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EMMA SPALDING

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Photo credit: Emma Spalding - RP Photography by Design




What prouder sewing achievement could there be than to walk down the aisle in a dress of your own creation? There's never going to be a better opportunity to say, "Thank you, I made it!" but is sewing your own wedding dress a dream or a stressful sewing nightmare? Michelle Rowley spoke to four dressmakers to discover the highs and lows of sewing your dream dress for the big day.

Proposal accepted, venue booked, date set, now all attention can turn to THE DRESS. We all know the hours, love and effort that goes into every garment we make, but a wedding dress is another make entirely; a sewing project in which the outcome not only plays a huge role on your special day but also long after the final dance, encapsulated in photos and memories to treasure. As you enter the room to your awaiting loved ones, you want to feel the most beautiful you have ever felt, not worried about an uneven hem or a badly inserted zip, so just how confident a sewist do you need to be to take on the challenge?

As Emma Spalding had been sewing her own clothes for years when she got engaged, she didn't hesitate in deciding to sew her own

Labour of **LOVE**

*Would you sew your own wedding dress?
Michelle Rowley chats to four dressmakers
who took on this exciting creative challenge to
see what it taught them*



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DELIA NAMOA

Photo credit: Delia Namoa - Rolling Portraits Photography (rollingportraits)



dress. “A ready-to-wear dress would have felt like a cop-out,” she explained, “I expected it of myself.” Emma knew exactly the style of dress she wanted; a shorter length 50s-style dress with a contemporary edge, made from layers of silk and spotty netting.

After a long search online, Emma sourced the perfect vintage Simplicity pattern from an Etsy seller in America. To her dismay, she was sent the wrong pattern, and concern crept in that the seller might have sent her pattern to someone else. “As an original vintage pattern, the seller only had one,” Emma explained. Thankfully, Emma did receive her intended pattern soon after, and the mix-up proved serendipitous, with Emma deciding to use elements of both patterns to create her perfect dream dress. Despite her years of dressmaking experience, Emma acquired many new skills during the process of making her dress, such as downsizing the bodice pattern, sewing with sheer fabric and making rouleaux loops for the first time. “I googled everything,” she explained, and with every new skill and step of the process accomplished, Emma’s sense of achievement grew. One of the more difficult aspects of sewing the dress was

keeping it hidden from her husband-to-be! Emma did however choose to share her progress with the dress to a friend one day, pricking her finger on a pin in the process that resulted in Emma’s one moment of panic... blood on the dress! Fortunately, this washed out easily, and Emma completed her dress without any further worries.

With her fabulous dress finished in plenty of time ahead of the wedding, Emma could relax and just look forward to the big day. Emma described the experience of walking down the aisle in a dress of her own creation as “brilliant!” and recommends the experience to any hobby sewist with enough time to do so.

Working under time pressure made Delia Namoa’s experience of sewing her beautiful bohemian style dress somewhat more stressful. Throw in the fact she was planning her whole wedding amidst COVID-19 restrictions, it’s no wonder she had some trying moments. Living in a rural area meant Delia had planned to travel to purchase fabric, but this became impossible once travel restrictions were put in place. Eventually, Delia managed

to find some suitable lace locally, but this left her with only a month to go before the big day in which to sew her dress.

As Delia was using a pattern she’d sewn before, Deer & Doe’s Magnolia Dress, she was able to get straight to work sewing, saving time by not needing to adjust, cut and toile the pattern for fitting. Despite this, Delia was unhappy with the fit of the bodice just two days before her wedding and took it apart to redo. Thanks to some very early mornings, the stunning dress was finished in time, and Delia found that “even though it was stressful, I did enjoy the whole process”.

Her stress was rewarded on the big day when her grandfather commented how her grandmother would have loved the dress. “That was a huge compliment”, as her dressmaking grandmother had been her inspiration for sewing her dress. A further lovely touch was that Delia sewed her dress on a machine gifted to her from her mother as an early wedding present. Delia would recommend others to sew their dress if they allow themselves time, “Not many people can say that they made their own wedding dress, so go for it!”



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CLAIRE CLARKE



Claire Clark loved every moment of sewing her striking red dress alongside her mum. Sewing together at a leisurely pace over eight months, whilst listening to Elton John, was a special bonding experience between them. “Now, when I hear his songs it reminds me of that time.” She has fond memories of the time they headed off together to a local tool shop in search of something to cut the boning for her bodice, having struggled between them to cut it. Sewing a boned strapless bodice was one of many new skills and techniques Claire had to learn when sewing her dress, such as sewing with a beaded fabric and making a waist stay. “The sense of achievement was so good,” she explained. Claire felt “just amazing” on her wedding day. “You can't beat that feeling of telling people you made your dress”. She was particularly proud of the pockets, which many sewists can appreciate! The beautiful red dress played a key role in the wedding colour scheme, with even the cupcakes having miniature red dresses on them.

Having enjoyed the process and relishing in the results on her wedding day, Claire would recommend other sewists to sew their special dress if they don't put too much pressure on themselves and sew

within their capabilities. “Consider non-bridal patterns and send your buttons to a company that will cover them for you.”

With no less than an incredible 126 buttons incorporated into the design of her stunning silk and lace wedding dress, Claire Eggleton also sent her buttons away to be covered, as did Emma. Claire knew long before the proposal that she would one day sew her own wedding dress, but it was through trying on a number of ready-to-wear bridal dresses that she decided on the design. Claire worked alongside her sewing teacher Christine Eady, an experienced bridalwear seamstress, to design the dress of her dreams. Christine was there to give advice throughout the process and helped Claire lay out her fabric for cutting in a community hall they had hired to do the job. “Cutting out was emotional,” said Claire, as she was cutting into the most expensive fabric she had ever bought and that she had spent a long time choosing from samples.

Claire knew she wanted to use lace over a coloured silk, but as a new fabric for her to work with, it was the biggest learning curve she faced. Most of the lace bodice had to be sewn and appliquéd by hand, a process



THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE DECIDING WHETHER TO SEW YOUR OWN WEDDING DRESS:

Time: Be realistic about how much time you have available before your special day and the hours of work your dress will involve

Space: You will need an area sufficient for cutting out and sewing, away from pets, dirt and future spouses!

Sewing level: You might need to learn new techniques or use fabrics you haven't sewn with before, can you master this in the time available?

Support: Is there someone who can offer words of encouragement and advice along the way?



The more time you can give yourself the better

CLAIRE EGGLETON



Claire enjoyed and found meditative. This is not to say there weren't moments of stress along the way – indeed, there were times when Claire questioned her decision. It took three full days of sewing for Claire to complete the 126 buttons and rouleaux loops down the back of her dress, leaving her with cramped hands and unable to sew for a week. Her doubts about her ability to complete the dress disappeared with each “pretty special” fitting, and after five months, the dress was ready. Claire's wedding venue was, fittingly, a former cotton mill where her dress stole the show, getting a mention in every speech.

Claire's advice for anyone sewing their wedding dress is to practise new techniques, do research and play to your strengths. “The more time you can give yourself, the better because things are going to come up”. Sewing your wedding dress can be a truly enjoyable and rewarding experience when carefully considered.



ABOUT MICHELLE ROWLEY

Michelle is a sewing teacher, writer, maker and passionate reader. Follow her latest dressmaking accomplishments on Instagram [stitchywhitney](#) and [booksatmybedside](#) to see what Michelle is reading next