

The Linen Story

Linen fabric is associated with summer, so we thought it timely to talk about this fabric.

Linen is a textile made from the fibres of the flax plant. Linen is laborious to manufacture, but the fibre is very absorbent and garments made of linen are valued for their exceptional coolness and freshness in hot weather.

The collective term "linens" is still often used generically to describe a class of woven or knitted bed, bath, table and kitchen textiles traditionally made of linen. In the past, "linens" also referred to lightweight undergarments such as shirts, chemises, waist-shirts, lingerie, and detachable shirt collars and cuffs, all of which were historically made almost exclusively out of linen. The inner layer of fine composite cloth garments (as for example jackets) was traditionally made of linen, hence the word lining.

Linen textiles appear to be some of the oldest in the world: their history goes back many thousands of years. Fragments of straw, seeds, fibres, yarns, and various types of fabrics dating to about 8000 BC have been found in Swiss lake dwellings.

Production Method

Flax is either hand-harvested by pulling up the entire plant or stalks are cut very close to the root. The plants are dried, and the seeds are removed. The stalks are then 'retted', a process which uses

bacteria to decompose the pectin that binds the fibres together. The stalks are then 'scutched', a process of removing the woody portion of the stalks by crushing them between two metal rollers. The fibres are removed and combed to remove the short fibres. The remaining long, soft flax fibres are then spun into yarns and woven or knit into linen textiles.

Producers

Flax is grown in many parts of the world, but top quality flax is primarily grown in Western European countries and Ukraine. In recent years bulk linen production has moved to Eastern Europe and China, but high quality fabrics are still confined to niche producers in Ireland, Italy and Belgium, and also in countries including Poland, Austria, France, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, Britain and Kochi in India. High quality linen fabrics are now produced in the United States for the upholstery market and in Belgium. Russia is currently the major flax cultivating nation.

Some of the linen we have recently been purchasing has come from the oldest flax mill in Lithuania, who spin, weave and dye the linen. Their fabric ranges

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Above: Striped Linen [Black/
Multi] – <https://dye.li/strip2390>
Photo: House of Cloth.

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from lightweight gauze fabric to fabric suitable for table linen and curtains.

Properties

Linen fabric feels cool to touch, a phenomenon which indicates its higher conductivity (the same principle that makes metals feel “cold”). It is smooth, making the finished fabric lint-free, and gets softer the more it is washed. However, constant creasing in the same place in sharp folds will tend to break the linen threads. This wear can show up in collars, hems, and any area that is iron creased during laundering. Linen has poor elasticity and does not spring back readily, explaining why it wrinkles so easily.

Linen fabrics have a high natural lustre; their natural colour ranges between shades of ivory, ecru, tan, or grey. Pure white linen is created by heavy bleaching. Linen fabric typically varies somewhat in thickness and is crisp and textured, but it can in some cases feel stiff and rough, and in other cases feel soft and smooth. When properly prepared, linen fabric has the ability to absorb and lose water rapidly. Linen can absorb a fair amount of moisture without feeling unpleasantly damp to the skin, unlike cotton.

Linen is a very durable, strong fabric, and one of the few that are stronger wet than dry. The fibres do not stretch, and are resistant to damage from abrasion. However, because linen fibres have a very low elasticity, the fabric eventually breaks if it is folded and ironed at the same place repeatedly over time.

Mildew, perspiration, and bleach can also damage the fabric, but it is resistant to moths and carpet beetles. Linen is relatively easy to take care of, since it resists dirt and stains, has no lint or pilling tendency, and can be dry-cleaned, machine-washed or steamed. It can withstand high temperatures, and has only moderate initial shrinkage.

Linen is much easier to iron when damp. Linen wrinkles very easily, and thus some more formal garments require ironing often, in order to maintain perfect smoothness. Nevertheless, the tendency to wrinkle is often considered part of linen’s particular “charm”, and many modern linen garments are designed to be air-dried on a good clothes hanger and worn without the necessity of ironing.

A characteristic often associated with linen yarn is the presence of “slubs”, or small knots which occur randomly along its length. Although often considered to be defects, slubs are considered as part of the aesthetic appeal of an expensive natural product. In addition, slubs do not compromise the integrity of the fabric, and therefore they are not viewed as a defect. However, the very finest linen has very consistent diameter threads, with no slubs at all.



New Products

Above: Cotton + Steel -
Melody Miller - Dress Shop
Jersey - Arrows Periwinkle
Photo: House of Cloth.

If you have not been in store for a while, do not receive our general updates, or follow us on social media, you may have missed some of the newer items now available in store:

- Tessuti patterns: Milenda Dress, Lois Dress, Kate Top;
- Colette patterns: Claudette Dress, Penny Dress;
- Gertrude Made barkcloth solids.

There will be a number of new fabrics arriving in the first 2-3 months of next year. These include:

- Printed cotton jersey from STOF fabrics. Remember the "monkey" fabric? We have more of this coming as well as some new prints;
- Printed barkcloth from the latest release of the Gertrude Made range;
- A printed cotton/merino blend fabric from the latest release of the Gertrude Made range;
- New colours of boiled wool in readiness for winter;
- Plus lots of printed Nani Iro double gauze.

Vintage Fabrics

From the beginning of this store we have assisted in the relocation of many peoples fabric stashes to new homes. We called this vintage fabric and was largely sold on commission. A significant amount of fabric has passed through our hands during that time, some of which is no longer made like Viyella. We did become more selective about what we accepted, as the fabric had to be saleable.

It has been a pleasure to be part of this, however it is now time to start scaling back. We are revisiting

some of the vintage fabric we still have in store, and may start returning fabric to its owner, especially if it remains unsold after many years. We will still possibly accept some new fabric if it is unique and/or special.

For those of you who have provided fabric, thank you for allowing us to be part of its journey to new homes.

Summer Class Schedule

We will again be hosting a holiday sewing program conducted by Kathryn Marks from Meraki Cottage. For full details of, please check out Meraki Cottage on Facebook, or email kathryn@merakicottage.com.au.

Beginner Sewers

When: Saturday January 6
Time: 10:30am–12:30pm
Project: Denim Skirt with Trim

Intermediate Sewers

When: Saturday January 6
Time: 2pm–4pm
Project: Birdies On A String

Do Your Own Thing

When: Monday January 8
Time: 1pm–4pm

Beginner Sewers

When: Tuesday January 9
Time: 1pm–3pm
Project: Foldover Bag

Machine Sewing Basics Pt. 1

When: Thursday January 11
Time: 4pm–5pm

Do Your Own Thing

When: Monday January 15
Time: 1pm–4pm

Intermediate Sewers

When: Saturday January 16
Time: 1pm–3pm
Project: Sewing Machine Cover

Machine Sewing Basics Pt. 2

When: Thursday January 18
Time: 4pm–5pm

Beginner Sewers

When: Saturday January 20
Time: 10:30am–12:30pm
Project: Floaty Summer Skirt

Intermediate Sewers

When: Saturday January 20
Time: 2pm–4pm
Project: Froggie Softie

Do Your Own Thing

When: Monday January 22
Time: 1pm–4pm

Beginner Sewers

When: Saturday January 23
Time: 1pm–3pm
Project: Reversible Bag

Machine Sewing Basics Pt. 3

When: Thursday January 25
Time: 4pm–5pm

Beginner Sewers

When: Saturday January 26
Time: 10:30am–12:30pm
Project: Notebook Cover

Just For Fun

When: Saturday January 26
Time: 2pm–4pm
Project: Paper Garland

Coming Events

Learn to weave your own cloth from scratch!

This thorough 6 week course introduces you to the 4 shaft loom and enables you to continue weaving independently with confidence. You will weave a small sample, then plan and produce a simple article of your own design, e.g. a bag, scarf, cushion, or table runner. It's magic!

Includes Sample Yarn and Loom Hire plus a free follow-up 'show & tell day'.

Venue: House of Cloth, Bendigo

Dates & Times:

Set-up Sunday, February 4, followed by 6 Monday evenings, 6 – 9pm

(Feb. 5, 12, 19 & 26, March 5 & 12)

Cost: \$440 (flexible payment plans available)

Bookings via <http://ilkawhite.com.au/contact/>

Trading Hours

We will be closing at 2pm on Saturday 23rd December and resume normal trading on Tuesday 9th January. We thank you all for your continued support and wish you a happy and peaceful festive season.