Curated By You: Abby Olmstead Makes the Grace Dress in Linen

Description

Grace Dress Made with FS CEDAR GREEN Midweight Linen

Tell us a bit about yourself and what you do.

My name is Abby and I live in Vermont with my husband and our three spirited kids. I was an actor in NYC during my twenties, and still miss the energy of the city, though I have come to love and deeply appreciate the beauty of Vermont. After finding my way back to sewing as a new mom living in a newÂ place, I began drafting clothing for myself, and started a small business a few years ago where I strive to create beautiful and sustainable women's clothing.

Why do you sew?

I grew up sewing with my mom and grandmother. My mom is an incredible quilter and my grandma sewed most of the clothing for her eight children. I was exposed to fabric and patterns and the promise of walking into the fabric store in my small town with nothing but the dream of a dress and the hope that I could make it come true. I still feel that way. As a new mom in Vermont, I struggled with postpartum anxiety, and returning to sewing offered a much-needed chanceÂ to be creative and also to stay present. In sewing you can't get too far ahead of yourself or you will miss what you're doing and it won't turn out as well. It is still a big part of my mental well-being.

What do you like to listen to when you're working (and why)?

I am lucky to have a sewing studio in a shared space so we all try to balance our various preferences. I love a good Broadway musical soundtrack (Hamilton, I'm looking at you) but also love some Ani Difranco, Alicia Keys, and whatever good pop single that has just come out.

As a child, what was your first encounter and memory of beauty?

I grew up onÂ a dairy farm inÂ Western New York, where the land aroundÂ me was incredibly beautiful. I remember alwaysÂ loving corn fields and how they change through the various seasons, never staying the same. I also loved the tiny floral calico fabrics my mom would use in her quilts. Those things both feel very evocative of my childhood and laid the foundation for a lot of what I still find beautiful.

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Where is home and how does it affect what you do?

Home is Winooski, Vermont, where the winters are verrrrry long. I've come to realise that there is beauty in this time though, as it's when I do most of my dreaming about the sundresses I'd love to wear and make in the coming days. I have the time to do more drafting and planning for my business as well, as there tend to be fewer outside distractions. Also the springÂ here is so magical as it feels like we all come outside after this epic slumber and really seize the day!

Name a book that you've recently read which inspired you and why?

I am re-reading 'Still Life' by Louise Penny for a book club I'm in, and I love the exploration of friendships as chosen family. I have always lived away from my family as an adult, and the families of friends I have been blessed to be a part of have held me up during my hard times. Especially during the last few years. I also really love that the characters are always eating delicious baked goods and drinking lattes in a cozy cafe.

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What was the first thing you ever remember making on your own? Tell us about this memory.

I remember making an apron for 4-H when I was very young. My mom was helping us and I still remember the striped pastel fabric I used. I remember being amazed that the pile of fabric turned into this beautiful thing!
IÂ alsoÂ remember how patient my mom was withÂ us. Patience in sewing is still aÂ long-gameÂ goal for me…

Who are your muses and inspiration?

I have always been inspired by the women around me. I find photos of my mom from the 70's and 80's so beautiful, and love picturing friends in the garments I'm designing. If I'm sketching something and can't picture them in it, then I had better start fresh! I also take a lot of inspiration from my time in New York – to get to witness that combination of color, texture, and style in fashion on a daily basis was truly magical to me.

Do you have a community of crafters/ makers around you or do you find you are on your own?

I have an incredible in-person community here at the Soda Plant in Burlington (where my shared studio space is) where there are visual artists, sewists, designers, jewelry makers, and many other folks to collaborate with and be inspired by. I also have a dear friend and talented sewist who helped test my first ever pattern collaboration this past summer and modeled for our cover shoot. And the instagram sewing community is amazing: the level of generosity and inspiration is constant and somethingÂ that I never expected from social media.

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How important is it to make something with your hands?

Very. I feel that I breathe more deeply during and after sewing, and feel a sense of accomplishment that often eludes me in the otherÂ areas of my life.

You are a mama of three! WOW! How do you find the balance between motherhood and creativity?

Motherhood and creativity are very linked for me. I feel like I rediscovered my love of sewing at a really dark time, during the haze of new-motherhood, and it blossomed and saved me from myself. I don't think I could be the mom I am if I didn't have a creative outlet that was separate from my three amazing children. In a sense, the sewing creates the balance, if that makes sense? I also feel like I'm re-creating the aspect of my own childhood where I got to witness my mom practice her craft, woven into our daily life, and where I always knew I was safe and loved but that my mom had this whole other equally important identity.

What does success mean to you?

Success means doing the best I can in each moment. The quote I keep coming back to is "Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can." by Arthur Ashe.

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What have you chosen to make out of FS linen and why?

I chose to make a square-neck variation of the pattern collaboration I did last summer with Taree of Marsha Style. It’s called the Grace Dress. For this variation I added ruffles to the shoulders and a button placket in the back.

When I received the beautiful softened CEDAR GREEN shade, it felt like pure spring to me, and I wanted to make something fun and celebratory but that I also knew I would wear often. As I get older, I reach more for flowy, forgiving summer pieces that can be thrown over a swimsuit or worn to dinner. And it must have pockets.

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