

AMERICA'S BEST PRICED LUXURY MATTRESSES SAATVA'S ONLINE PRICE IS JUST \$899 To match the materials and specs of our queen mattress set, retail stores will charge over \$2,400. LEARN MORE

BOOKS OF STYLE

Holiday Reading, Some Homework Required



By LIESL SCHILLINGER Published: December 12, 2012

'BurdaStyle Sewing Vintage Modern: Mastering Iconic Looks from the 1920s to 1980s,' by Nora Abousteit with Jamie Lau. Potter Craft. 216 pp. \$29.99

The Collection: A New Fashion App for the iPad A one-stop destination for Times fashion coverage and the latest from the runways. Download It From the App Store

Follow Us on Twitter Follow @NYTimesfashion for fashion, beauty and lifestyle news and headlines.

'Decades,' by Cameron Silver. Bloomsbury. 256 pp. \$60.

'New Dress a Day,' by Marisa Lynch. Ballantine. 215 pp. \$20.

'Style Me Pretty Weddings,' by Abby Larson. Clarkson Potter. 256 pp. \$30.

'The Mistress of a Golden Age Mystery' series by Dorothy L. Sayers. Bourbon Street. Four books, \$14.99 each.

'The Butler's Guide to Running the Home and Other Graces,' by Stanley Ager and Fiona St. Aubyn. Clarkson Potter. 208 pp. \$21.99

'Let's Bring Back: The Cocktail Edition: A Compendium of Impish, Romantic Amusing and Occasionally Appalling Potations from Bygone Eras,' by Lesley Blume. Chronicle Books. 208 pp. \$18.95

AHH, the holidays: Hanukkah parties, Christmas parties, New Year's parties ... surely your sewing machines are threaded and ready by now; your shimmering yards of taffeta and satin all measured, pinned and cut. Of course not. In this age of ready-to-wear, most of us leave sewing to the professionals. Nonetheless, a growing number of nostalgic hobbyists lately seek to revive the magic and glamour of other eras, stitching together their frocks to create looks not found on the rack.

Guiding this trend are Nora Abousteit, a founder of BurdaStyle.com, and Jamie Lau, whose ring-bound full-color book, "BurdaStyle Sewing Vintage Modern," holds detailed instructions and actual sewing patterns that conjure a "tapestry of voices and stories, memories from the past that shape our present style."

Following their lead, anyone with a Singer and nimble fingers can whip up a homage to Garbo, like a delicate 1930s-style day dress with a capelet, or pay tribute to the '60s with Jackie Kennedy A-line shifts, Twiggy trapeze dresses or, for men, a George Harrison Mandarin collar jacket. One can fast-forward to the '80s to resurrect a Madonna bustier.

For would-be seamstresses and designers who seek cinematic inspiration to guide their stitching, "Decades," an outside, lavishly photographed book by the Hollywood vintage couture pundit and boutique owner Cameron Silver, provides an alluring visual record of how a legend wears her clothes.

In these pages, Joan Crawford appears in sultry black-and-white, elegant but menacing in a backless cream gown, gripping her own arm so hard with her lacquered nails that you wonder if she drew blood. Her power, Mr. Silver observes, came from "her ability to look domineering and intimidating one moment, exquisitely feminine the next." A still of smoky-eyed Anne Bancroft as Mrs. Robinson in "The Graduate" (1960) comes with the author's commentary: "With her skins and streaks, pencil skirts and lace, Mrs. Robinson might as well have been dressed by Dolce and Gabbana."

And a shot of Jodie Foster, with "rosy cheeks, Cupid's bow lips, and pin-curved hair," in "Taxi Driver," when she was barely a teenager, beguiles with her pale pink, lace-trimmed shirt and white short-shorts with studs at the beltline. The coy Victorian libertine look that rippled through the '70s had more charm than contemporary spandex and Lycra, Mr. Silver suggests, though it was no less louche.

Daring D.I.Y. types who want to inject their wardrobes with old-style glamour don't need to drop by Los Angeles to inspect Mr. Silver's curated collection of gowns, or to dish out a lot of dough; they can snap up mummies at local vintage stores, and upgrade them from frumpy to frolicsome. Marisa Lynch's plucky, high-spirited "New Dress a Day" shows how with "Dressipes" that explain what tools and trim are needed for each sartorial suggestion she makes, and before-and-after snapshots of her projects.

The book grew out of Ms. Lynch's popular blog in which she challenged herself to make 365 dresses in 365 days for \$1 each. The book showcases her successes, like the "Lucille Ball" look, for which she took a baggy polka-dot dress, snipped off its sleeves, ran the new armholes through a sewing machine and voilà, bonbon time. A yellow maxi-length floral dress didn't even need a needle to be put out of its misery — scissors and fusible tape ("stitch witchery," Ms. Lynch calls it) turned it into a fetching short number, perfect to wear while swanning down Bedford Avenue.

Sometimes not even scissors are needed. A belt or brooch can give a sack dress a waist, and a spotted white blouse can emerge from a dye bath utterly transformed as a lustrous red Bordeaux. "I just love that magical moment when you open the lid and there's a whole new shirt!" Ms. Lynch exults. Most usefully she devotes a full chapter to rehabilitating bridesmaids' gowns, shearing off hideous ruffles to transform horror stories (turquoise sateen mermaid dresses, Pepto-Bismol-pink strapless sheaths that looked like terry bath wraps) into happy endings. "Beyond those sleeves is a party dress waiting to happen!" she declares.

Before there can be a bridesmaids dress, there must be a bride; and because the winter holidays are a time when a preponderance of proposals get made, "Style Me Pretty Weddings" may come in handy in the new year. The nuptials blogger Abby Larson, who has blogged about more than 5,000 "real weddings" on her Web site, has drawn hundreds of images and ideas from her vast reportage into a sourcebook intended to help couples celebrate with élan.

Her book is dedicated, she writes, to "all of the brides who find themselves awake at 2 a.m., searching the Web for birdcage veils and signature cocktail recipes. May this be a place of happy." The book proceeds two-by-two, wedding after wedding, highlighting the personal touches chosen by each pair (did you know there was a flower called Craspedia?) so that legions of starry-eyed but innovation-challenged imitators may copy them. "Don't doubt how important the little details are," one bride vows, beneath a snapshot of a young ring bearer hoisting a "mazel tov" bunting banner (scored from Etsy). "

At some point I was knee-deep in D.I.Y. and thought, 'What am I doing? No one is going to notice these little details.' But our guests raved about every last one of them."

Not every proposal ends with a raised veil and a kiss. When Harriet Vane's live-in boyfriend proposed marriage, she poisoned him. That, at least, is what the judge thought. The stylish, sparkling Dorothy Sayers mysteries, set in England in what may now be called the late Downton Abbey period, feature the crime novelist Harriet Vane, abetted by the dashing detective Lord Peter Wimsey.

New in an elegant set of four paperbacks, the books inaugurate Bourbon Street, a Harper imprint, and feature the rubric "The Mistress of the Golden Age Mystery," just the thing to get a person through a snowstorm, should one arrive, or a proposal, should one not. Ms. Sayers's titles alone crackle with indestructible wit: "Have His Carcase," "Gaudy Night," and "Busman's Honeymoon." The first, "Strong Poison," is as strong and as irresistible as the last.

Alastair Bruce, Order of the British Empire, the royal equerry who is the historical adviser to Downton Abbey, contributed to another new book that may help households avoid accusations of murder, poor wine stewardship or similar embarrassments: "The Butler's Guide to Running the Home and Other Graces," by Stanley Ager and Fiona St. Aubyn. In this "post-deferential" world we live in, Mr. Bruce writes, "We still have a fascination for, and seek out, the illusive excellence of living; a style that was emblematic of the period."

The wisdom of butler (Mr. Ager) and lady (Ms. St. Aubyn) combine in this book to instruct anyone who wishes to "recreate that same grace in entertainment" on how to lay down wine, polish brass, iron trousers, clean shoes and so on. If you know people who aspire to these tasks, give them this book.

And if you're unaccountably understaffed and find yourself mixing and serving libations at various holiday frolics this month, you may want to invest in "Let's Bring Back: The Cocktail Edition," by Lesley Blume.

She resuscitates 144 wrongly forgotten confections, like the gin and Grand Marnier frisked into the pants, the Green-Eyed Monster (whiskey, bitters and Pernod), the Earthquake (absinthe, whiskey and gin), the Fluffy Ruffles (rum and vermouth), the Scofflaw (rye, vermouth and grenadine) and the Symphony of Moist Breath (chartreuse and crème de menthe). With this much festivity to pour over ice, who needs mistletoe?

A version of this article appeared in print on December 13, 2012, on page E13 of the New York edition with the headline: Holiday Reading, Some Homework Required.

Get 50% Off The New York Times & Free All Digital Access.

Get Free E-mail Alerts on These Topics

- Fashion and Apparel Books and Literature Alcoholic Beverages

Ads by Google what's this? Boutique Culture® Fashion Buy That Perfect Outfit Today! Popular 2012 Trends + Free Shipping LoveCulture.com

Log in to see what your friends are sharing on nyltimes.com. Privacy Policy | What's This?

What's Popular Now

Advertisement

Advertisement