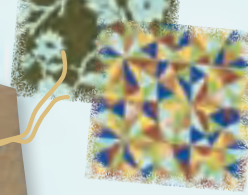




lisette
SEW YOUR STYLE



meet liesl

YOUR NEW FAVOURITE DESIGNER

Once a designer for top international fashion brands, America's Liesl Gibson now heads up her own company Liesl + Co. and is bringing her distinctive fabrics and patterns exclusively to Spotlight in 2012.

With a distinctive design signature that has made her popular with sewers worldwide, Liesl describes herself as "a very practical girl" who loves good design and style.

"I like a little playfulness," she says, "but I'm not big on passing fancies and fleeting trends. I like things to last, so quality is important to me. And I believe that other people appreciate good design too."

A graduate of New York's Fashion Institute of Technology, Liesl began shopping around for sewing patterns when her daughter was born and was disappointed with what she found in the shops. Her company, Oliver + S, was created and soon her pattern collection was joined by an Oliver + S fabric range. Since then Liesl has released her Lisette fabrics collection (both adult and children's versions) and all of these will be available at Spotlight.

"Lisette has it completely covered, collaborating with only A-grade business partners," says Tim Hanrahan, Senior Buyer in Spotlight's Sew department. "We'll be able to present customers with a range of beautiful printed apparel fabrics in cord, canvas, drills and soft poplins. They're all printed and developed by the famous American quilt brand, Fabric Traditions.

"To completely round off the experience, Lisette has teamed up with the super brand, Simplicity, to provide a complete collection of patterns for women and children which are not only inspirational but truly original and developed by Liesl herself. The experience is like working in a design studio from home – we love it!"

Liesl grew up around a mother and sisters who sewed but, she says, it wasn't until her daughter was born and she left her design job that she noticed the resurgence of interest that sewing was enjoying. Knitters, who had been growing in numbers in the few years leading up to this, were recognising the creative possibilities of sewing and Liesl discovered it was "a perfect time to be launching a pattern line".

Aware that sewing isn't a part of life like it was in her mother's youth, instructions in Liesl's patterns don't assume anything. "I explain what an edge stitch is, when to finish the seam allowances, etcetera," she says. "But I also like to include little dressmaking details that aren't usually found in sewing patterns. Those details might take a little more effort to sew, but the result is such a beautiful garment and gives you such a feeling of accomplishment. So the patterns are appropriate for sewists of all levels."

When Liesl's collections arrive in Spotlight stores there will already be plenty of Australian sewers familiar with her work. "Australians seem to be a very creative bunch," she says. "Right from the start, due to the global nature of the Internet and sewing blogs, I heard from lots of Australian customers who loved our patterns."

"A year or so after launching Oliver + S, we added a discussion forum section to the website to allow our customers to get to know each other and to talk about sewing, ask and answer sewing questions, offer tips, etc. Now there is quite an active group on the discussion board, including sewists from all over the world who congregate digitally to talk about a range of topics. Many of the most active members are from Australia."

Liesl's friend Laurel, who initially suggested she publish sewing patterns, now lives in Australia too. "Her son is the Oliver of Oliver + S," explains the designer, "so I always feel a special connection to Australia, since our Oliver lives there!"

Liesl's daughter – the 'S' in Oliver + S – is six-years-old now so too big to be the house model for her mother's Oliver + S collection (the base size is a size 3T) but she is still the girl paper doll and she often serves as an assistant.



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“We visit her old preschool for all the Oliver + S fittings, so I let her choose whether to act as the photographer or help to dress the children when we go,” says Liesl. “And lately she’s really enjoyed the photography and styling, so I’ll certainly be curious to see what she does with all these experiences.”

The experiences and influences that come together to fuel each of Liesl’s new collections are diverse.

“Before I start a collection I tend to collect a lot of inspiration, pulling ideas from found objects, things that I’ve seen or photographed, scribbled notes and drawings in my sketchbook, and then I let them all marinate together for a while before something starts to come out,” explains the designer. “I have some giant bulletin boards in my studio where everything gets pinned up and moved around and stared at for a long time before I really start to work ... It’s difficult to explain what exactly happens in there, which is probably why my husband calls it nebulous, but it takes a lot of time and

can be a lot of fun or quite painful at times. I guess that’s just typical of the creative process, right?”

Even now, with being a wife and mother and running her own business, Liesl still “absolutely” finds time to do some sewing.

“I may only get to sew a seam here and there, but I always have at least one project I’m working on and usually many more than just one,” she says. “I need to sew to feed my own creative impulses, and I feel strongly that a designer of sewing patterns should also be a sewer if I’m going to develop good patterns. Plus, I just love to sew!”

“I’ve been making lots of Lisette patterns for myself and every Friday on the Lisette blog we have a feature called ‘Wear your Style’ where we show how I or someone else has assembled an outfit around a Lisette style. It’s lots of fun to do, so I’m always thinking of different ways to sew up the patterns and to show the fabrics.” ●



LIESL'S TOP TIP FOR BEGINNER SEWERS:

“I’ve taught a lot of beginning sewers and my advice to them is to be fearless. It’s just fabric, after all! Take a chance, try something you’ve never tried, and you’ll learn something new. It’s the best way to develop new skills and knowledge and it’s not a terribly expensive pursuit, even if you make a mistake. It never hurts to take a class or read a sewing book but I’ve found that experimentation will teach you all sorts of great things.”

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