

BOOK BEAT

SEW RETRO: A Stylish History of the Sewing Revolution

by Judi Ketteler

reviewed by Joy Landeira

"Sew Retro" offers a lighthearted look into sewing's rear-view mirror. Judi Ketteler takes us on a sentimental journey with a chronological time line that begins with the 1800s when the first Singer sewing machines retailed for the breathtaking sum of \$100–\$125 in 1853. Stops along the way include memories of the first electric machine in 1889, zippers for clothing in 1933, and the debut of polyester in 1953. The decade-by-decade back story narrates the waxing and waning popularity of sewing, sometimes spurred on by the baby boom and required sewing classes in schools, at other times sputtering in competition with low-cost ready-mades. Sewing's popularity follows the economy—when times get tough, the tough get out their sewing machines, drafting their own wardrobes, and crafting for entertainment and to supplement their wages. Nowadays enterprising seamstresses sell their wares on the Internet.

The return to sewing has inspired many vintage fabric lines, so Ketteler profiles several designers of the myriad retro looks that are now on the market. When customers shop for ready-to-wear clothing, their first view of a garment is the sleeve—an eye-catching retro fabric urges us to pull it off the rack and take a closer look. Interviews reveal why some colors make retro fabric by-the-yard important sellers—after all, they have to stand out in fluorescent-lit fabric shops. If you don't have some in your stash, you can buy new "old"-style fabrics, or search out Web sites for

original printed flour sacks and tablecloths. Other sources suggested are thrift shops for recyclable fabrics, especially sweater knits. Using and reusing older fabrics makes not only a fashion statement, but also an ecological one.

To inspire you to sew retro and use wonderful old-timey fabrics, you'll find easy projects sprinkled throughout, which are illustrated with simple line drawings, instructions, and accompanying pattern sheets for a basic gathered apron, straight skirts, patchwork potholders, clutch purses, and needle cases.

Clever appliquéd teapots grace the corners of a tea table cover and provide a place to tuck in a ribbon bedecked napkin. Or, try decorating a brightly printed tote bag with a floral vintage hankie. Ten full-size patterns are included.

Yesteryear photos of sewing machines, advertisements, old patterns, and sewing paraphernalia bring smiles to the faces of those who remember how sewing used to be, and a sense of discovery to those who are just learning to sew for the first time. The new trend is oh, sew retro, it's the cat's pajamas... in polka dots!

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