

HOW' ABOUT?

with Louise Howland



Have you been around long enough to remember the time when there were more fabric shops in a town than cafes? Today it seems we are fortunate if we have just one reasonable store within driving distance. In some desperation, I began trawling the garment district of New York City in search of a specialty fabric for embroidery kits.

Between 7th and 8th Avenues, on 39th and 40th Streets (even I can't get lost with this street numbering system) lies textile nirvana. In streets that seem the perfect blend of Mumbai and Paris you can find boucles and brocades, charmantes and cordovans, paramattas and pretty poplins.

Rare and endangered creatures of the textile species from around the world inhabit these lanes, mainly in free-ranged selections, but it is possible to stumble on some displayed in a categorised order.

Dedicated button stores, shops crowded with every length and shade of zipper, incomparably glorious ribbons and window after window displaying notions of each and every respect.

Hardly knowing which door to enter first, I browsed and spoke to those who have made textiles their business. All were knowledgeable about the scrappy sample I had in my hand and were full of helpful advice, adamant that this fabric could be found.

We all know how painful a fruitless search can be, but this was an exciting treasure hunt that was rewarding in itself. Can you believe a full six hours had passed before I realised I had better get serious.

Entering the very next door I

flashed my gold swatch at a handsome Indian gentleman. He smiled and pointed me in the right direction. I squeezed through bolts of fabric on the path to my special lame, but found myself distracted by cascading tambour beaded tulles, embroidered, sequinned silks, metallic denims, sparkling taffetas and sicilienes on the way.

Once I found the fabric I was so desperately seeking, the store owner rolled it and packed it to withstand airline handling, then we sat down to have some tea and swapped a few life stories.

Sunny, the store's proprietor, had been in this shop for just 10 years, but his other store, Weaver's Fabrics at 257B West 39th Street NY stocks thousands of fabrics, plus it has a dyeing works at the back where you can have as little as a yard of fabric dyed to your own specifications. Sunny's customers include home stitchers, tailors, well-known designers, such as Calvin Klein, plus many theatre, opera and ballet costumiers. Textiles have been his life's work, as they were for his parents and grandparents before him.

Some of his most expensive fabrics may be worth almost \$200 per roll - they are exquisitely embroidered and beaded silks, but what was the bargain of the day you ask? Well,



that's up to you! Sunny is disappointed if customers don't ask him for a better price.

Imports of inexpensive clothing to many countries may have led to a demise in the interest of home sewing, but it is comforting to see signs of renewed interest once again. Quality and individuality, choice, fit and satisfaction are the positives of bespoke tailoring. Whether or not you want to stitch, I guarantee a trip to this area of New York City will astound you just as much as the view from the Empire State Building or a concert at Carnegie Hall!

Till next month,

Louise

Share your tips!

Your ideas and feedback on these articles are very welcome, so do keep in touch. We'd also like to share the great tips you may have on any aspect of stitching and beading. A gift pack valued at \$50 which includes threads and a copy of The Art of Conversation will be sent to the best tip published each month. Email your handy hints to louise@taoc.com.au