



Curated By You: Emily Zahnister Makes The Assembly Line Tulip Dress In Linen

## Description



Emily and her mum in the 1970's

[I'm Emily](#), a life-long creator, and romantic realist. I grew up a theater kid and spent my young adult years pursuing a career in opera. Based out of New York City after attending Manhattan School of Music, I bounced around the country directing and assistant-directing opera for regional opera houses. I now live in Portland, Oregon, with my husband, two sons, three chickens,

and one dog.

## **Surrounded with beauty and meaning**

After eschewing a life on the road, I ended up working in marketing and PR. I've been a freelance writer for the past eight years. My niche is interior design and residential architecture. My work is published in home and style magazines popular in the Pacific Northwest. Beauty and aesthetics are a big deal for me. I want my home and surrounding things to be beautiful. I'm not a minimalist, but I like everything to have considered meaning. It's only now as I'm middle age that I have relaxed into appreciating my super power is to make a beautiful life, and that I'm successful at it every day.





Linen. Photo: Jonya Streeper

## **A theatrical flair for fashion**

I had the opportunity to wear so many incredible costumes in the opera world. What those theatrical costume designers and costume shops create is so magical. I also had a closet full of ball gowns and formal wear. Dressing up and personal style have always been a big part of my creative expression. My “look” has certainly evolved over the years. I’m sure my proper English mother would still roll her eyes about the punk-goth phase I went through in high school. It was the 1980s, after all, and I couldn’t help but be influenced by the punk scene I was exposed to when visiting London.





Linen. Photo: Jonya Streeper

## **Creativity runs in the family**

My mother, an interior designer by trade, is an incredible sewist. She's made me many outfits over the years – from mother-daughter matching sets to all my fantastical desires and requested mash-ups of unusual fabrics and patterns. She's made my clothes, housewares, curtains, sofa slipcovers, and everything in between. She even made my best friend a hand-beaded wedding dress.

I've sort of always known how to sew, thanks to her, but I believed wholeheartedly that I didn't enjoy it. It wasn't until a few years ago that I finally sat down and gave it a proper go. I'd had the chance to visit Merchant & Mills in Rye while on holiday, and I'd bought a couple patterns and some beautiful fabric. I hired a good friend who teaches sewing here in Portland to help me step-by-step through my first real pattern. I was pretty pleased with myself. Holding something you've made by scratch in your hands is very satisfying.



Emily's Workspace

## Sewing for sanity

When the pandemic started, I was busy adjusting to managing children and working from home all day. I'm not quite sure how it happened, but I found myself sewing at night when everyone was asleep. It was a way to have quiet time to myself. It was also a way to find satisfaction in creating something beautiful when I felt like I couldn't do anything well. I took some big leaps and pushed my skills, all on an almost 30-year-old starter machine.





Linen. Photo: Jonya Streeper

## **Inspiring the creative process**

Since then, sewing has eclipsed almost all my other hobbies. I've finally stopped sewing at the dining room table and organized my office space as a sewing studio. I still sew mostly at night after my youngest son has gone to bed, and the house settles down. I prefer to work in quiet. Generally, I let my attraction to a textile lead me to what pattern to make. I like to work with natural fibers and dead-stock fabrics. I've even had the opportunity to pattern test for independent designers, and I love that.

When I'm not sewing or mom-ing, I love trail running with my dog, cooking, and reading. I'm an avid fantasy and science fiction reader. The real world is heavy enough. When I read, I want to be transported somewhere else.

Sharing my work on social media brought me the gift of community and inspiration. Portland is such a creative town, and it's no surprise there are many gifted sewists here. People are so supportive of one another.







## Linen

### **Balancing creativity and practicality**

Thanks to circumstances beyond our control, we all experienced a fundamental shift in style over the last two years. Sewing has helped me settle down into a look that feels stylish and comfortable. I like to put on “real clothes” every day, even if I’m not going anywhere beyond a trip to the grocery store. After making all the trending things (endless gathers and puff sleeves), I’m moving into more tailored garments or experimenting with mixing patterns to create something totally unique. One, to continue to grow and learn, but also because I’m interested in what looks best on me, not just what’s most popular.



FS OPTIC WHITE Midweight Linen

**Exploring personal style at any age**

I've chosen to make The Assembly Line Tulip Dress because it has a fitted bodice that will be flattering on my curvy figure. It also has a zipper back, and until now, I've managed to avoid zippers! Inspired by a Dissh ready-to-wear dress similar to this pattern, I've made the dress with [FS OPTIC WHITE linen](#).

Something about white on older women is very appealing. I imagine it as embracing that crone-goddess energy. Women don't need to hide when they get older. We're at our most appealing selves when we have earned this much wisdom and power. White feels like owning that space and radiating the kind of settled satisfaction I feel in my own body and life right now.

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