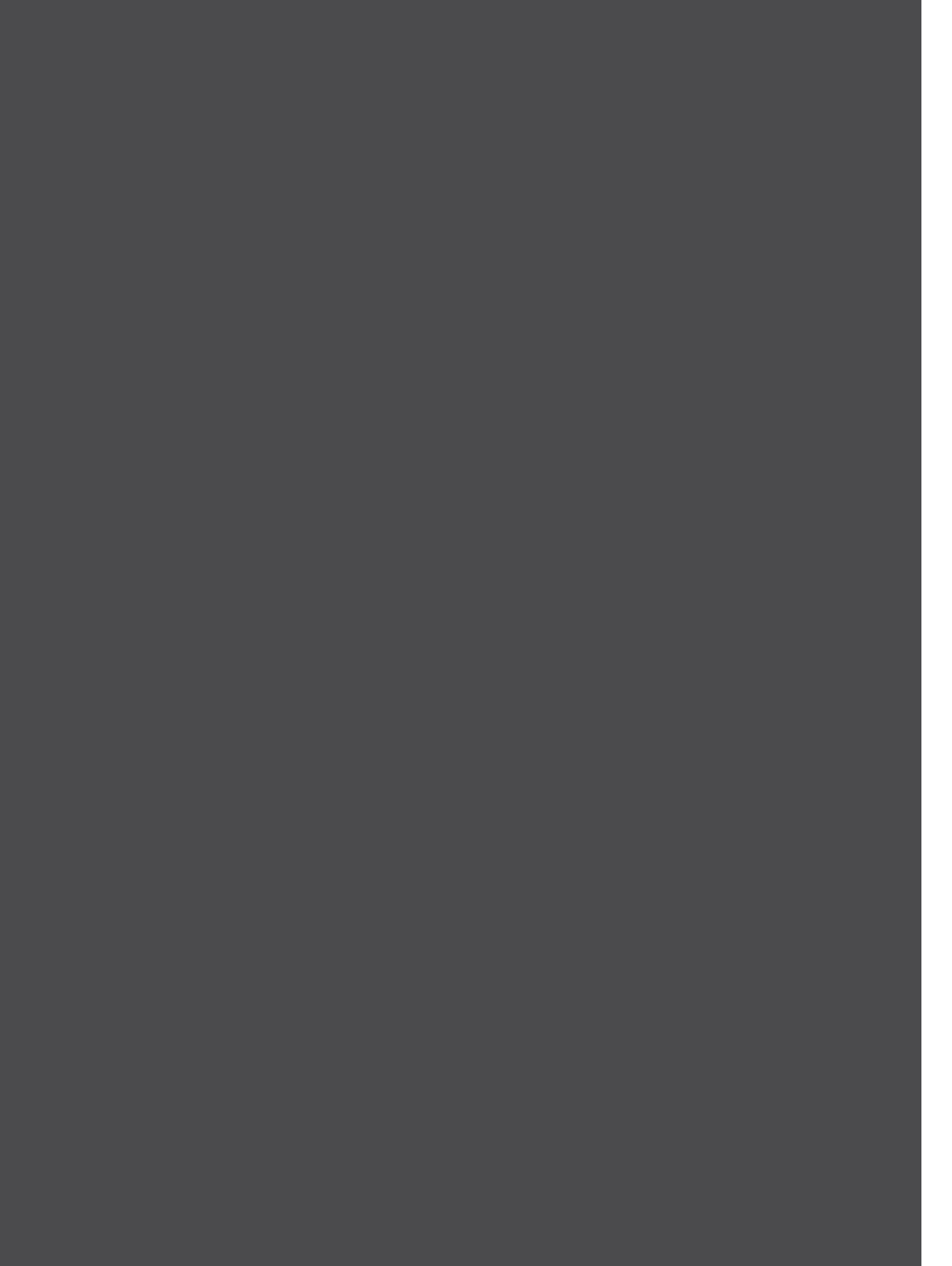


FAMOUS FROCKS  
THE LITTLE BLACK DRESS



PATTERNS FOR **20** GARMENTS  
INSPIRED BY FASHION ICONS

Dolin Bliss O'Shea  
Designed by DANIEL GASTRO



# FAMOUS FROCKS THE LITTLE BLACK DRESS

PATTERNS FOR 20 GARMENTS INSPIRED BY FASHION ICONS

Dolin Bliss O'Shea

Photographs by Daniel Castro

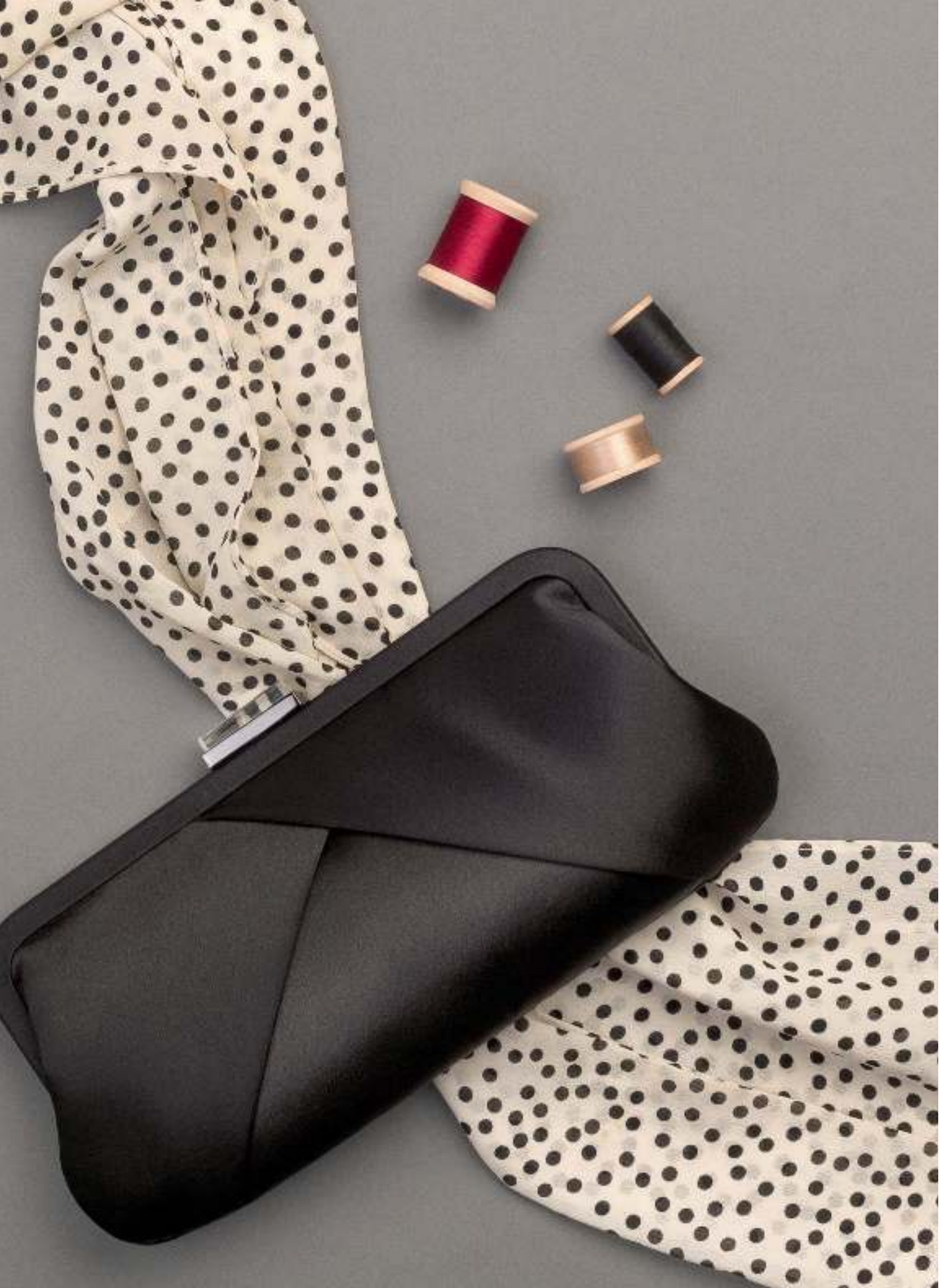


CHRONICLE BOOKS

SAN FRANCISCO



PATTERNS 177











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Before making the projects in this book, you will want to have all the necessary tools on hand. This list includes all the basic tools you will need to make every project in the book. A few projects require additional tools; I've listed those items with the individual project instructions, so be sure to check whether extra tools are needed before getting started.

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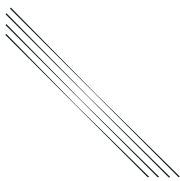
Clear gridded ruler  
Dressmaker's carbon paper  
Hand-sewing needles  
Paper for tracing patterns (patternmaking paper, roll of paper for an easel,  
large sheets of tracing paper, or a roll of examination table paper)  
Pencil  
Pins  
Point turner (if you don't have one, a knitting needle or chopstick will work)  
Quality steam iron and ironing board  
Scissors—one pair for fabric, a separate pair for paper, a small pair for trimming threads,  
and pinking shears (optional) for basic seam finishing  
Seam ripper  
Sewing machine—with a zipper foot, a buttonhole foot, and particular sewing  
machine needles for individual projects  
Tape measure  
Tracing wheel  
Water-soluble fabric marker pen, tailor's chalk, or dressmaker's chalk pencil



Binding is a strip of fabric that is used to finish raw edges. There are many different types of binding for varied purposes. In this book, we basically use one type of binding: binding used as a facing made with single-fold bias tape. The Mary dress on page 109 uses double-fold binding on the sleeve; see project instructions on how to make this. Using single-fold binding as a facing, the binding is not visible from the outside of the garment and there is only a line of topstitching visible from the outside. This binding is used to finish the neckline and sleeveless armholes of a couple of dresses in this book. It could also be used to hem a garment, especially if the garment has a curved hemline.

MAKING YOUR OWN SINGLE-FOLD BIAS TAPE

1. Measure each edge that the bias tape will be sewn to,  $\frac{1}{4}$  in/6 mm from the edge, and add about 3 in/7.5 cm to each of those measurements. Write these measurements down.
2. Cut a 1-in/2.5-cm strip along the bias grain (see page 18), for each of the measurements in step 1 (fig. 1). If you don't have a piece of fabric that is big enough to cut the bias strip in a single piece, you can join the bias strips together with a seam to get your desired measurements. See the next step if you need to join strips together. If you don't need to join strips, skip to step 4.
3. To join two bias strips, if there is a selvage edge on any strip end, cut it off. Make sure each end of the bias strips you join is cut at a 45-degree angle. Place two bias strips perpendicular to each other, right-sides together, aligned along the short ends. Sew the ends together with a  $\frac{1}{4}$ -in/6-mm seam allowance (fig. 2). Press the seam open, and cut off any points that extend past the long raw edges.
4. Press the bias strip into single-fold bias tape. The easiest way to do this would be to use a  $\frac{1}{2}$ -in/12-mm bias tape maker (following the manufacturer's instructions). If you don't own a bias tape maker, using an iron, press the bias strips in half lengthwise, wrong-sides together. Then unfold, and press each of the long raw edges to the center crease you just made, wrong-sides together. When both of the long raw edges are pressed toward the center of the strip, you then have single-fold bias tape (fig. 3).



{fig. 1}



{fig. 2}



{fig. 3}

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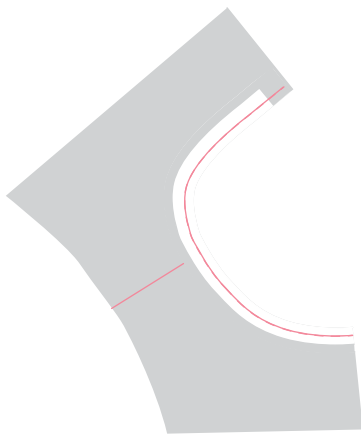
## BINDING AS A FACING WITH SINGLE-FOLD BIAS TAPE

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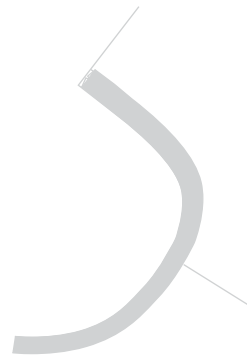
1. Sew shoulder seams and/or side seams as instructed in the project. With your prepared piece of single-fold bias tape, cut one end off at a 90-degree angle. Fold the cut end over  $\frac{1}{2}$  in/12 mm to the wrong side and press. Refold the long edges at the cut end along the creases and press them in place again.
2. Depending on the placement of the binding, the folded end of the bias tape will either be placed at the back neck edge of the garment or along the back armhole about 1 in/2.5 cm from the side seam. (See project instructions for specifics on placement and prep of bias tape.) Starting at the folded end, unfold one long edge of the single-fold bias tape and align the raw edges at the neckline or armhole edge, right-sides together. Pin the bias tape around the opening, making sure not to stretch

the bias tape much. With the wrong side of the bias tape facing up, stitch along the first crease line, which should be about  $\frac{1}{4}$  in/6 mm from the edge (*fig. 4*). Clip the seam allowance around the curves (see page 14), being careful to not cut into the stitching.

3. Fold the bias tape and seam allowance to the inside of the garment and press along the seamed edge, leaving the second creased edge of the bias tape folded. With the raw edge of the bias tape folded under, pin the bias tape around the opening on the wrong side of the garment. Edgestitch, through all layers, along the inner fold of the bias tape, making sure there are no puckers in the garment fabric (*fig. 5*).



{fig. 4}



{fig. 5}

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## BUTTONHOLES AND BUTTONS

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Buttonholes and buttons are a way to finish a closure on a garment. There are many different ways to make buttonholes, but the easiest way is with your sewing machine. A machine-made buttonhole is done with a narrow, dense zigzag stitch running down each side and a wider, dense zigzag stitch at the top and bottom of the buttonhole, and then you carefully cut a short, straight hole between the top and bottom zigzag lines. Each sewing machine is different, so check the instructions that came with your machine on how to make buttonholes. Where you have made a buttonhole, you will need to sew a button onto the opposite side of the closure.

Thread your needle, match both ends of the thread, and knot the ends together. Anchor the thread in the fabric, and sew up through the fabric and through the holes or shank in the button, then back down into the fabric. Continue sewing up and through the holes/shank of the button and back down into your fabric until you feel the button is securely attached. Knot the thread close to the fabric and cut the thread close to the knot.

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## CLIPPING AROUND CURVES

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When you sew curved seams together, you will need to clip into the seam allowance so that the curved seam can lie flat once it is turned right-side out and pressed. If the curved seam is an enclosed seam (collar, cuff, armhole, or neckline with facing), first trim the seam allowance, grading the seam allowance if necessary (see page 17) to between  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{3}{8}$  in/6 mm to 1 cm. Then, perpendicular to the seam line, make small, straight cuts into the seam allowance on an inside curve, or on an outside curve, cut out tiny V-shapes from the seam allowance {fig. 6}. The tighter the curve, the more clips you will need to make. Be careful not to cut into the seam stitches.

*Outside curve*

{fig. 6}

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## DARTS

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Darts are one of a few ways to create shaping in garments, and some of the projects in this book use darts. There are two basic types of darts: single-point darts and double-ended darts. Single-point darts start at a seam or edge of a garment, with the widest part of the dart at that seam/edge, and the end of the dart coming to a point within the garment, while double-ended darts start and finish within the pieces that make up a garment. Dart markings on a pattern usually consist of three lines: two outside lines that are the dart legs and an inside line that is the centerfold of the dart (*fig. 7*). Sewing up darts is usually one of the first things you do after cutting out your project in the fashion fabric. It is a simple process with just a few steps.

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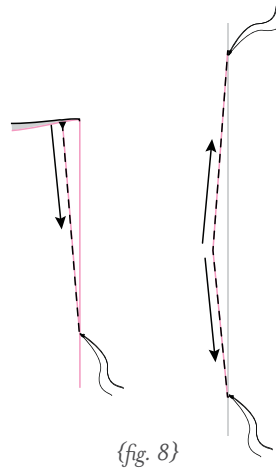
### SEWING DARTS

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1. Transfer the dart markings from the pattern piece to the wrong side of your fabric (see page 37).
2. With right sides together, fold the dart in half along the centerline, align the dart legs, and pin together. Sew along the dart legs, starting at the widest part of the dart and ending at the point. Sew off the edge of the fabric at the point. Don't backstitch, but leave long thread tails. If the dart is double-ended, the process is the same, but you sew the dart in two steps: Starting at the widest part of the dart, sew toward one point, cut the threads, then go back to the widest part of the dart and sew toward the second point (*fig. 8*).
3. Tie knots in the thread tails at the dart points and clip off the threads. For darts at the waist, on the inside, press the darts toward the center of the garment, and for darts at the bust, press the darts down toward the bottom edge of the piece. When pressing darts, I like to use a tailor's ham (a densely stuffed pillow the shape of a canned ham), which helps to press the point nice and flat without creating a dimple, which can happen if you press the dart on a flat surface. Repeat for all darts in your project.



{fig. 7}



{fig. 8}

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## EDGESTITCHING

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Edgestitching is a line of stitching placed  $\frac{1}{8}$  in/3 mm or less from an edge, seam, or fold. It is used to keep multiple layers flat, to strengthen a seam, or as a less noticeable form of topstitching.

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## FACINGS

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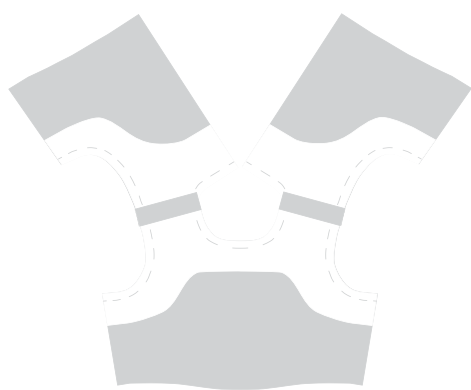
Facings are pieces of fabric that fold to the inside of the garment and are used to help finish the raw edges of necklines, armholes, waist seams, and even hems. The projects in this book use most of these types of facings, and the project instructions will tell you how to sew them in. My favorite facing is the all-in-one facing that finishes both the neckline and armholes of a sleeveless garment.

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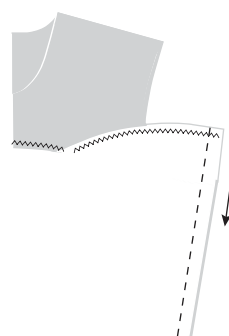
### SEWING AN ALL-IN-ONE FACING

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1. Sew the shoulder seams of the garment and the facing together per the project instructions. Do not sew the side seams at this point (these instructions won't work if the side seams are sewn together).
2. Lay the joined facing pieces on top of the joined garment pieces, right-sides together, aligned along the neck and armhole raw edges, and pin. Sew the neck and armhole raw edges together. Grade the seam allowances, and clip into the seam allowance at the curves (fig. 9).
3. Turn the garment and facing right-side out through each of the shoulders. Press the neck and armhole seams, making sure that the facing doesn't show on the outside of the garment.
4. In the final step, sew the side seams on both the facing and the bodice or garment. This step may happen at different times for the different projects, so refer to the instructions for when to sew the side seams. Flip the facings up at the side seams, so that the bottom edges of the facings are positioned above the armhole (fig. 10). Align the edges of both the facing and the garment, making sure that all seams that intersect the side seam match (like armhole and waist seams), and pin. Sew the sides together in one continuous seam, beginning at the facing edge and ending at the bottom edge of the bodice or garment. Press the seam open and finish per project instructions. Then turn the facing back to the inside of the garment.



{fig. 9}



{fig. 10}





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## GRAIN

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Fabrics are made of fibers woven or knit together and these fibers form the grainlines of a fabric. There are three different fabric grains: lengthwise grain, cross-grain, and bias (*fig. 11*).

**Lengthwise grain:** The lengthwise grain is the most common in garment construction. It runs the length of the fabric, parallel with the selvage, and is the most stable of the grains. Most woven fabrics don't have any stretch along the lengthwise grain, while knits can have no stretch or a lot of stretch along this grain.

**Cross-grain:** The cross-grain runs across the width of the fabric, from selvage to selvage. The cross-grain of a woven fabric can have a tiny bit of stretch, but it is not as stretchy as the bias grain. The cross-grain of a stable knit fabric is usually where most of the stretch can be.

**Bias:** The bias grain line runs at a 45-degree angle to the lengthwise grain and cross-grain. Most fabrics have some stretch along the bias grain. Designers have used this stretch to their advantage for years. Think of those fluid figure-hugging dresses of the 1930s.

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## GRAINLINE

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The grainline on a pattern piece is the double-ended arrow line, which can be placed on any of the three fabric grains. The grainline helps you align the pattern along the correct grain of the fabric for the piece you are cutting. Where the grainline is placed on the pattern piece determines the grain of the fabric piece when it is cut. For the projects in this book, you will always align the grainline on the pattern so that it is parallel with the selvage edge of the fabric.

*{fig. 11}*

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## HAND STITCHES

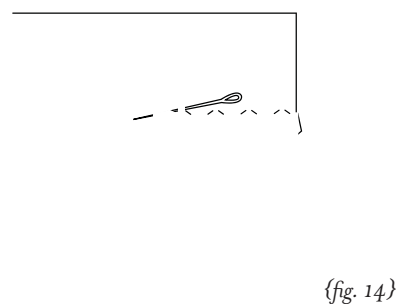
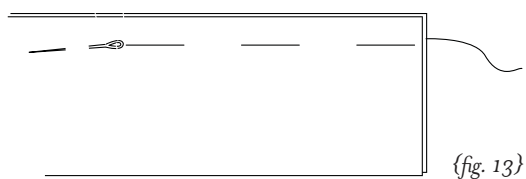
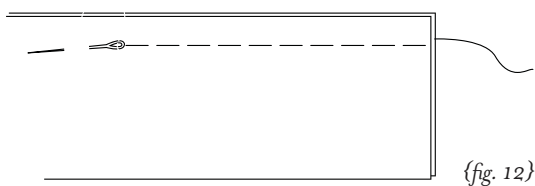
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Hand sewing is an essential part of couture sewing. It is a good idea to learn some basic hand stitches, and who knows, you may enjoy the meditative qualities of sewing by hand so much that you make an entire garment this way. Don't laugh; it is doable. I have made quite a few wedding dresses by hand, including my own, using the sewing machine only to restitch seams that will be stressed. Once you start hand sewing, you realize that you have a lot more control over the fabric than you do with a sewing machine. I include only a few of the many types of hand stitches here, since I used these stitches in some of the projects in the book. If you want to learn more, see Resources at the back of the book or check out any book on couture sewing. The hand stitches included in the following discussion use only a single strand of thread, not doubled-up thread like you would use to sew on a button or a hook and eye.

**Backstitch:** The backstitch is a very strong stitch to use and is suitable for sewing seams together. I use it in this book to tack facings to the seam allowance at side and shoulder seams, not to sew entire seams together. To backstitch, anchor the thread at the back side of your fabric, and pull it up to the top of the work. Make a small stitch to the right of the working thread and pull the needle down to the back of the work. Pull the needle up to the left of the working thread, about the same stitch length as the stitch made to the right. Continue making small stitches backward, bringing the needle up to the front of each stitch. *{fig. 12}*

**Running stitch:** The running stitch is the most basic of hand stitches. It isn't a strong stitch and is most often used to baste two pieces together; it is sometimes referred to as a "basting stitch." To make a running stitch, anchor your thread at the back of the work and pull the needle up to the top of the work. Make a stitch to the left of the working thread, down to the back of the work, then bring the needle back up to the top of the fabric at equal intervals. You can make a few stitches at a time by rocking the needle up and down through the fabric, before pulling the thread through. *{fig. 13}*

**Slipstitch:** The slipstitch is the least visible of the hand stitches and isn't terribly strong, but it is a great stitch for holding two layers flat against each other, like a hem, or for attaching facings to each side of a zipper tape. To make a slipstitch, anchor the thread by putting the needle inside the fold of the top layer of fabric and bring the needle out through the edge of the fold. Take a small stitch (just a thread or two of the garment fabric) in the fabric piece you are joining the fold to, then insert the needle back into the fold and repeat. If you are sewing with seam binding that doesn't have a fold, you would sew the same way, but the stitches on the top layer would be visible since there is no fold to hide the stitches in *{fig. 14}*.



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## HEMS

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There are many different ways to hem your garments. I have included three of my favorites in this book; they are simple and easy to do. But by all means, if you prefer a different type of hemming technique, feel free to use it. If you do use a different type of hem, remember that you may need to adjust the hem width on your traced pattern.

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### BABY HEM

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A baby hem is a very narrow hem that is good to use on thin fabric, on a rounded or flared hemline, and on linings. It is simple to do, but does require that you sew around the circumference of the hem a few times.

1. Sew a line of stitching  $\frac{3}{8}$  in/1 cm from the raw edge you want to hem. Along the stitch line, fold and press the hem over to the wrong side (fig. 15).  
as close to the stitching as possible, being careful not to cut into the stitched line (fig. 16). Fold and press the hem over again to the wrong side along the second stitched line.
2. Sew around the hem  $\frac{1}{8}$  in/3 mm from the folded edge. Trim off the excess hem fabric
3. Sew again around the hem  $\frac{1}{8}$  in/3 mm from the folded edge (fig. 17).



{fig. 15}



{fig. 16}



{fig. 17}

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### BLIND HEMMING WITH SEAM BINDING OR LACE

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Blind hemming is a lovely finish that is almost invisible on the outside of a garment. It can be done by machine, but I feel you have more control when you do it by hand. This type of hem is best done on a straight or very slightly curved hem. You don't have to use seam binding or lace to do this hem, but you will need to finish the raw edge of the fabric in some way before sewing the hem. I love the vintage look of adding seam binding or lace, so the following instructions include this step.

1. Press the hem in place, following the instructions in the project.
2. Pin seam binding flat along the raw edge, with right-sides facing up, overlapping the edge by about  $\frac{1}{4}$  in/6 mm. Machine stitch the seam binding in place along the lower edge of the overlap. When you get to the end of the hem, press under the short end of the seam binding to finish the raw edge.
3. Slipstitch (see page 19) the seam binding to the inside of the garment, making sure to only catch a thread or two of the garment fabric (*fig. 18*).

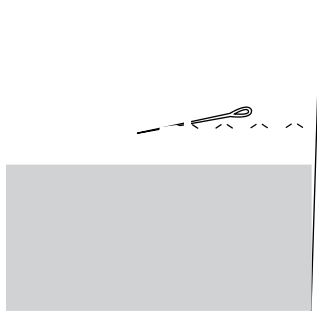
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### NARROW CLEAN-FINISH HEM

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This hem is simple and looks great on the inside of a garment because the raw edges are enclosed in the fold. It works best on straight or slightly curved edges. This hem can also be made with wider measurements; I use the following measurements in the projects in this book.

1. Fold and press the raw edge over  $\frac{1}{4}$  in/6 mm, wrong-sides together. Then fold and press the edge over again  $\frac{3}{8}$  in/1 cm.
2. Edgestitch along the inner folded edge to stitch the hem in place (*fig. 19*).



{fig. 18}



{fig. 19}

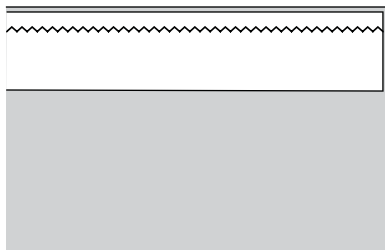




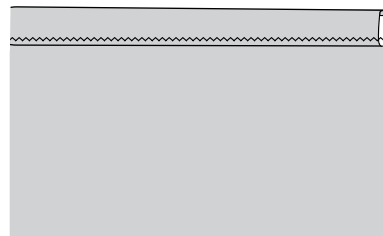
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There are many different ways you can finish a neckline and the armhole edges on a knit garment. For this book, we will use two of my favorites, single-layer binding and binding as a facing. Single-layer binding is a binding that is visible on both the outside and inside of the garment. It wraps around a raw edge, and for these projects, stretches with the garment. Binding as a facing is only visible from the inside and for our purposes is a more stable, less stretchy option. In this case, you see the topstitching that holds the binding as a facing in place from the outside.

1. Cut the binding strips along the cross-grain, and make them four times the width of the finished binding. For this book, all the single-layer binding finishes are  $\frac{3}{8}$  in/1 cm wide, so cut a strip of fabric  $1\frac{1}{2}$  in/4 cm wide along the cross-grain. Cut a strip that is long enough to go around the neck or armhole edges.
2. It is best to sew binding to a flat opening. On a neck edge, sew just one of the shoulder seams together per project instructions, or for an armhole, sew just the shoulder seam together and leave the side seam open.
3. Sew binding to a neck or armhole opening. With right-sides together, with the binding on top and raw edges aligned, sew the binding in place using a narrow zigzag stitch and a  $\frac{3}{8}$ -in/1-cm seam allowance. While sewing around the curves, slightly stretch the binding piece only, making sure not to stretch the neck or armhole of the garment. Since the binding piece is on top, you can stretch it slightly while letting the machine feed the neck or armhole of the garment through. You also don't want to stretch the binding so much that it makes the neck or armhole pucker. Press the binding toward the raw edges. Trim off any excess on the binding ends so they are even with the garment edges (*fig. 20*).
4. Sew the remaining shoulder seam or side seam together per project instructions. Keeping the binding pressed toward the opening, align the binding raw edges and match at the binding seam before sewing the shoulder or side seam together.
5. Fold the binding over the raw edges to the wrong side of the opening and press in place. The binding should easily cover the stitching from step 3. From the right side of the garment, pin the raw edge of the binding in place around the opening.
6. Using a narrow zigzag stitch (width 1 to 1.5) and with the right side facing up, edgestitch around the inner folded edge of the binding, making sure to catch the single layer of binding underneath. Press, and on the inside of the opening, trim the binding raw edge close to the stitching (*fig. 21*).



{fig. 20}



{fig. 21}



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