

Embracing Imperfection: Lessons from a Perfectionist Sewist

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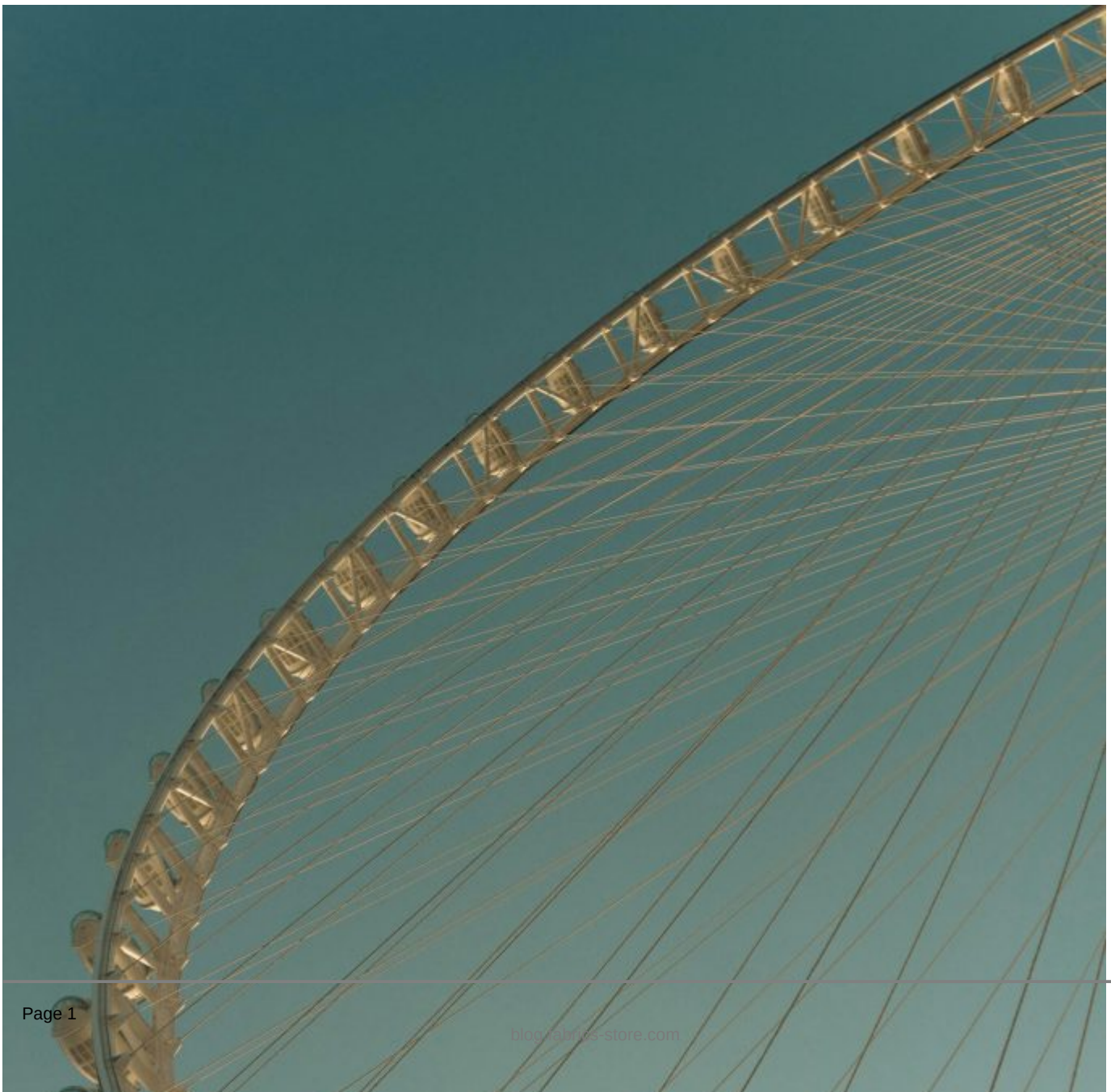

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Photo by Andrey K.

Iâ??m what you would call a classic perfectionist. Iâ??m detail-oriented and I can set ridiculously high standards for myself. I often obsess over the tiniest of details and naturally notice even the smallest of mistakes. Because of this, I can interpret mistakes as signs of imperfection or even failure.

I can also have a pretty black and white way of thinking: things are either perfect or terrible. As a result, even minor errors can feel far bigger or more disastrous than they actually are. When things arenâ??t just right, I can be pretty self-critical. Therefore, if something canâ??t be done to my high standard, it sometimes feels like itâ??s not even worth doing.

This perfectionism carries over into my sewing and pattern making. It shows up in all kinds of ways, shaping how I approach a project before I even start.

Thereâ??s that little voice that says every seam has to be perfectly straight, every pattern flawlessly matched. I get caught up in these tiny imperfections, sometimes to the point of spending hours unpicking a seam just because it didnâ??t line up. I also find myself avoiding â??riskyâ?• patterns or techniques, instead sticking to what I know out of fear of getting it wrong. Even when I have finished a project, a small flaw that no one will probably notice can leave me feeling unhappy and disappointed.

Even in my mid-thirties, after more than 20 years of sewing, Iâ??m still learning how to let some of this go. I know Iâ??ll never completely lose my perfectionist streak, and honestly, I donâ??t want to.

Perfectionism isnâ??t a bad thing, we just need to learn to work with it not against it. There are a lot of positives. My perfectionism makes me reliable and consistent. I genuinely care about doing things well. I follow through. Iâ??m ridiculously organised. I take immense pride in producing quality work. I really care about doing things properly, not just getting them done.

I know I am not alone in this.

So, to the fellow makers who resonate with what I have been saying, here are a few things I have learnt to keep in mind when it comes to my creative work, helping me to let go just that little bit more. I am not lowering my standards, but rather shifting them. Focusing on progress, and more importantly, the joy making bringsâ??even when itâ??s imperfect. Hopefully, these tips will help you sit with imperfection that little bit more comfortably too.



Photo by Maeva Vigier

5 Practical Strategies to Embrace Imperfection

1. Shift your mindset and see the bigger picture

A great reminder about looking at the bigger picture comes from one of my favourite movies, Clueless. Cher describes someone as a â??*full-on Monet*â?•, explaining that *â??Itâ??s like a painting, see? From far away itâ??s OK, but up close itâ??s a big old mess.â?•*

I kind of feel like she hits the nail on the head here. Putting aside the fact that this comment is pretty offensive to both the painter and the person she is referring to, the idea is pretty useful. Something can look messy up close, but when you take a step back, the overall result is beautiful.

I like to take this mindset into my sewing. Sure, my seams might be a bit wobbly and not line up under close inspection, but when I take a step back I probably wonâ??t even notice. The finished product actually looks pretty great!

Sometimes itâ??s enough to simply move away and appreciate the overall result rather than obsessing over those small details.

2. Build your skills gently

Itâ??s important to accept that first attempts at most things wonâ??t be perfect. Mistakes are expected and likely inevitable. This is especially true when trying something new, such as a different sewing technique or pattern. Therefore, setting realistic expectations from the start can make a huge difference.

To help with this, I like to start small. For example, Iâ??m currently wanting to try my hand at quilting. I know little to nothing about it, but I understand that there is quite a bit involved, from layering the fabric and batting to using a walking foot. Instead of diving straight in and trying to master all of these

skills at once, Iâ??m starting with a smaller project before attempting my end goal of a quilted jacket.

I know what Iâ??m like, and I donâ??t want to lose motivation if my high standards arenâ??t met first time around. So, to build my quilting skills gently, I plan to start with a small triangular scarf. This takes the pressure off, allows me to build my skills and confidence slowly, and ultimately continue to enjoy the process.

If and when mistakes arise, it can be helpful to frame them as experimentation rather than failure. In doing so, we are allowing ourselves to test ideas and practice skills in a more low-stakes way.

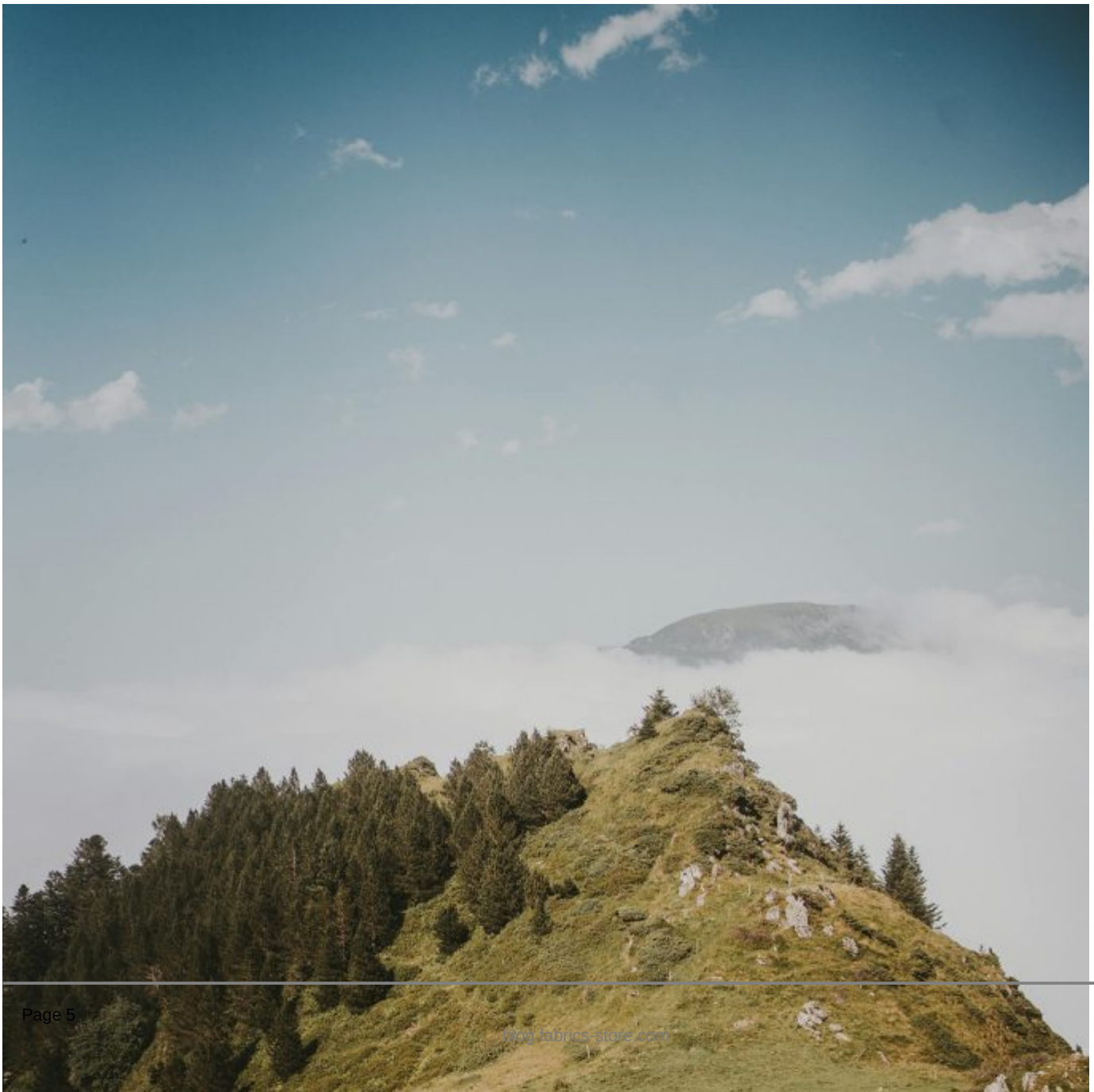


Photo by Maeva Vigier

3. Value your time and energy

Learning to embrace imperfection also means valuing your time.

I have wasted more hours than I care to admit, unpicking stitching because it wasnâ??t perfectly straight, or redoing a seam that didnâ??t line up perfectly. The truth is, I never actually want to spend my time obsessing over these sorts of tiny flaws. My time would be much better spent actually enjoying the process, rather than chasing impossible perfection.

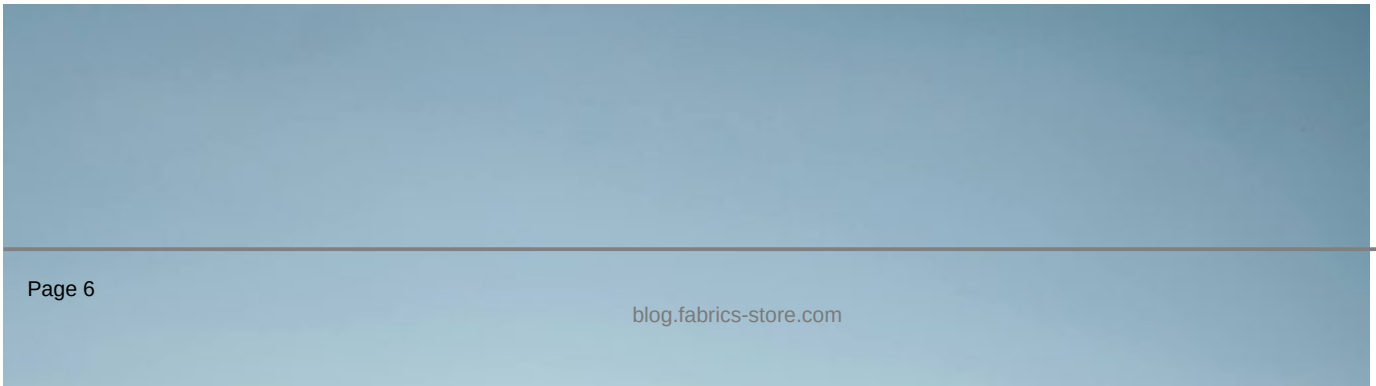
To help get time back, I am trying to decide before I even start a project what aspects truly matter to me. Maybe that is ensuring the pattern of the fabric lines up at the centre front, but if itâ??s off a little at the side seam, it doesnâ??t really matter.

Ask yourself *â??If X isnâ??t perfect, will it actually affect the overall finished project?â?•* or *â??Will anyone actually notice?â?•*. If the answer is no, itâ??s probably OK to move on and spend time on the things that matter.

4. Donâ??t downplay your efforts

Have you ever received a compliment on something you made, only to take the opportunity to minimise your efforts? My hand is certainly up.

Maybe someone has said, *â??Oh, I like your jacketâ?•,* and you respond with *â??Yeah, but itâ??s not perfect. Iâ??m not entirely happy with the collar.â?•* All this does is downplay your achievements. What we should be doing is simply acknowledging and celebrating the fact that we made a jacket from scratch. So next time you receive a compliment, why not reply with a simple *â??Thanks, I made it!â?•.*



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5. Stop comparing

Thanks in large part to social media, opportunities to compare ourselves are always within reach. Our feeds are full of perfectly made projects that are styled flawlessly. But what we often donâ??t see are the behind the seams (pun intended) moments, the mistakes, frustrations, and the hard work that goes into making something.

We shouldnâ??t be measuring ourselves against what we see as we scroll through our feeds. Easier said than done, I know. But online communities can and should be supportive. I like to curate my feed so that it inspires and supports me, rather than making me feel imperfect or like I donâ??t measure up, and I follow those who share and celebrate their mistakes. But this works both ways. By sharing your own mistakes, you are helping to normalise them and let others know they are not alone.

When it comes to perfectionism, the key is learning to adapt to it. Work with it, not against it. It can be a real positive.

By shifting our perspective a little, setting realistic expectations, valuing our time, celebrating our achievements, and surrounding ourselves with positive influences, we can create more freely and really enjoy the process. At the end of the day we will spend less time unpicking and actually feel proud of what we make, imperfections and all!

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