

MEET NOTIONS SPONSOR: Simplicity Creative Group

The Simplicity Pattern Company is one of four companies that exist under one corporate umbrella. The parent company, Conso International, acquired British Trimmings in 1993, Simplicity Pattern Company in 1998, and Wm. E. Wright in 2000. In 2008, Conso announced a new corporate identity—Simplicity Creative Group. Today this family of well known craft, sewing, knitting, hobby, and home decorating brands includes Simplicity, New Look, Wrights, Conso, Boye Needle, E-Z Quilting, and British Trimmings.

The Simplicity Pattern Company has been a particular friend to ASG. In addition to being a *Notions* sponsor since 2008 (Wrights had been a sponsor since 2000), the company has partnered with ASG since 2003 for our annual Creativity Contest. The company is headquartered in New York City where the design, patternmaking, sample making, instructional, and consumer service departments reside. In the mid-1980s, Simplicity acquired New Look Patterns, The English Pattern Company. Today, a design staff continues to operate in the United Kingdom to support New Look's international flair.

Simplicity History

The Simplicity Pattern Company was founded in 1927 by Joseph M. Shapiro and his son James J. Shapiro. Joseph could not understand why patterns were so expensive (\$2.00!). He set out to revolutionize the business by introducing perforated patterns that retailed for 15 cents. All the pieces for these patterns came on one large tissue sheet that was laid out on the fabric. Then users cut along the perforated lines, through both fabric and tissue. Around 1934, Simplicity began to print the envelopes that were approximately the same size as today. The instructions were called "The Primer" and had illustrations and lots of directions to make construction easier. By 1939, some Simplicity patterns with printed pieces were offered at 25 cents each. By the 1950s, all patterns were printed; perfo-

rated patterns were obsolete.



Evolution of Pattern Production

The pattern production process has changed dramatically since those first days, particularly with the technological developments of the past 30 years. Here are a few examples of how things have changed.

From the moment a design is selected to go into the line until the date it actually appears in a catalog, it takes five months, from start to finish. But before a design is selected, fashion trends are researched. About three months of fashion research goes into producing a trend presentation that includes color, fabric, silhouette, trims, and home dec. This is done twice a year—for Spring/Summer and for Fall/Winter. The information is reviewed by the design team and, along with input from the company's merchandising department, becomes the starting point for a new collection of patterns.

Patterns have gone from a hand-drawn and hand-cut process to an entire computer-aided patternmaking process. This has reduced the time it takes to develop a master-size pattern that is ready for the pattern testing stage from 11 days to five days. Previously, all master patterns would be cut out of oak tag, made up into a muslin test garment, and if there were any changes, these changes could take up to two days to implement. Now, with technology, these changes can be finalized within a day after the designer has approved it. Effectively, the time frame for the whole pattern making process has been cut in half.



The Simplicity pattern room with Bonnie Simmons (left), design director; and Tatyana Rodygin, manager, pattern development

Layouts for the pattern pieces, once painstakingly done by hand, are now painstakingly done by hand, are now computer generated. Once these layouts have passed through Quality Control, they are e-mailed to the printer as PDF files. There is no shipping and no need to make printing plates, a process that used to take at least five working days. Every step in the production of a pattern has been similarly streamlined, which means that there is no longer a lag between ready-to-wear offerings and pattern catalog offerings.

Educational Commitment

Simplicity has long been known as a company committed to sewing education and support. In 1934, Simplicity formed an Education Division, one of the first in American business. Its director, Caroline Hutchins Shapiro, was one of the first home economists in business. In the early 1940s, Simplicity embarked on a major sewing education program with travelling representatives, fashion shows, educational books, and literature disseminated across the country. Such programs cemented Simplicity as the key source for learning to sew, and set the foundation for how sewing is taught today.

Simplicity has continued its commitment to the educational community with teachers' kits mailed twice a year to middle schools, high schools, community colleges, and vocational schools throughout the U.S. and Canada. The kits contain posters and a variety of educational materials, plus information on the educator rate for catalogs, books, and kits.