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Sewing With Micro-Fibers

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The fabrics of the '90s, micro-fibers, are finer than silk and at least 15 times finer than those used in sheer, silk pantyhose. Advances in fiber and textile technology have allowed manufacturers to create fabrics with the quality, drape and finish of natural fibers and the durability and easy-care properties of synthetics.

Most micro-fibers are made from polyester although some are made from nylon and rayon and most recently, acrylic. Micro-fibers may be blended with other fibers including cotton, linen, wool, rayon or Lycra spandex. Micro-fibers increase the washability and easy care of the other fibers in fabrics. Polyester micro-fibers will be used in blends because some clothing companies have found that the pure micro-fiber fabrics pucker when sewn. Micro-fiber fabrics are very versatile and come in various weaves and weights. They can be sanded or sueded giving a super-soft, buttery texture on the fabric surface.

Fabrics available include:

- *Silkmore*TM — appearance of washed silk crepe
- *Sherice*TM — permanently crinkled fabric with a distressed look
- *Venessa*TM — reversible taffeta for rain wear or outerwear
- *Stanza*TM — a flat satin face fabric
- *Soffair*TM — woven fabric with suede-like properties
- *Reganza*TM — a gabardine that resembles a fine wool

The fabrics are sold in 45" to 60" widths and retail from \$15 to \$30 a yard.

Micro-fibers can be machine washed and dried. They are strong and lightweight, yet porous and more breathable than conventional polyester.

Pattern Selection

Before buying fabric and pattern, look at ready-to-wear garments. Get ideas on fabric type and pattern details. Micro-fibers are suited for a variety of garments including dresses, tailored separates, outerwear,

rainwear and even lingerie.

Design features such as shirt sleeves, kimono, raglan, dolman, cap sleeves and extended shoulders are desirable. These are easier to sew than traditional set-in sleeves since micro-fibers are a little more difficult to ease.

Particularly attractive are such details as gathers, soft pleats, cowl necklines, topstitching and edge stitching.

Selecting Interfacing

Choose lightweight sew-in or fusible interfacings. Lightweight fusible knit or weft insertion interfacings are also good choices. You may consider polyester organdy or stabilized tricot for interfacing.

Be sure to test both fusible and sew-in interfacings. Select the type that gives the right support and control for your fabric. If using a fusible interfacing, fuse to the facing and undercollar.

Preshrink fusible interfacing by placing it in hot water for 10 minutes. Squeeze out water and roll in a towel to remove excess moisture. Hang on a towel rod to air dry.

Thread, Pins and Needle Selections

Thread: Use 100 percent long staple polyester or extra fine cotton-wrapped polyester. For sergers use texturized nylon in loopers to avoid a thread imprint.

Pins: Use fine, high quality pins. Pin in the seam allowance as holes will remain in the fabric. Place pins parallel to the grain line. Some holes can be hidden by using your thumbnail to scrape across fabric holes.

Needles: Select very fine sewing machine needles; size 60-70 (European) or 8-10 (American).

Other equipment:

Use a straight stitch presser foot and a straight stitch throat plate. This holds fabric firmly so the needle can penetrate the fabric easily and won't be pulled into the needle hole.

Sharp shears or a rotary cutter and mat will allow for smoother cut edges.

Set the stitch length on the sewing machine at 10-12 stitches per inch or 2 to 2.5 mm.

Select zippers with a nylon coil.

Pressing Tips

Before pressing any construction steps, test the iron temperature and use of steam on fabric scraps. If the iron is too hot, the fabric will melt; if not hot enough the fabric won't press well. Steam or a damp press cloth will be needed for a good crisp press.

Pleats may be set by brushing with 50/50 solution of white vinegar and water. Always test first on a

fabric scrap for color fastness.

Stitching Tips

Avoid puckered seams by filling your bobbin on a slow speed; when stitching, hold the fabric taut. Moving your needle to the left position may also help.

Finish seams with pinking, edge stitching, welt stitching or use a serger.

Buttons and buttonholes, buttons and loops, and zippers are suitable closures.

Treat hems by fusing or machine topstitching. Select a fusible web that is soft and lightweight. A narrow, machine-rolled hem may not hang as softly at the edge. Blindstitched hems by hand or machine are difficult to make invisible on the right side.

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