

# **Costuming and Sewing Collection**

Jacquelyn Bowin

## Essay

This collection of Costuming and Sewing books is based on my personal hobby, garment and costume construction. I started sewing out of necessity around nine years ago when a friend needed a uniform altered quickly. I had taken home economics in high school, and my mother had attempted to teach me the basics of sewing as a child, so I took on the task as a favor. I quickly moved on to altering uniforms as a side business, and other alterations and sewing commissions grew out of that. When I wanted a nice Halloween costume in 2002 I researched the costumes of the movie *Moulin Rouge!*, and I discovered a vast international network of hobbyist costumers who recreate movie garments. From this I explored historical costumes, theater costumes, and speculative science-fiction costuming. I also took time to cultivate my skills in construction techniques, both garment and costuming, and explore related crafts and skills such as corsetry and millinery. Corsetry, especially, became a passion, and I have quite a few books in my collection that relate to corset construction and historical corset production and patterning. As my skills have grown I have placed my costumes in national and international competitions and won awards for technique and construction detail, and I have given lectures on costuming techniques and craft skills.

A vital part of developing the skills utilized in these costumes was this collection. My profession required travelling and I had little access to extensive libraries, so I tended to purchase books for reference. As I branched out into new techniques and areas I would search the internet for recommendations of books to buy, or make day trips to larger libraries where I could sample books and look for new sources, later purchasing books I felt would be useful in the future. As I

left my profession and rejoined academia I utilized the library and inter-library loan programs to get more books for projects and research, however, I found there were books I was checking out repeatedly so I purchased them as well. Academia also began my explorations into costume design and scholarly historical costume research, so I added books that focused not only on sewing and costuming techniques, but history of fashion and the academic theories behind how and why fashion occurred and is occurring. As a future costume historian and costume designer this was important because there is no single area of the University of Kansas that focuses on costume history. I blended my own concentration of costume history and design out of the Theatre & Film and History departments, with some Art History classes when possible, but my collection of books has served to focus my knowledge much more than my undergraduate career could.

The books in the collection were mostly obtained through online sources. Due to the specialization of the topic references were rarely available in book stores. I did manage to find some great books, such as Bridal Couture and Exploring Textile Arts, in fabric stores. I have also found some great things in second-hand stores, so a few of my books have had previous owners. As the collection, and my interest, grew friends and family members would remember some of the more expensive books I was wanting and give them to me as gifts for holidays. Dressing a Galaxy: The Costumes of Star Wars was a holiday present from a friend. I have also been lucky enough to have a few classes in costuming and historical fashion during my academic career at KU, so some of the books, especially the academic books on Medieval costuming, have been collected first as textbooks then added to the collection following their use in class.

In the future I would like additions to my collection to focus more on historical costumes of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. So far I have concentrated on 16<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> century clothing,

especially of England, because it is the most readily available and the most utilized time period in Western Theater. However, I would like to expand my knowledge past the most readily available and into knowledge that is specialized and specific. I would also like to expand my fiber arts and techniques section into more information on dyeing and other chemical treatments of fibers because I feel that is an area that I utilized in costuming but is not as developed as it should be. Long-term, my goal would be to expand past western costume and explore the historical costume of other areas, especially Asian costume. I feel there are many beautiful techniques in historical Chinese, Indian, and Mongolian clothing especially that are not very researched but deserve to be learned and utilized. Japanese textiles and techniques are another of these areas, although one that has more available in English, especially historical and modern kimono. I don't feel my collection will ever include much information on 20<sup>th</sup> century fashion, quilting, or home craft techniques because they fall outside my realm of interest. I plan on maintaining this collection in my home, however, it will never be a personal collection only. I cultivate a network of home sewers and costumers wherever I go. In Lawrence this means ties to the American Sewing Guild and the Kansas City Costumers' Guild, as well as personal relationships with historical reenactors, Renaissance festival patrons and performers, and hobbyist costumers of all persuasions. I have always maintained my collection as a source for other people to borrow from, learn from, and utilize, not just as a personal reference.

## Annotated Bibliography

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Arnold, Janet. Patterns of Fashion 2: Englishwomen's Dresses and Their Construction C.1860-1940. New York: Drama Publishers, 1977.

Arnold, Janet. Patterns of Fashion: The Cut and Construction of Clothes for Men and Women C1560-1620. New York: Drama Publishers, 1985.

Arnold, Janet. Patterns of Fashion 4: The Cut and Construction of Linen Shirts, Smocks, Neckwear, Headwear and Accessories for Men and Women C. 1540-1660. New York: Drama Publishers, 2008.

Janet Arnold's books are the foundation of any collection dealing with costume and costuming. Her work is the cornerstone of costume and fashion historical studies, and her books have a wealth of information on clothes and how they were made in a wide variety of historical periods. Unlike many theatrical costuming books Arnold's pattern guides are taken from historical garments and left unaltered, allowing the study of unusual shapes, assembly techniques, and body modifications the fashions made. Many theatrical costuming books alter the pattern for the modern body shape, destroying this valuable information.

Betzina, Sandra. More Fabric Savvy: A Quick Resource Guide to Selecting and Sewing Fabric Completely Revised and Updated. Newtown, CT: Taunton, 2004.

More Fabric Savvy is one of the essential reference books that stays near my sewing machine. It contains information on different types of fabric and how to sew them, including what needles to use, how to finish the seams, the best hems, how to pre-treat the fabric, and what temperature to iron it on. It is organized by fabric, allowing easy reference to whatever I'm sewing at the time.

Biggar, Trish. Dressing a Galaxy: The Costumes of Star Wars. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2005.

This book is an inspirational gallery of costumes from the Star Wars movies. I use it for inspiration in design and craftwork. The varied techniques and materials used to craft these spectacular costumes, plus the many pictures, both long shot and detail, of hundreds of the costumes used in these movies are always a motivation.

Boucher, François. A History of Costume in the West. London : Thames and Hudson, 1987.

Boucher's book is a very good attempt at cataloging the history of fashion and clothing in Western culture throughout time. It is useful because it utilizes art of the time period being described and doesn't rely on a modern artist's rendition of clothing, which can distort the bodies and details on the clothing to be more aesthetically pleasing to the modern eye. It is my first reference when looking for information on a historical garment, for it provides the name of the fashion center, either city or nation, of the time as well as the names of artists and garment names to use in library keyword searches.

Cole, Holly, and Kristin Burke. Costuming For Film: The Art and The Craft. Beverly Hills: Silman-James Press, 2005.

This book is a reference for working in the Film and Television industries as a costumer and costume designer. I use it as a guide for how film and television differs from hobby costuming so that I can work up to the level of a professional film costumer after graduation.

Ingham, Rosemary, and Liz Covey. Costume Designer's Handbook: A Complete Guide for Amateur and Professional Costume Designers. Second Edition. Portsmouth, NH : Heinemann, 1992.

Ingham, Rosemary, and Liz Covey. The Costumer's Handbook: How to Make all Kinds of Costumes. Englewood Cliffs, NJ : Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1980.

Although these books started out as textbooks, I am very glad I retained my copies. These books, written by professional theater costume designers with decades of experience, are a valuable resource to the theater sewing industry and the job of a costume designer. I have applied their information on pattern manipulation, textile and craftwork resources, and other useful information that sewing books often ignore in my more elaborate creations.

Khalje, Susan. Bridal Couture: Fine Sewing Techniques for Wedding Gowns and Evening Wear. Iola, WI: Krause Publications, 1997.

Bridal Couture has served as an inspirational book for me since I began sewing. Like costume sewing, couture and bridal sewing is different from standard garment sewing, and the techniques I learned by reading this book help me to work with more difficult fabrics such as lace, tulle, and satins, as well as providing a spark to my obsession with corsetry.

Kyoto Costume Institute. Fashion: A History from the 18th to the 20th Century. Los Angeles: Taschen, 2002.

This book is mostly pictures of historical garments retained in the Kyoto Costume Institute. It concentrates on details of trims, pattern shapes, fabrics, and textures in garments of the past. It is very useful when looking at historical clothing because pattern books tend to be black-and-white

flat shapes, so seeing the colorful clothing mounted on a mannequin like it was worn in the period is useful in constructing undergarments and inspiring historical design work.

Mooney, San-kate. Making Latex Clothes. London: Costume & Fashion Press, 2004.

I found this book very useful when I wanted to branch out into alternative garment designs. Latex is very challenging because it is glued, not sewn, and patterning it is difficult because it stretches. As latex is utilized in many Hollywood films on superheroes and science-fiction costumes, I am trying to learn more skills like this to make myself a more rounded costumer.

Readers Digest. New Complete Guide to Sewing. Pleasantville, NY: Readers Digest, 2002.

This is the first reference book any sewer should own. It gives the basics of sewing in clear, concise instructions with large colorful illustrations to help learn the techniques. I still utilize this book when inserting zippers and other techniques I don't use often but wish to get correct when I do.

Waugh, Norah. Corsets and Crinolines. New York: Routledge, 1990.

Like Arnold, Norah Waugh is the first to study historical corsetry in a serious, encompassing manner. It has a wealth of patterns taken from period pieces in museums and private collections, in the original, unaltered sizes and shapes. The book also has quotes about corsets and corsetry from period sources like newspapers and magazines and period pictures and a narrative of how corsets were made in each time period and how they changed from corsets before them. It is the first source, and still the standard primary source, for historical corsetry.

Wolff, Colette. The Art of Manipulating Fabric. Iola, WI : Krause Publications, 1996.

This book is a technique guide on how to pleat, pucker, rutch, dye, gather, quilt, or smock fabric for a variety of results. It is a great book to go to when designing a costume or garment because it encourages me to think outside of traditional flat fabric. It is also good when trying to duplicate costumes from movies because I can reference the illustrations to try and figure out how some costumes were constructed and what techniques were used.

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