

Couture Lace Skirt

An easy and wearable garment teaches essential guipure sewing techniques | BY SUSAN KHALJE

Beautiful guipure lace is what catches the eye in this trendy two-tone skirt, but it's the layers of cotton and charmeuse beneath that enable the guipure to take center stage.

Guipure is unique in that it doesn't have a net background. Instead, its motifs are held together with small thread bars. These so-called "brides" make cutting through guipure painless, since you can easily isolate a motif with a clean cut that leaves the design intact. The space between the motifs provides room for an underlying fabric to shine through for a striking look. The designs available in

guipure vary tremendously. Some are small and finely worked, while others are heavy and bold with lots of space between the motifs.

Given the horizontal, structured nature of guipure, it makes sense to use it for a simple garment, such as a pencil skirt, and to place the attractive selvage along the hem edge. The featured skirt requires four layers: The lining is made with silk crepe de Chine, the underlining is cotton batiste, the fashion fabric is silk charmeuse, followed by the guipure lace top layer. To prevent the guipure from drooping, it must be tacked to an underlining. The lace is also trimmed

and shaped to follow the contours of the body, echoing the shape created by the darts and side seams. It is then finished with a center-back seam, zipper, and petersham waistband.

Here, I'll show you how to properly orient lace so it lies smoothly and evenly spaced throughout, shape lace at the darts and side seams, and handle lace along the zipper opening. With these straightforward steps, you'll see how simple it is to make an elegant couture skirt with guipure.

Susan Khalje is a couture expert, teacher, author, and Threads contributing editor; SusanKhalje.com

SUPPLIES

- Guipure; a length equal to the desired skirt's widest measurement plus 4 inches (Note: The selvage will be placed along the hemline.)
- Fashion fabric; two skirt lengths plus enough for the hem allowance and at least a 1-inch seam allowance at the skirt's top edge. (Note: Cut with the vertical grainline parallel to the selvage.)
- Prewashed muslin or reasonably-bodied cotton batiste for the underlining; same measurement as the fashion fabric
- Lining; same measurement as the fashion fabric
- 7-inch regular skirt zipper (not invisible)
- 1-inch-wide petersham ribbon for the waist facing; waist measurement plus 4 inches
- Hook and eye
- Carbon tracing paper
- Thread to match the lace, fashion fabric, and lining
- Medium-sized snaps (optional)



Dart, seam, and zipper details are hidden in this elegant guipure pencil skirt.

Lace: metallic guipure, B&JFabrics.com; fashion fabric: silk charmeuse from the author's stash.

Start with the foundation

Create a three-piece skirt muslin with one front and two back pieces. Once it fits, trace the pieces to the underlining and baste the underlining to the fashion fabric. Next, partially sew the side seams and turn up the hem.

1 Begin by fitting a muslin. Pay careful attention to the hem length, since it can't easily be altered after the guipure is applied. Once the muslin fits, mark it, carefully take it apart, and release the darts.

2 Press the muslin pieces, and lay them over the underlining. Trace the pieces and mark their grainlines, seamlines, waistline, hemline, and darts with carbon paper. Choose the carbon paper color carefully so it won't show through the fashion fabric or be pulled through to the fabric's right side when stitched. Include at least 1-inch seam allowances around all the edges, then cut.

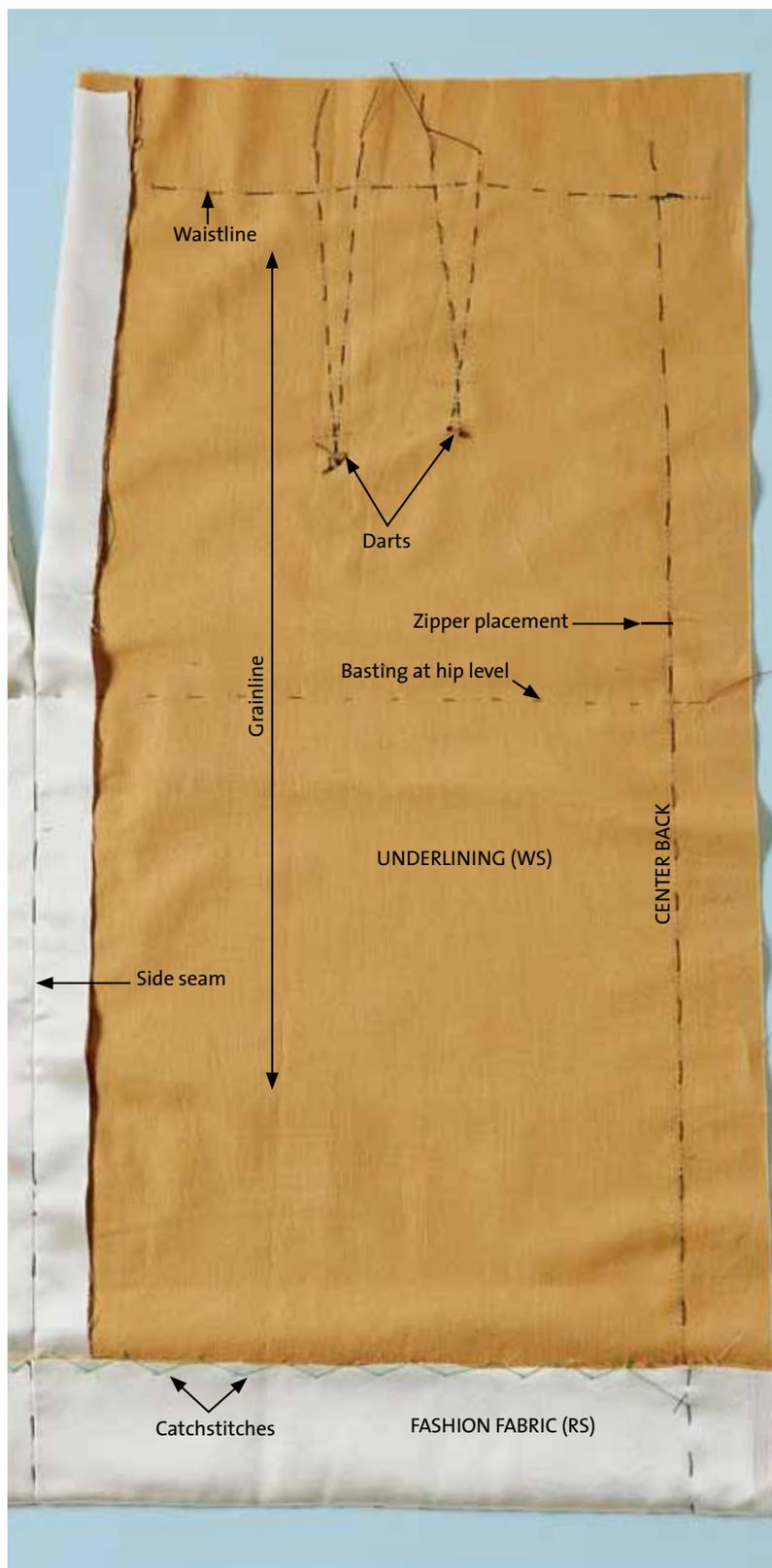
3 Lay the marked underlining pieces in a single layer over the fashion fabric, aligning the grainlines. With contrasting thread, hand-baste the layers together along the edges, at the darts, and at the center front. Then, baste a horizontal line at hip level where the upper curve in the side seam begins. Make the basting stitches as visible as possible from the fabric's right side, since these lines guide even positioning of the guipure. Cut the fashion fabric to match the underlining.

4 Sew the side seams. Treat the fashion fabric and underlining as one, and sew the skirt's side seams up to the basted horizontal lines. Neatly trim the seam allowances to even widths, and press them open.

5 Turn up the hem and catchstitch it to the underlining. First, measure along the open center-back seam to make sure both sides are the same length. If they aren't, make the appropriate adjustments.

LACE CONSIDERATIONS

- Determine where you want the lace to end. For instance, you might want the motifs to extend beyond the fashion fabric's hem.
- Study the lace to see if placing a motif at the center front is a good idea; it may or may not matter.
- See where the motifs meet along the center-back seam. If the lace has large motifs, you might not want a pair of them next to each other at the center back.



Photos: (45; p. 49, right) Jack Deutsch; all other photos, Sloan Howard. Stylist: Jessica Saal. Hair and makeup: Patrycja for Halley Resources. Styling credits: (p. 45) earrings—House of Harlow 1960 (Macys.com), top—BCBC (LordAndTaylor.com); (p. 49) earrings and bracelet—stylist's own, top—DKNYC (Macys.com).

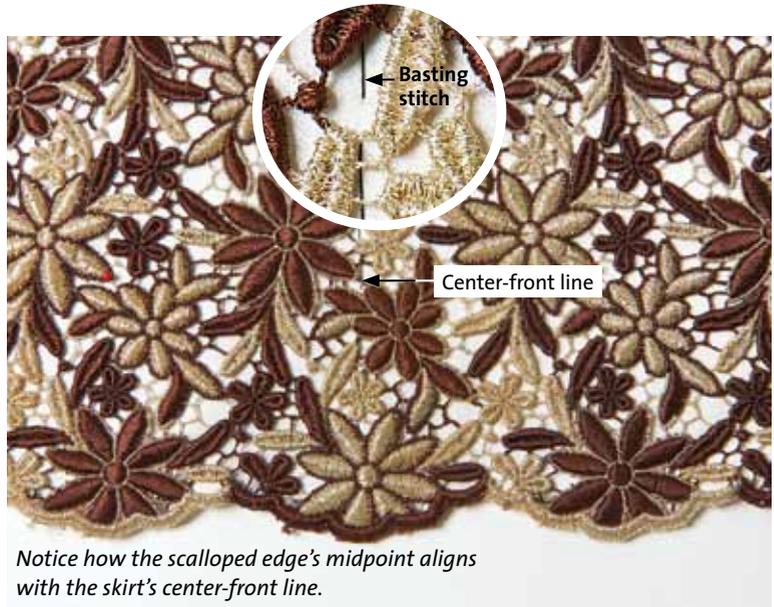
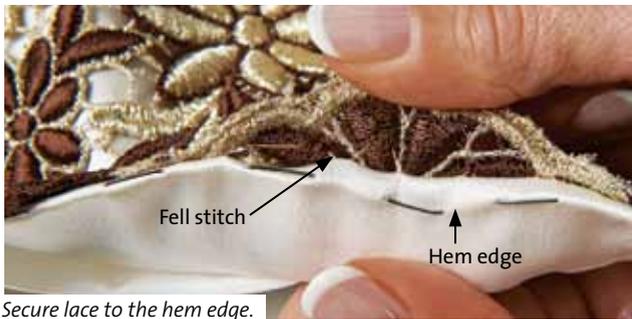
Position and attach the lace

Position the lace motifs on the skirt as desired. Then tack the lace to the fabric layers. These stitching lines are essential in keeping the lace properly oriented. Finally, construct the skirt.

1 With the skirt right side up, position the lace over the fashion fabric. Pin the lace's lower edge along the hemline as desired (see "Lace considerations," on the facing page). Smooth the lace into place, keeping it flat and evenly spaced. Do not stretch it.

2 Pin the lace along the center front. It helps to count the motifs and measure their distance from the hem to keep the sides symmetrical. Pin the lace in rows spaced every few inches. Stop once you get to the basted horizontal line.

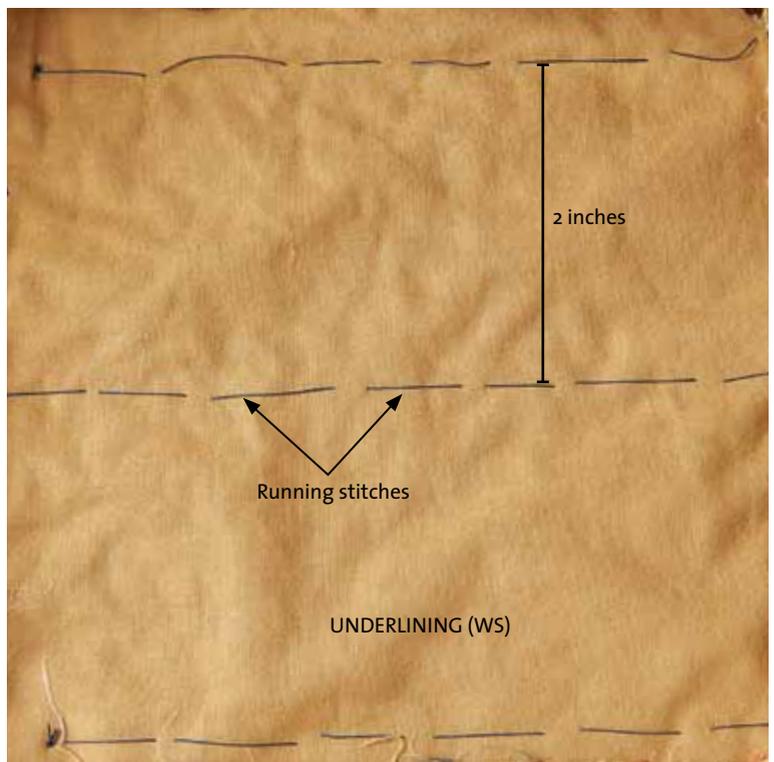
3 Attach the lace. Secure the lace to both skirt layers with a small backstitch or fell stitch along the skirt's hem edge. Use thread that matches the lace. Be sure the bottommost stitches don't show through the hem allowance.



4 Working horizontally, tack the lace in place using running stitches or backstitches. Work upward from the hem. Begin and end each tacking row about 1 inch from the center-back seam, and space the rows approximately 2 inches apart (depending on the motif design). Do not pull the stitches tightly, otherwise the motifs will distort. Continue until you reach the basted horizontal line at hip level.

5 Continue tacking the lace. Tack the lace above the horizontal line on the front and back pieces, but continue to keep at least 1 inch away from the seamlines and darts. Be sure the lace stays even at the center front and doesn't shift to one side when tacking it to the upper center-back panels.

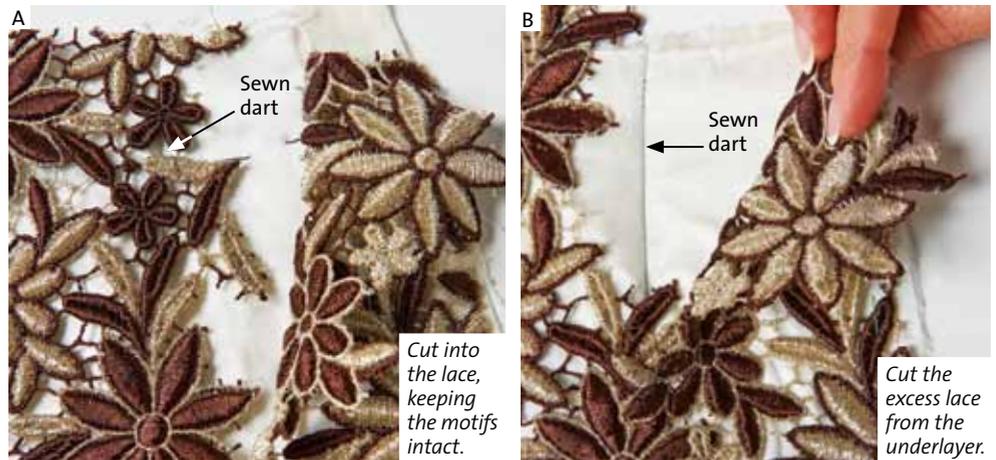
6 On the foundation layers, sew the darts, the remaining part of the side seams, and the center-back seam up to the zipper marking. Do not catch the lace in any seam as you sew. Trim the seam allowances for neatness, and press them open. Press the darts on a pressing ham toward the center front and center back.



Conceal the shaping

Garments are shaped with seams and darts, but lace should be treated differently at these areas to avoid unnecessary bulk. Lap and trim the lace along darts and seams for nearly invisible results.

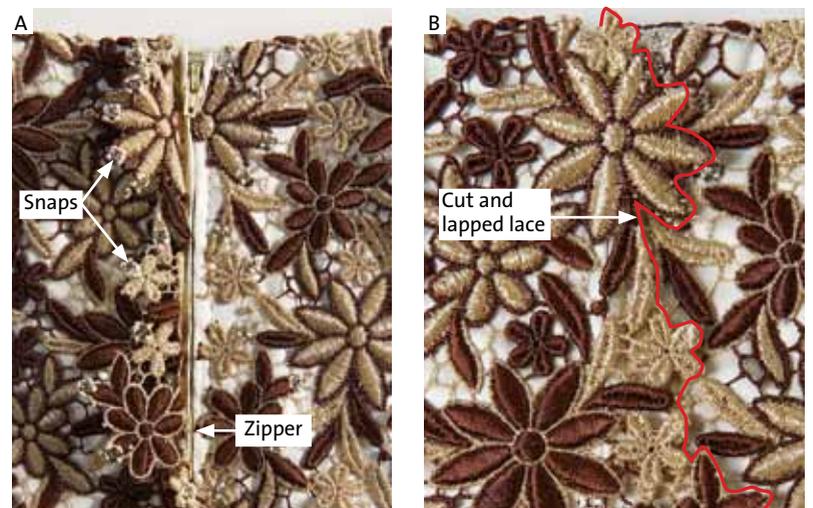
1 Trim and arrange the lace at the darts, side seams, and the center-back seam below the zipper opening. Lay the skirt over a ham, cut into the brides joining the lace motifs to the approximate length of the dart or seam (A), and overlap the motifs so the lace conforms to the underlying curve. The overlaps should be in the same general area as the darts and seams, but needn't be exactly on top of each other. Then, cut away the excess lace from the underlayer so the pieces just barely overlap (B).



2 Next, fell-stitch the lace edges. Put the topmost layer into position, pin, and fell-stitch the edges with matching thread through all layers to hold the overlap in place.



3 The lace can be treated a number of ways at the zipper opening. If the lace is lightweight, as shown at right, secure it along the seamlines with small running stitches. Next, fold it and the fabric to the inside, and install the zipper by hand, carefully matching the motif placement. If the motifs are heavy, as shown below, some can be trimmed and arranged to overlap the zipper and snap into place once the skirt has been zipped. Not only is the zipper covered, the lace also appears continuous and seamless.



Insert the zipper by hand, trim the lace, and apply snaps where the motifs meet (A) to hide a zipper beneath heavy lace motifs (B).

Finish with a ribbon waist facing

Once the lace has been secured to the foundation layers, use the muslin as a pattern to cut the lining. A traditional waistband is often too heavy and thick for this skirt type. Instead, use petersham to make an inner waist facing.

MAKE AND ATTACH THE LINING

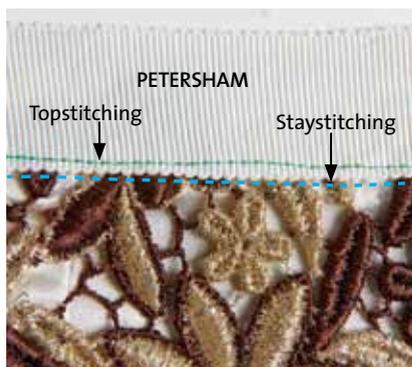
1 Lay the muslin pattern pieces over the lining fabric; cut with sufficient seam allowances. Transfer the markings. Then, sew the pieces together as usual. Press and trim the seam allowances.

2 Insert the lining into the skirt with wrong sides together. Turn under the lining's raw edges near the zipper and secure the lining along both sides of the zipper tape with small fell stitches. Fold the lining's bottom edge so it rests about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch above the hem; form an ease pleat, and attach it to the skirt's hem allowance with small running stitches.

COMPLETE THE WAIST

1 Join the fabric layers. Machine-staystitch along the waistline, joining all four layers: the guipure, the fashion fabric, the underlining, and the lining. Trim the waistline seam allowance to $\frac{3}{4}$ inch, and zigzag the raw edge.

2 Topstitch the petersham. Use a moderately hot iron and steam to shape a piece of petersham so it matches the skirt's top edge contour. Flip it over and align the new top edge with the staystitching line on the skirt's right side. The petersham will now cover the seam allowances. Topstitch it in place, as shown. Note: If the petersham has been oriented correctly, the unstitched edge will appear fluted. This will be fixed once the seam allowances are clipped.

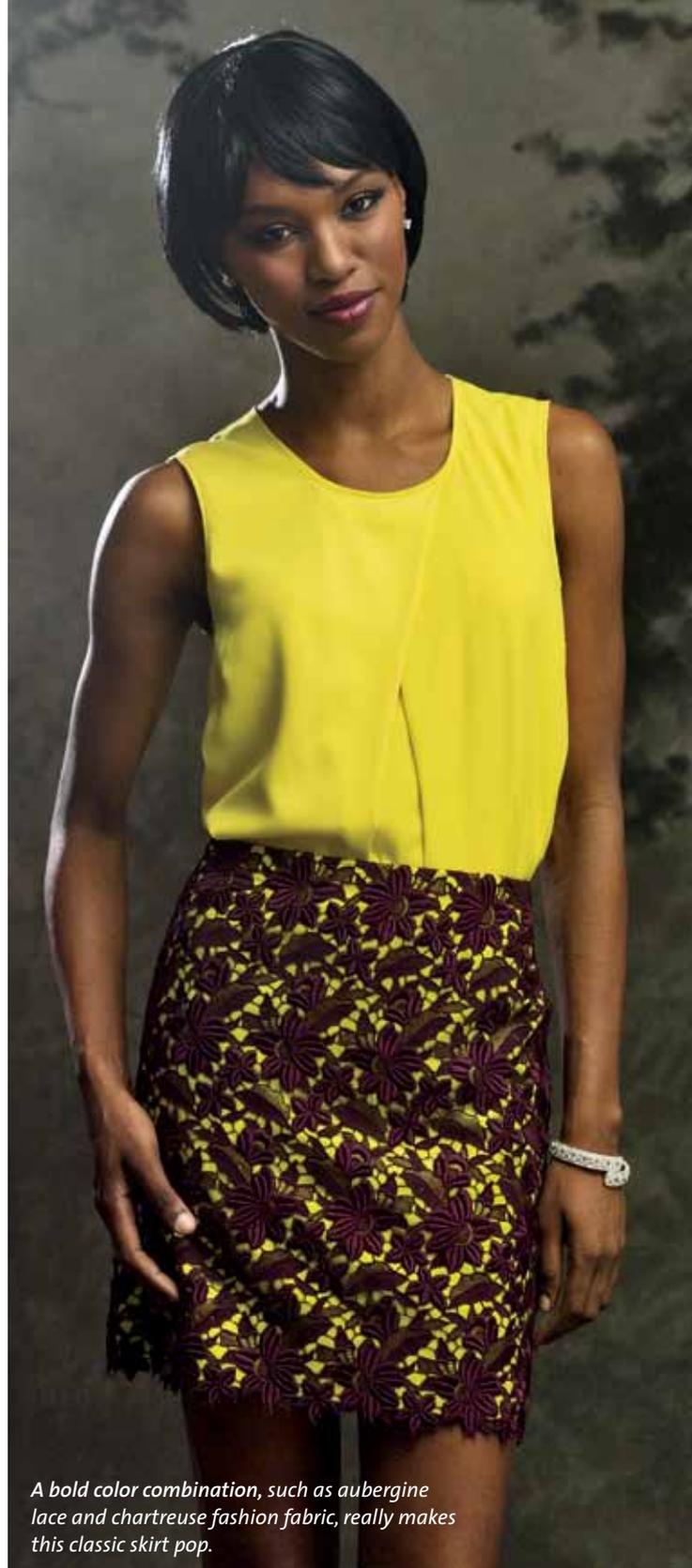


Topstitch the petersham to the skirt along the staystitching line.

3 Clip the seam allowance generously beneath the petersham. Then, fold the petersham and its underlayers inside the skirt, along the staystitching line. Press this edge firmly. Tack the petersham's lower edge to the darts and side seams.



4 Turn under the petersham's raw ends. Tack them in place with a few stitches near the zipper. Finish by securing a hook and eye to the petersham at the center back.



A bold color combination, such as aubergine lace and chartreuse fashion fabric, really makes this classic skirt pop.

LACE SOURCES

- BandFabrics.com
- Fabrics-Fabrics.com
- [Mendel Goldberg Fabrics](http://MendelGoldbergFabrics.com)
72 Hester Street
New York, NY 10002
(212) 925-9110