Sewing with Silk

Nothing else comes close to the softness and sheer luxury of 100% pure silk. But, sewing with the fabric can be frustrating without an understanding of its characteristics and exacting requirements. On the other hand, you do not need a fancy machine to sew with silk; and it is a lot easier to sew than most synthetics.

Fabric Preparation: If you plan to wash your garment rather than dry clean, pre-wash the silk. Soak uncut fabric and all components, linings, interfacings, zippers etc in a large tub of warm water for about 20 minutes, or follow our fact sheet [Information for Textile Artists on Preparation & Dyeing Silk](#). Press on wrong side of fabric while still damp. Let rest for 24 hours.

Note: Some commercial silks contain many factory finishes are best dry cleaned as they will change characteristics when washed.... i.e. Charmeuse/Satin will become dull but often softer too. Silk velvet should always be dry cleaned to preserve the original condition of the pile. Test wash a small square of your fabric. If you like the results, wash.

All silks supplied by Silk Wholesalers are PFD (prepared for dyeing) and contain no factory finishes other than Sericin, a naturally occurring gum from the silkworm.

Needles: Always use new needles. For light weight and medium weight silks use a #9 or 11 sharp needle. For heavy weight silks use a #13 sharp. Never use a ballpoint needle! It will tear the fabric rather than go between threads.

Thread: Generally, 100% cotton thread is recommended for sewing light and medium weight silks. Cotton is weaker than silk. It therefore breaks easier in the event of stress on the finished garment. A broken seam is a lot better than a torn garment. For heavy silks, poly/cotton may be used, but remember, polyester does not take home dyes. So, if you are ever going to change the colour of your garment, you might wind up with very pronounced seams.

Machine Tension: Set your tension loose, about #2 or #3 tension.

Stitching: For fine silk, 10 to 12 stitches per inch is good. For heavier silks, 8 to 10 stitches per inch works best.

Pins: Use silk pins to avoid pin marks. They are very sharp and will not break fabric threads. It is best if only seam allowances and darts are pinned.

Interfacings/Linings: Light weight fusibles may be used on silk but should be done with care as they may alter the feel of the silk. It is best not to use fusibles on very fine silks. Interfaces should be lighter than the outer fabric. Paj/Pongee, Habutai or Organza are good choices for lining fine silks. Pre-shrunk muslin, cotton mull or voile are good choices for heavier fabrics. I also like Silk Gauze. When working with blouse weight fabrics (i.e. Habutai or Crepe de Chine), it is common to use self-fabric for collars, plackets, cuffs and the like. If added body is desired, silk Organza or Paj may be used. A word of caution when using Paj as a lining; it does not have great tensile strength and will deteriorate under duress. If you require tensile strength around armholes for instance, use a Habutai. Please do not be

tempted to line a silk garment with a synthetic lining. You will lose the natural fall, drape and character of your silk and be disappointed.

Zippers: Use lightweight zippers, i.e. nylon coil. For best results, sew zippers in by hand with a #10 sharp needle or a #10 embroidery needle.

Seams: Finish all seams! On light weight silks, French or flat seams are best. On heavier silks, use the bound or Hong Kong seam. Silk can fray so finish off neatly and your garment will last for many years.

Washing: Yes, silks are washable. Follow our fact sheet [Information for Textile Artists on Preparation & Dyeing Silk](). If you haven't any Softly (recommended for it's ideal PH balance on silk/wool) to hand you can use any mild soap powder or good shampoo. It is not necessary to use specialty cleaning agents. Hang or lay flat to dry in shade. Press on wrong side of garment with a cool iron while still damp or with light steam. Caution: spotting from your steam iron will mark your silk. Silk is a protein fibre (like your hair). When washing, treat it accordingly. DO *NOT* use bleach. (However, peroxide is OK.) Do not use very hot water as silk filament is readily damaged by excessive heat and agitation. And, for best results, keep silks out of direct sun.

Dry Cleaning: All silks can be dry cleaned, although many very soiled fabrics respond better to washing. Dry cleaning will eventually make your garments appear dull and listless. Some silks should only be dry cleaned, they include commercial garments that may not have been pre-shrunk, or have been poorly dyed, often in third world countries. Commercial garments often suggest dry cleaning as a disclaimer against possible customer complaints.

Silk is addictive, don't be afraid of it, jump in and enjoy ~ it will reward you well!

SOME OF THE BENEFITS OF SILK

Because of its natural protein structure silk is the most hypoallergenic of all fabrics

- An all-climate fabric, silk is warm and cosy in winter and comfortably cool when temperatures rise. Its natural temperature-regulating properties give silk this paradoxical ability to cool and warm simultaneously. Silk garments thus outperform other fabrics in both summer and winter. Silk worn as a second layer warms without being bulky.
- Silk is highly absorbent: it can absorb up to 30% of its weight in moisture without feeling damp. Silk will absorb perspiration while letting your skin breathe.
- In spite of its delicate appearance, silk is relatively robust. Its smooth surface resists soil and odours well. Silk is wrinkle and tear resistant, and dries quickly.
- While silk abrasion resistance is moderate, it is the strongest natural fibre and, surprisingly, it easily competes with steel yarn in tensile strength.
- Silk takes colour well; washes easily; and is easy to work with in spinning, weaving, knitting, and sewing.
- Silk mixes well with other animal and vegetable fibres.