

Life unplugged

A STITCH

IN TIME

Vowing to only wear what she has made, Bristol seamstress Lydia Higginson heads up the Made My Wardrobe project



When the UK government first told us to “Stay home, save lives,” many of us started frantically searching our houses for something, anything, to entertain ourselves behind closed doors. This, combined with the sudden, desperate need for face masks and the rise of programmes like *The Great British Sewing Bee*, led to a flurry of people reaching for their old sewing machines.

For Lydia Higginson, founder of the Made My Wardrobe project, the rediscovery of this age-old practice was long overdue. “Our grandmothers’ generation could sew, but in our mothers’ generation it began to die out, and by our generation very few of us learnt to sew as youngsters,” she says. “Finally, people are becoming more and more dissatisfied with what’s available on the high street and are beginning to make their own clothes again.”

Social media has certainly had an influence on this resurgence – something Lydia has experienced first-hand. With a sturdy Instagram following, a staff of five and a highly engaged community participating in her workshops and buying her patterns and kits, it’s hard to believe she only started Made My Wardrobe from her mother’s attic just five years ago.

Lydia’s journey began as a way of rejecting the spiralling fashion industry, aiming to only own and wear clothes she had made herself. Within a year, she’d created over 60 garments and had an entirely new wardrobe. The only shop-bought items remaining were socks, gloves, scarves, hats and waterproofs. “I see sewing as one of the most creative and exciting alternatives we have to fast fashion,” she says. “Hearing about its impact on the planet and awful →



Made My Wardrobe workshops offer an alternative to fast fashion, giving people the skills they need to make everything from dungarees to period pants

Photography: Alice Poole and Melissa Arras



Get sewing Lydia's favourite pattern makers

The Modern Sewer
for wardrobe staples
themodernsewer.com

Puff and Pencil for
customising your
garments
puffandpencil.com

Paper Theory for
interesting details
papertheorypatterns.com

**Pattern Cutting
Deconstructed**
for improving your
pattern-cutting skills
patterncuttingdeconstructed.com

Cashmerette for a great
range of sizes
cashmerette.com

factory working conditions made me realise I didn't want to buy into that system anymore."

She started with the bottom layer: pants and bras. "There's something amazing about making your own underwear. It's such an intimate thing. It's how you start your day. Plus, it can represent how you want to feel – whether you want to be comfortable, feel sexy or be active." Although many of the garments Lydia creates feel timeless and not necessarily a product of the era we're living in, there's one design she offers that our grandmothers might not be as familiar with: period pants. Wanting to create a sustainable alternative to pads or tampons, Lydia has designed a pattern for period pants using specialist fabrics.

The community she has nurtured has made adaptations of their own, too. "People will add elements to our patterns depending on their needs, like those who are breastfeeding or using a wheelchair. Everyone has different needs from clothes, so it's great to see people being able to make the clothes they actually need."

Since mastering underwear, Lydia has gone on to make and sell patterns for jumpers, leggings, swimwear, bags and dungarees, which are now ubiquitous across the south-west. "I saw so many people wearing my

Greta dungarees at Shambino Festival this summer," she says. "It's brilliant to see my designs in the wild."

"Our bodies hold so much," Lydia says. "They hold all our trauma and pain, but also all our pleasure and joy." A lot of sewers who have attended her workshops have shared stories about wanting to reclaim their bodies. "One of the first things we do in workshops is help people find their size. Sometimes, rather than getting people to just use a tape measure, I get them to close their eyes and feel their hips and waist to find out the shape they really are. It's rare that we feel our bodies in that way. It helps you find out what shape it is and what it needs from you."

It's not just the process of dressing herself that has become therapeutic for Lydia. The quiet, focused time that sewing creates is her meditation. "It's the thing I always come back to when I need to sort my head out. It's what makes me who I am."

Will sewing become just another trend that passes through and remains a relic of the past? Definitely not, says Lydia firmly. "If you've got the sewing bug, it tends to stick." ×
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