

REFLECTIONS ON MAKING &

MENDING

FROM THE NEXT GENERATION OF HOBBY SEWISTS

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Getting dressed is an art. At the very least, one's connection to their clothes is functional, but that functionality often extends to an essential expression of self—reflecting every shimmering, fragmented piece of who we are and our relation to the world around us.

Or maybe they're just Carhartt overalls and it's not that deep (except it definitely is that deep).

Regardless, our closets offer daily outlets for creativity. On a global scale, critical discourse surrounding garment obsolescence urgently pushes back against the exploitation embedded in the fast fashion cycle. Contemporary DIY culture offers up an intriguing perspective: a new generation of creative hobbyists reviving an active and hands-on approach to assembling their wardrobes.

Motivated by "a desire to access clothes [she] couldn't normally afford," Sechelt local Paige Godfrey (@paige.dress) began her first sewing project four years ago, making herself a yellow floral slip-dress. Today, her "me-made" repertoire dwarfs the ready-to-wear purchases in her closet, and she doesn't see that ever changing.

For Vancouver-based home sewists Allison Smith (@a__made__) and Kaya Kurz (@kaya_sews), an affinity for tactile mediums led them to their first encounters with a sewing machine.

"I've always enjoyed creative outlets that involve constructing things with my hands," says Smith. After "browsing through the Toronto school board's adult continuing education programs" a few years ago, she signed up for a class on garment sewing and was "immediately obsessed with the sewing process."

Kurz found the space to nurture her passion more recently, "Sewing was always something that intrigued me, but the circumstances were never quite right for me to learn," she explains. "Transitioning from being a full-time student and part-time retail employee to an unemployed, immunocompromised grad in the height of the pandemic left me with an abundance of time (something I hadn't had in quite a few years!). I bought a sewing machine off Facebook

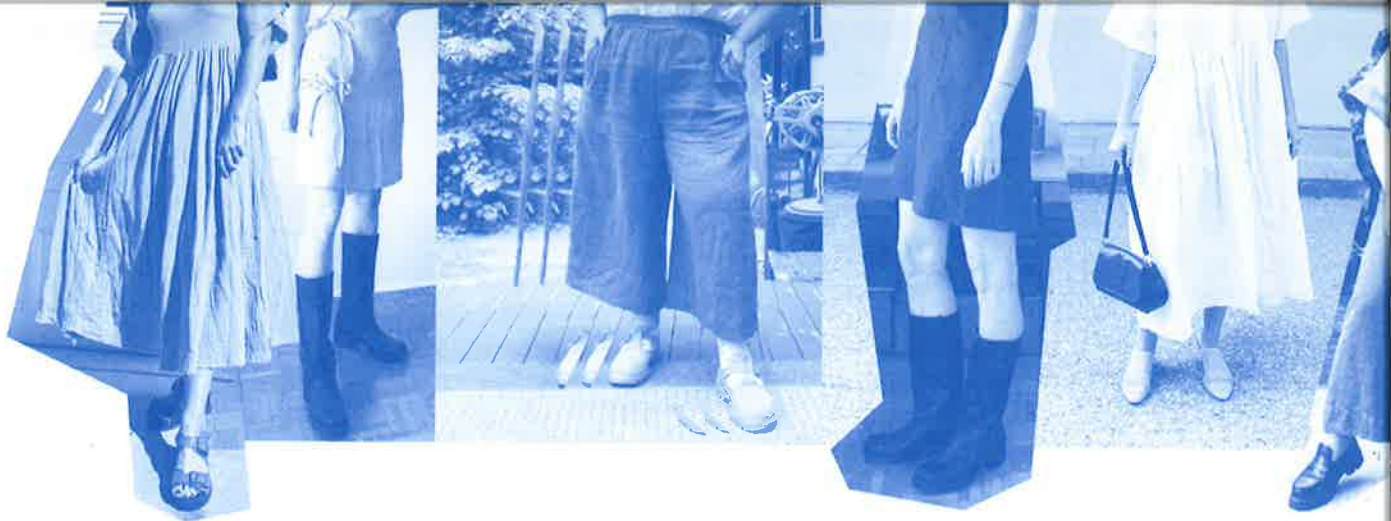
Marketplace, thrifted some bedsheets, and got to work fulfilling my childhood, Project Runway-fuelled dreams." Godfrey, Smith, and Kurz all fondly vouch that sewing their own clothes is now ingrained in their daily lives—probably indefinitely. Reflecting on the past few years of making and mending, they're ready to share their most powerful insights and rudimentary advice for those interested in taking up the hobby.

Considering her motivations for getting started, Godfrey acknowledges: "I used to be mad into shopping because I use clothes as a way to express a part of myself and be creative. But I never really gave a thought to where they came from or who made them. The sewing community puts that information in the forefront and it's really changed my perspective on purchasing fast fashion."

When you're the one funding, labouring over, and reworking a garment until it's fit to wear, the implications of the cost of clothing are hard to ignore. "Sewing my own clothes has truly exposed the exploitative and wicked reality of the fashion industry," says Smith, "taking 12 hours to sew my own pair of jeans has revealed just how absurd it is that you can buy a pair of pants for \$20. That would rarely cover the cost of materials for a home sewist, with no compensation for labour."

Amidst Kurz's sewing journey, learning to create garments that actually fit was a welcomed eureka moment. "Being able to make exactly the size, shape, and cut of a garment in the exact fabric I envision gives me power and agency over the way I present myself in a way that I've never been able to access before," she attests. "Living in a larger body means that my options for ready-to-wear are comparably limited, so I've always felt a bit of lack in ability to explore different styles, and making my own clothes has only further highlighted that lack in the fashion industry as a whole."

Smith echoes Kurz's sentiment. "Sewing my own clothes has made me feel more confident wearing different styles that didn't necessarily fit my body well before as I can now fit a garment perfectly to my body measurements. Sewing has opened my eyes to how flawed standardized sizing is in typical garment manufacturing."



The repercussions of standardized sizing are as disheartening as the message it sends about our bodies. Kurz lays out the damage: "The vast majority of clothing is manufactured to fit the platonic ideal of a body with little regard for the people who actually purchase it—that sounds harsh, but it's true! Poor fit is just another facet of planned obsolescence and is a huge contributor to the cycle of purchasing, not wearing, donating, and re-purchasing clothing."

Of course, not everyone can just pick up a sewing machine and start bringing their 'style inspo' Pinterest boards to life, perfectly tailored. Many socio-economic factors and widespread mystification regarding garment sewing in the Global North stand in the way for a vast number of folks who might be interested in learning to sew, but not all of these barriers are insurmountable. One vital resource Godfrey, Smith, and Kurz recommend seeking out is community.

"Having a community, even just a few fellow sewists, is a great advantage," says Smith, citing her employment at a small textile company as one of her greatest sites of growth.

Even if you can't think of anyone in your inner-circle who sews at home, Kurz assures: "So much fibre craft knowledge has been passed down orally and there are people in your life, in your neighbourhood, on the internet, that would love to pass some of their knowledge onto you."

Hobby sewists active on social media have also formed lively online communities— platformed primarily on Instagram and TikTok — wherein a wealth of insight and resources are dished out in abundance (and for free).

Smith remembers her surprise when she first created her sewing Instagram account during the pandemic. With little expectation for how it would assist her at the time, Smith now considers her online community indispensable to her craft, "I tap into sewing Instagram to follow what fellow sewists are making, see how patterns fit on folks with similar measurements, generally get inspired, seek advice on fabrics/construction and celebrate the impressive pieces others are making," she gushes. "The sewing community on Instagram spans generations and is truly a niche corner of the Internet without comparison."

Some of the friendships Smith has formed in this space have even progressed beyond her time spent online; "Recently four of us who met through the online community had a group sew at my apartment. It feels like the modern version of my grandmother's 'stitch and bitch.'"

When it comes to accessing the necessary tools (namely, a sewing machine, fabric, and a space to sew), things can get a little trickier, "The cost adds up pretty quickly," Kurz admits. Thinking about acquiring textiles in particular, Godfrey adds: "[They] can be expensive investments and when you're just a hobbyist or new to sewing or prone to mistakes it can be a pricey learning curve."

In this situation, Smith recommends taking advantage of as many free resources as possible, like "buying a secondhand machine or using machines available at some public libraries." Godfrey is also a big fan of thrifting and upcycling as a way of accessing low-cost materials, "I just spend extra time in the bedding section [of the thrift store] hoping to find a great shower curtain that I can turn into some pants."

If you have access to these resources and are keen on getting started, Godfrey, Smith, and Kurz each have a final nudge of wisdom to offer:

Godfrey: "Practice. The first few years were a lot of trial and error and learning about fit and my own body. Lots of wonky garments. It does get easier though, you just need to put in the time to learn and do."

Smith: "Start with a simple free tote bag pattern, use an old sheet, and give it a go! Start small to see if you enjoy the process before investing in an expensive machine, the required notions and materials."

Kurz: "It might be a little cliché, but just go for it! Your first project will always be a little bit wonky, but it's so worth it if you can stick it out. Also, don't be afraid to seek community!"