



The Case of the Missing Curve

There's a secret in the fabric shop. Dozens of women come in all day to purchase soft minky for baby blankets, retro oilcloth for totebags, and Betty Boop flannel for pillowcases.

But these aren't just eager homemakers and doting moms. These are seamstresses who are terrified to make something to wear for themselves. They're hiding out in Home Dec, because the last time they made a dress, it was such a disaster they're still trembling with shame.

What was the problem? Why did they never attempt a jacket, a pair of jeans — a T-shirt, even? The answer is in one dreaded word: curves — the diabolical design of the female figure. Aside from all the adolescent angst they cause, curving bodies present the first real challenge to the home stitcher.

The chief culprits are found in the unstated prerogatives of the most well-known pattern companies. They don't advertise this fact, but Vogue, Butterick, Simplicity, McCall's, and New Look all design their patterns for a B-cup, no matter how large the chest measurement. You could cut out the tissue with a 40" bust, and it would still be a B-cup; this is astounding when you think of how few women actually fit that measurement.

These same patterns also place the apex of the bustline (where your nipples sit) at a high angle, pointing at the stars. If you're more at sea level or below, the finished garment is going to look ridiculous.

Why do they do this? To be honest, designing for the flattest plane is the simplest, most forgiving assignment. It also allows for the most variety. When they say that slender, boyish figures look the

best in high fashion, it's not a lie, or even a prejudice. A tremendous variety of clothes look great on hangers. If you have that hanger-like look, you should try every crazy outfit under the sun, because it will probably look swell on you.

Curves require more care, and more discrimination as to what will flatter. They take longer to draw, to cut, to sew — they are simply more labor-intensive.

Have you noticed how bridal designs in recent years have focused on sleeveless, strapless gowns? They're all the rage, and it's not just because they're sexy or romantic. No, it's because drawing and tailoring a *sleeve* (a huge curve if there ever was one) would add a tremendous cost to the dress, and so designers like Vera Wang realized that the profit margin lay in cutting those darn things off.

Is there any hope? Yes, and a well-drawn pattern by someone who has devoted themselves to curves is the place to begin. Don't reinvent the wheel unless you're enrolling at Parsons and need the exercise.

Popular patterns from companies like Burda, Hot Patterns, and Kwik Sew all feature designs that assume that as one gets bigger in size, the cup size should change with the chest measurement. Simplicity just offered a couple of experimental patterns where they offer different cup sizes (one trendy jacket and one shirt-dress), and I intend to flood them with encouraging letters.

And then there's *Fit for Real People*, a manual as unpretentious as it sounds. It shows you how to slash, spread, and tape any pattern tissue into submission! You'll be flabbergasted by how great the models look whether they're 6 feet tall or 80 years old, top heavy, pear shaped, or round as a barrel — all because they finally have something that fits. ✕

