

Sewing and repairing clothing at home no longer deemed 'daggy'

ABC Radio Brisbane By Hailey Renault

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PHOTO: Jenni Langan has sewn 90 per cent of the work clothes in her wardrobe. (ABC: Hailey Renault)

Homemade, hand-sewn clothes once deemed "daggy" are making a comeback.

Men and women tired of buying cheap, mass-produced clothing are seeking out classes to learn how to repair their own clothes and make outfits from scratch.

Sewing teacher Julie Hillier said the forces that made home sewing unfashionable were starting to wane.

"When clothes became cheaper to buy than to make, I think homemade and home sewing became daggy because that [was] what everyone had to do.

"Hand-making was done out of necessity, a make-do mend type of mentality born out of the fact that people didn't have a lot of money.

"People have reconnected with who they really are."



PHOTO: Start by sewing simple projects before moving on to quilts and more complicated patterns. (ABC: Hailey Renault)

Jenni Langan started sewing again in 2014 after the skills her mother and tailoress grandmother taught her as a child fell by the wayside.

She started small, sewing kimono-style bathrobes and simple dresses under the guidance of Ms Hillier.

Now 90 per cent of Ms Langan's work wardrobe is hand made.

"As a 40-plus-year-old woman you're looking around for things in stores and they are a bit short, a bit long, a bit dowdy or a little bit too young," she said.

"You'll find stitches coming undone and seams split within a few washes and wears and that just doesn't happen when you've made your own garments."

"It just enables you to sew for your body shape, for your style and work out what suits you."

Sewing at home is saving her money too.

When she's not at work helping kids with dyslexia, Ms Langan is on the hunt for interesting fabrics to recycle at op shops.

"I've put myself on a forced fabric buying ban because I have quite a stash at home."

People hard-wired to make



PHOTO: Julie Hillier says sewing your own clothes at home is no longer considered "daggy". (ABC: Hailey Renault)

Ms Hillier said the popularity of cooking classes and do-it-yourself hardware stores proved humans were still "hard-wired to make".

As well as teaching students to sew, she runs workshops helping a new wave of crafters restore furniture, re-cover lamp shades and construct bedheads and ottomans from scratch.

"You look back and there was Mr Smith, Mr Baker ... people were identified by the sorts of skills they brought to their community," she told ABC Radio Brisbane.

"That no longer became part of how we lived our lives and I think now people are saying, 'I miss that part of me'."

Ms Hillier suspects the joy of giving homemade gifts is another quality driving Australia's home-sewing revival.

"I made a friend of mine a cushion cover for her 21st birthday," she said.

"She received some beautiful gifts, but, on the quiet, said 'I love this, it's the best because you made it'.

"It's the intent that's part of it, the time investment and the joy."

Learning to sew 'easier than driving'



PHOTO: Julie Hillier's students start on projects like bags and pillowcases before moving on to more complex creations. (ABC: Hailey Renault)

Ms Hillier teaches everyone from senior citizens to primary school students and assures newcomers sewing is easier to pick up than driving.

Most of her time is spent "de-mystifying" crafts by breaking down the process.

She said students starting out should avoid complicated, modern sewing machines and start simple.

"Skip most of the buttons and knobs.

"Just buy the basic model of a good brand because you don't need heaps of bells and whistles unless you want to do heaps of complicated sewing."

Building up talent with a needle and thread is likely to take time too.

"You don't make a lined, tiered, tulle ballgown as your first attempt.

"I usually start people on cushion covers, things that are forgiving and then you build up from there."

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