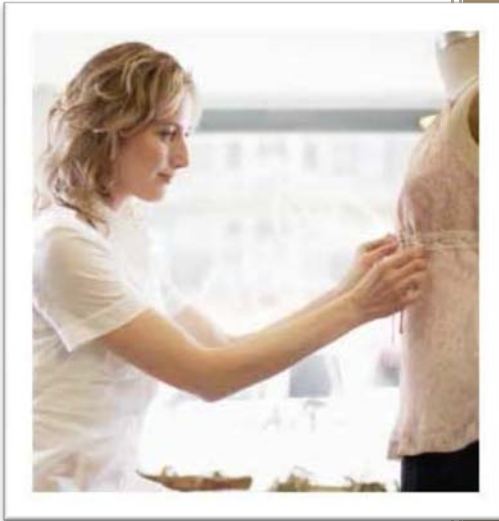


WANT TO LOOK FABULOUS
EVERY DAY?

Learn to Design Your Own Clothes!



Judith Christensen,
Professional
Patternmaker,
[ClothingPatterns101](http://ClothingPatterns101.com)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

YES, YOU CAN DESIGN YOUR OWN
CLOTHES!.....4

PLANNING YOUR
DESIGN.....8

ELEMENTS OF DESIGN AND HOW THEY'RE
USED.....10

YOUR BASIC BLOCK OR FITTING
PATTERN.....14

VARIATIONS ON THE BASIC
BLOCK.....15

KEEP YOUR BALANCE! MAINTAINING
PROPORTION.....22

DESIGN WITH FABRIC AND
COLOR.....26

WHERE TO FIND
INSPIRATION.....31

ETHNIC INSPIRATION.....35

HISTORIC INSPIRATION.....	37
PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER.....	41
CROQUI	43
CONCLUSION.....	44

EXPRESS YOUR CREATIVITY WITH CLOTHING YOU DESIGN YOURSELF!

Think you don't have what it takes to design your own clothing?

Nonsense!

Clothing design is little more than taking a variety of style elements and putting them together in creative new ways. Change a sleeve, a collar, the shape of a skirt – and you've just designed a new style!

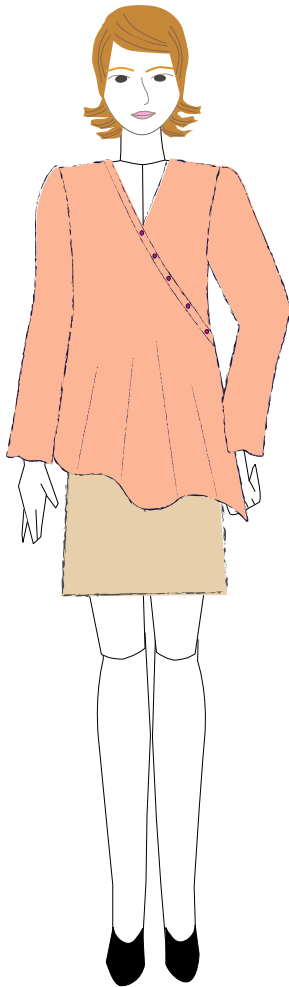


When paging through a magazine or watching TV or a movie, do you notice what people are wearing and think, “That looks fabulous!” Or – “Wow, that’s *not* a good style for her shape.”

One of the first steps to designing your own clothes is recognizing good design and what appeals to you when you see it on someone else.

Do you often look at a garment and think, “I *love* that neckline”, or “What a beautiful sleeve”, or “I love the way that skirt flows”.

If you do, then you *are* a designer! Being able to pick out styling details – and identify *why* you like a particular garment – allows you to get inspiration from those details and use them in your own designs.



If you sew your own clothes from commercial patterns you buy at the fabric store, **you already make design decisions regarding style, color, and fabric.**

And when you shop for clothes, don't you often think, "I don't like....(the color, the collar, the sleeves...)" ?

You're making design decisions then, too!

If you're ready to step up to the next level and create your own fashions, I'll **walk you through the process of putting together your own styles.**

Fashion is little more than taking simple design elements and putting them together in your own unique way.

It's kind of like a jig-saw puzzle, or playing with paper dolls. You mix and match sleeves, collars, skirts, and so on until you get a pleasing arrangement – voila! **You've designed something!**

PLANNING YOUR DESIGN

There are certain aspects of design, both practical and aesthetic, to take into consideration when you plan a garment.

For example, if you want to design a dress, you may ask yourself:

- Where do you plan to wear this dress? For what kinds of events or activities? Is it “dressy”, business-like, casual?
- Keeping the purpose of the dress in mind, do you want it long? Short? Somewhere in between?
- Where do you want the waist to sit – at, above, or below your natural waistline? (this will affect the type of skirt and bodice you choose)
- Do you want the bodice close-fitting or loose-fitting?
- Do you want the skirt slim, A-line, gored, full, pleated?

- Or do you want a dress without a waistline – a sheath or a full, flowing style?
- Do you want sleeves? If so, are they long, short, $\frac{3}{4}$ length? Full or fitted? With or without a cuff?
- If you don't want sleeves, how about straps? Or strapless? Or just a sleeveless bodice?

Once you've decided the basic form and function on your dress, you can choose almost any combination of design elements and come up with a great-looking garment.

ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

The design details you'd use to distinguish your style include **the shape of the neck and/or collar, the length, shape and fullness of sleeves** (with or without cuffs), **the shape, length, and fullness of a skirt, or the length, shape and fullness of a top or blouse.**

These style details - like bell sleeves, full sleeves, shawl collars, V-necklines – can be added to a basic bodice or blouse in any number of combinations, each creating a new and different style.

The examples on the next page are all basic blouses – but each has different styling details.

One has a Peter Pan collar and full sleeves, another has a shawl collar and short sleeves, and another has bell sleeves and a V-neckline.

Each as a different look – but all are based on the same basic body.



Peter Pan Collar and Full Sleeves

V-Neckline and Bell Sleeves



Shawl Collar and Short Sleeves

Re-arrange these basic design elements, and you can create any number of different blouses! Put the shawl collar on the full-sleeved blouse, or the Peter Pan collar on the

short sleeve blouse – or any other combination of details you choose.

If you love the neckline you see on a blouse, imagine it on a dress, in a different color and fabric, or on a casual top.

Design is all about trying different combinations of elements until you find one that appeals to you.

It's the details that make a great design, but don't overdo it.

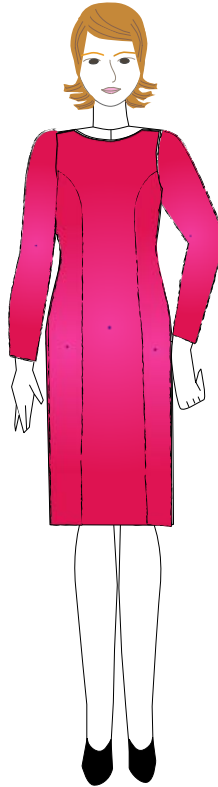
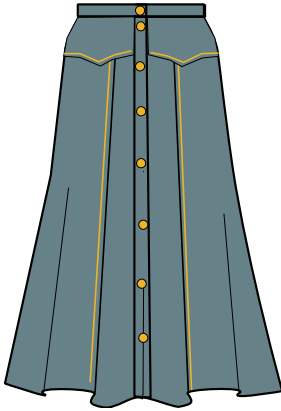
Don't put too many details into one garment. They will compete with each other and you'll lose the impact of each one individually.

Each detail speaks volumes – too many and you'll have a shouting match!

DESIGNING WITH DARTS AND SEAMS

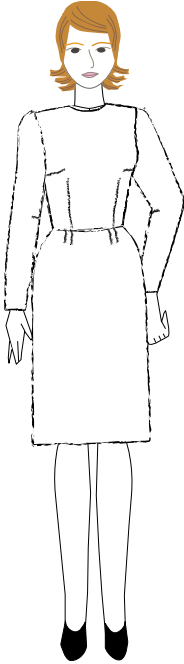
Darts and shaping seams can also be used as design elements.

Princess seams are commonly used to give the garment shape and fit. But they also add style to a plain sheath.



The yoke on a skirt is a shaping seam which also functions as a design detail. The yoke allows the skirt to fit closely through the hips, and adds detail to an otherwise simple skirt.

YOUR BASIC BLOCK OR FITTING PATTERN



Before you design your first garment, you'll need a **pattern block** – one that fits you like a glove.

A pattern block, or basic block, is a simple garment, with absolutely no styling details.

It is, frankly, a very boring fitting dress!!
But that boring dress is like a blank slate to which you will apply your design magic.

You'll make fit adjustments to this basic dress until the fit is perfect – then you can add whatever details you like, to design fashions that fit and flatter you.

SIMPLE VARIATIONS ON THE BASIC BLOCK



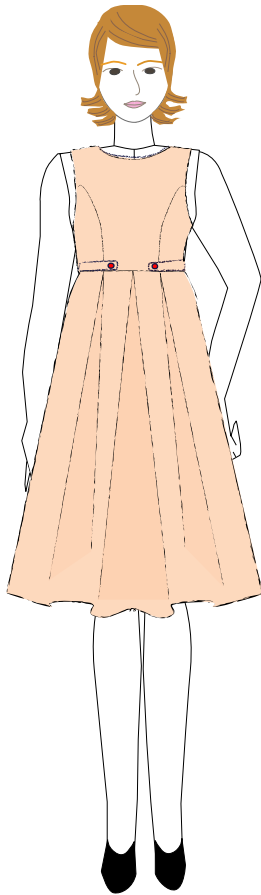
Dress with 2-piece look

This dress is a simple variation on the basic block. The 2-piece look with contrast skirt keeps the waist seam, adds a belt, and moves the bodice darts to the neck.

Starting with your basic block, you'll add "style lines" and details to create your masterpiece.

Style lines are changes to the pattern used primarily to achieve the look you want, not for fit.

You can get some very nice looking dresses, blouses, and tops with just a few style lines added to the block, and details like belts, sleeves, or collars.



This simple dress keeps the fitted bodice with **flattering princess seams replacing the darts for fit.**

The skirt has soft pleats that swing nicely – using a very simple adjustment called **“slashing and spreading”** to add shape and fullness to the skirt.

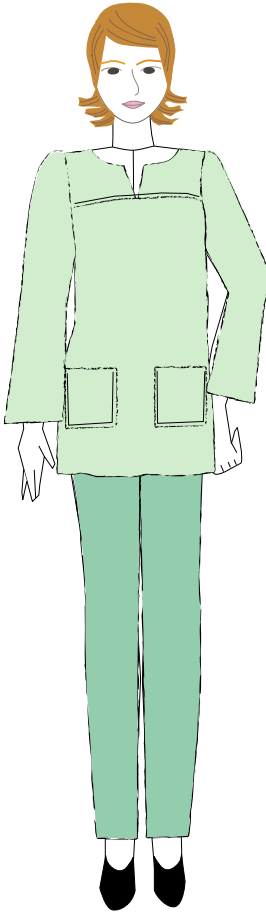
High Waist Dress with Full Skirt

The “Illusion” dress has **shaped panels at the sides to give the appearance of a smaller waist.**

Like princess seams, the side panels not only add color and shape, the seams function as darts or shaping seams to customize the fit without the use of waist or hip darts.



“Illusion” Dress with Contrast Side Panels



Tunic with shaped yoke

There are almost unlimited options when it comes to sleeves, necklines, skirt shape, blouse or top length and overall fit.

Use the bodice of the basic block to make a top or blouse – the yoke, bell sleeves, and slight flare at the hem are all style lines that create this easy-fitting style.

The yoke effectively “hides” the bust darts, too, giving the top a nice fit over the bust without noticeable darts.

Or, turn it into an unstructured jacket with curved overlap – it’s really just a minor variation on the bodice block!

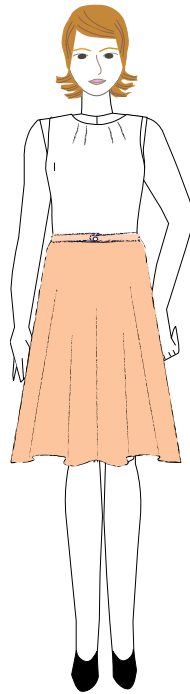
Design is, to a great extent, just a matter of “mixing and matching” those elements until you have a style that you like.



**Unstructured Jacket
with Curved Opening
and Bell Sleeves**



For example, add bracelet-length sleeves to the 2-piece look dress and the dress looks a bit more elegant.



Or keep the casual sleeveless look, but make the skirt full and swing-y – a very different look!

Just switch the details around, and you have a new style.

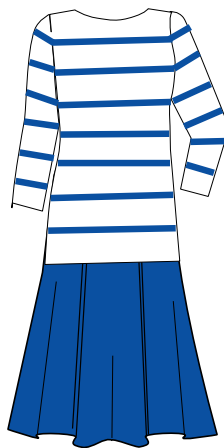
All of these styles – and many, many more - can be made using the simple dress block described at the beginning of this chapter.

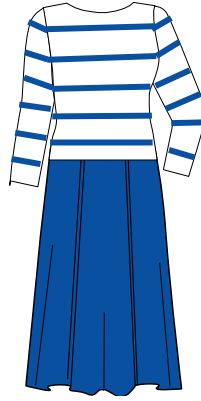
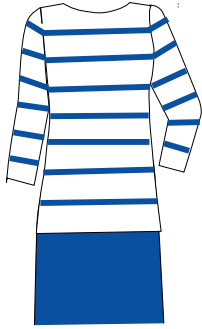
Learn how to do a variety of sleeves, necklines, yokes, and other design elements – and **you can design anything!**

MAINTAINING BALANCE AND PROPORTION

As you're choosing the individual parts that make up your dress, keep in mind **proportion** – both yours and that of the dress itself. Some shapes will look better on you than others and I'm sure that by now you have a pretty good idea what works on you and what doesn't.

In general, the parts of your garment should give a sense of balance. **A long tunic-style top over a below-the-knee skirt seldom looks balanced.**

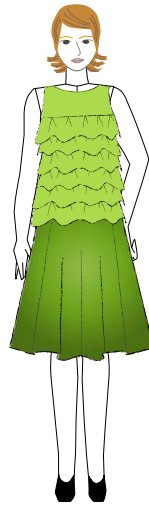




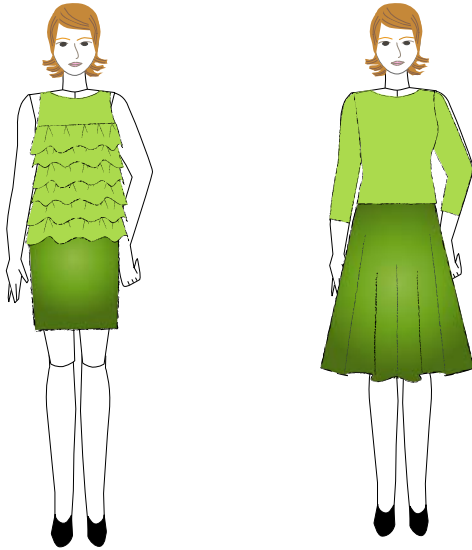
Long over short or short over long looks better!

In a similar way, full and fitted balance each other.

A full top over a full skirt is too much; it adds pounds



The same full top over a slim skirt is much better, more balanced. Or, a more fitted top with the full skirt works well.



Finally, keep *your own* proportions and body shape in mind.

Many larger women (like myself) gravitate to oversized clothing to hide their size. But in reality, **excess fullness just makes us look bigger!**

Tight-fitting clothing, on the other hand, often **looks like we've outgrown the item** (and sometimes, that's exactly what's happened!) – and it's also not flattering.

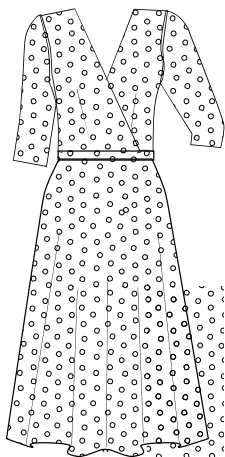
But a **natural fit, relatively close but not binding, with well balanced design, looks great on everyone.**

DESIGN WITH FABRIC AND COLOR

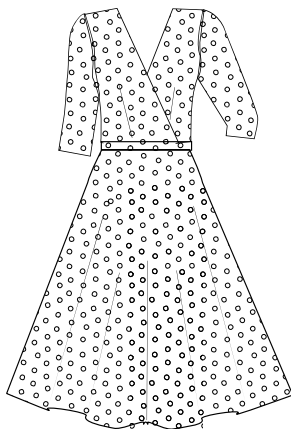
The final selections for your design are **fabric and color**. These are often the most important considerations, and a change of fabric, print, and/or color can make the same dress look like an entirely new style.

The **softness, stiffness, drape, or “hand” of the fabric** is a very important consideration when choosing a fabric for your dress or garment.

A circle skirt, for example, can be soft and flowy, or it can stand out like a poodle skirt. Dior’s New Look of the 1950’s used full, circle skirts (worn with a crinoline) for a shape that emphasized the waist by flaring the skirt.



A circle skirt in a soft fabric drapes nicely



The same circle skirt, in a firmer fabric holds its flared shape.

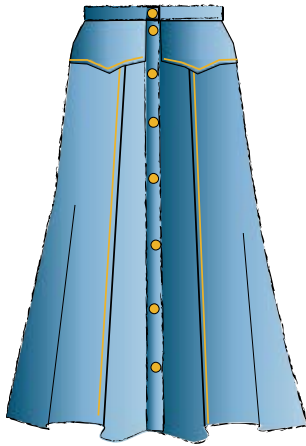
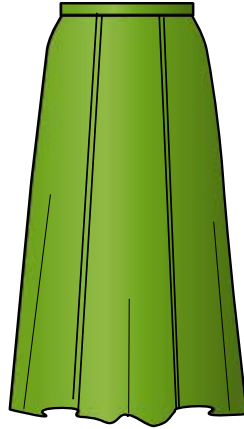
For a full skirt that hangs and moves beautifully, use a fluid fabric like crepe or challis. For a flared skirt, use a firmer fabric like taffeta or poplin.

In another example, a **very soft, flowing fabric will not work for crisp-looking pleats**. The pleats won't hang properly and won't have a nice, neat edge. For crisp pleats, use a firmer fabric like wool or linen.

Some styles can be made in both soft and firmer fabrics; you'll just get a different look with each.

A gored skirt, for example, is not too full and tends to fit fairly closely through the hips.

In a soft, loose weave or knit fabric, the skirt will swing and flow easily.



In a firmer fabric, like a light-weight denim, it will have more structure and shape.

Notice how the addition of a pointed yoke and contrast topstitching

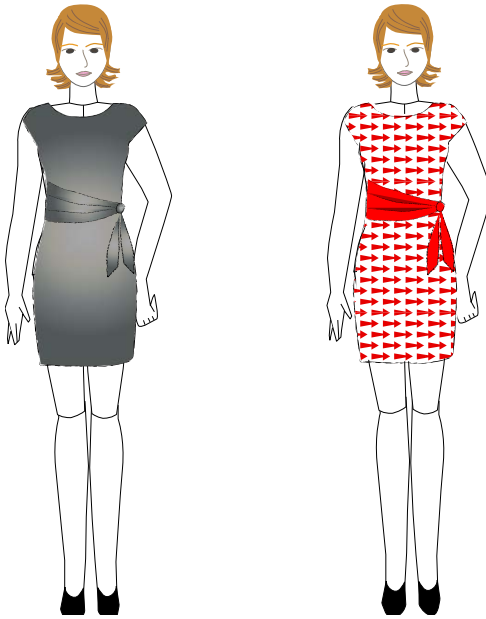
gives this skirt a very Western feel – **just changing a few simple elements gives you an entirely different look.**

Get to know your fabrics and how they react to the construction of the garment you want to make.

Feel the fabric you're considering and lift it from the bolt. Does it hold its shape or drape loosely? Both are good features; you just need to be aware of when and how to use them.

Changing the color or print of the fabric can also make a garment look entirely new.

A basic dress with waist wrap may be sophisticated and dressy in a nice black crepe, or light and casual in a bold graphic print.



It's the combination of silhouette, fabric and color (or print) that determines the "look" and feel of a garment.

WHERE TO FIND INSPIRATION FOR YOUR DESIGNS

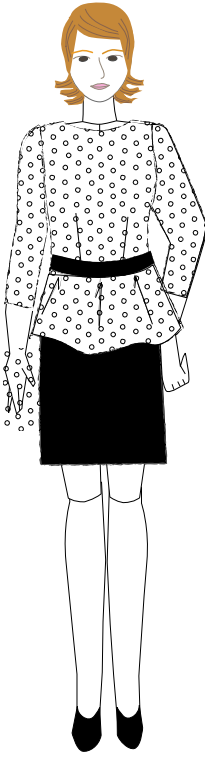
Where do you go to get ideas for your designs?

Almost anywhere! If you want to stay current with the latest trends, you can **find inspiration from other designers.**

By “inspiration”, I do **NOT** mean that you **should copy other designers.** You’ll want to create your own look and reflect your own personality, not that of someone else.

Look for specific details that you can incorporate – the neckline, the hemline, the fabrics or embellishments used - **and use it in a new and different way.**

For example, a peplum is a nice detail that defines the waist – you can add it to the bottom of a blouse or the top of a skirt.



The peplum top is a fresh take on a simple blouse – it's a great shape for almost every body type.



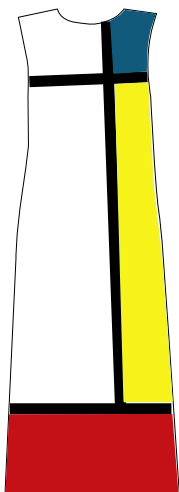
The uneven hemline and turtle-shell print of the simple sleeveless top update a straight black skirt.

Uneven or asymmetrical hems make a top, blouse, or dress more interesting and can be used on almost any style.

Follow fashion magazines on Facebook or Pinterest, and read print issues.

If you love celebrity fashion, watch the red carpet entrances of award shows. While you might not need an evening gown, some of the details can be translated into a cocktail dress or more casual wear. Look for trends, like the height and shape of hemlines, symmetry, the shape of sleeves (or the lack of sleeves), and the shape of necklines and skirts.

Many catalogs and retailers also have current fashions, designed for everyday wear. Follow your favorites and you'll find lots of details you can put together into *your own* interesting style.



Color-blocked Mondrian Dress with a '60's Feel



Navy Sheath with a Van Gogh inspired print

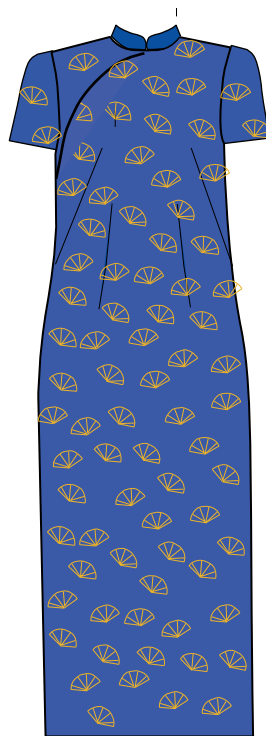
You'll also **get inspiration from the art world** (the art-inspired, color-blocked Mondrian sheath, above, is an example), from **historic fashions**, or from **ethnic costume**.

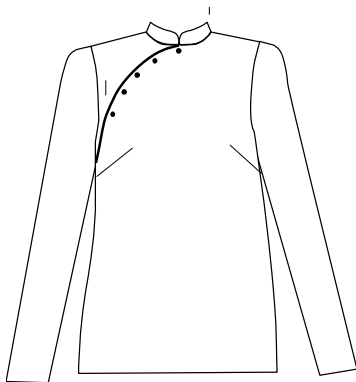
Pinterest is a fabulous resource for vintage fashions and ethnic designs as well as current trends.

EXPLORE THE WORLD AND FIND INSPIRATION IN ETHNIC FASHIONS

The classic Chinese **Cheongsam** (or “Susie Wong”) dress was very popular in the early ‘60’s in the US.

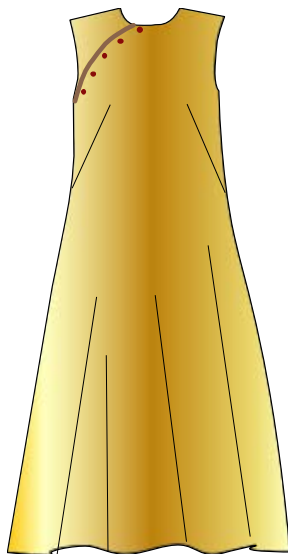
The detail I love about it is **the curved opening on the wearer’s right side**. In the dress (which is a very fitted sheath), this opening hides a zipper that continues along the side seam, to the waist.





I've used it in a side-buttoned top

and a sleeveless summer dress – the gentle curve adds interest to each garment, and retains an Eastern feel.



How Would *YOU* Use this opening in a design?

LOOK TO THE PAST FOR HISTORIC INSPIRATION

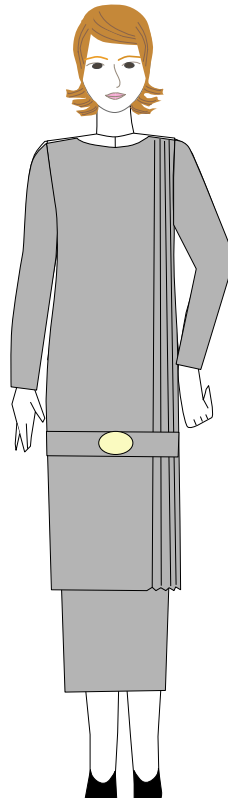
I love historic clothing.

The late 1910's and early 1920's is a favorite period of mine. (If you're a fan of Downton Abbey, you know what I mean). It's a period when the big, Victorian full skirts gave way to a very long and slim profile.

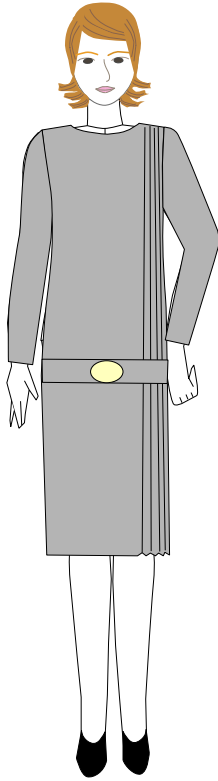
Women were just beginning to show their ankles, so dresses and skirts were still relatively long. The silhouette is long and lean, and you see the beginnings of the boyish figure so popular in the '20's.

This 2-piece dress was found in a pattern book from the early 20's; it consists of a very long tunic worn over a skirt that stops just above the ankle.

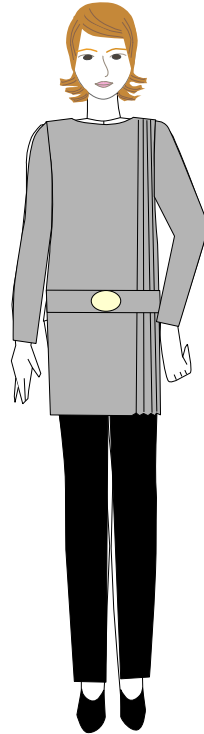
The original dress has a pegged skirt (with a vent at the hem so you can walk) and a belt that sits below the hips (upper to mid-thigh).



The belt has to be set that low to maintain a nice proportion for the overall style – remember that **this dress is almost ankle length and if the belt were higher, the overall length would be off-balance.**



When you remove the pegged underskirt and **wear the upper part as a dress in itself**, the belt needs to go up a bit to maintain proportion.



The belt is raised again when it's shortened to a tunic (here it sits on the high hip). The tunic version is very modern, but retains some of the look and feel of the original.

Get inspiration from books, TV shows, movies, magazines, and online. There are *tons* of ideas out there – put your own spin on them!

Also **remember to keep it simple** – you might find literally *hundreds* of interesting details that you'll want to incorporate into your designs. Don't use them all at once! **One or two terrific details on a single garment is plenty.** (A nice neckline and sleeve on a very simple dress or top, for example).

If you pile on more details, they all get lost in a sea of “stuff”. **Highlight a terrific detail by focusing on it** – don't distract the eye with too many things to look at.

You don't need pattern books – you can come up with terrific fashions, with the right inspiration!

PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

Designing is a lot like putting together a jig-saw puzzle. With a selection of collars, cuffs, sleeves, bodices or tops, and skirt or dress shapes, you can mix and match to your heart's content – until you create a style you like.

One of the tools a designer uses is a **croqui** (pronounced “croak – y”). A croqui is like a paper doll, in that it is a basic body shape without clothing.

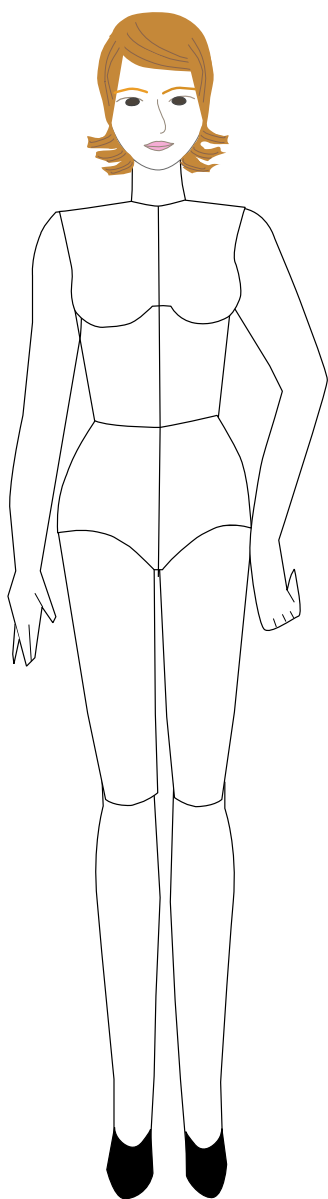
You **use tracing paper to draw the design over the croqui**; the body allows you to maintain proper proportion for your garment. All of the styles in this book were drawn using the same croqui.

The croqui also allows you to draw your garment with a little bit of style and the suggestion of movement. The better your artistic ability, the more stylized your drawings can be – as you can see, I'm not a great artist, but I can represent styling details in a simple, technical fashion.

The following page has a croqui you can use for tracing, and to help you get started designing your own clothing.

You can find many croquis online (just google “croqui”), but most are designed for fashion illustration and the body proportion is totally unrealistic. If you’re designing for yourself – or your clients if you’re a dressmaker – you’ll probably want a more realistic body as your croqui.

The croqui on the next page represents a female body with approximately 36 bust, 26 waist, and 37 – 38 hips – not fashion model thin, and not plus-sized. Just “real”.



So – you’re ready to get started on designing your own clothes!!!

Print the croqui, get some tracing paper (or plain paper – just make sure you can see the croqui when it’s behind the paper) – and start drawing!!

Then use the patternmaking instructions at [Clothing Patterns 101](#) to help you bring your designs to life. You’ll learn how to create your perfect-fitting block, and how to use that block to make bell sleeves, bateau necklines, wrap fronts, gored skirts – just about any design detail you can imagine.

Have fun!!