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SPECIAL

The magazine for women



elissa K, a designer and sewing instructor in Manhattan, likens needlework to taking Prozac: 'You should see the look on people's faces when they create something - they're elated.' Elissa has rescued sewing from home economics class and New Yorkers are addicted. 'We teach how to achieve Prada taste for a reasonable price,' she says, which explains her roster of style disciples. 'We've had designers and assistants from Calvin Klein, Ralph Lauren and Prada, as well as costume designers, lawyers, make-up artists, opera singers, doctors, even flamenco dancers. People come here from the Metropolitan Museum, *The New York Times*, *Vanity Fair*, you name it.'

Frustrated by the bureaucracy of the fashion industry, Elissa began to teach sewing from her Chelsea loft in 1986. 'People were so grateful for common-sense stuff,' she says. 'I realised there was a real need for this.' Her school, Sew Fast Sew Easy, has since moved to West 57th Street, a neighbourhood padded with the same designers Elissa teaches New Yorkers to imitate. But for her, sewing is more than material; it's a matter of spiritual survival in a world dependent on remote controls and instant gratification. 'This is not Burger King; you cannot have it your way. Creativity is about struggle. The driving force in this society is that buying something makes you feel good. What about getting out a needle and thread, and creating?' Elissa keeps track of the industry, translating trends to the classroom. This spring's offerings include the regular line-up - pull-on skirt, computer-fitted skirt, pull-on pants and bodice - as well as faux-fur vests and a skirt/pant combo that skipped down recent runways. 'Sometimes I have to stay home because if I go into a department store, I get hyper,' Elissa admits. 'Not about buying but: How can I make that? How am I going to do it better?' **Liz Welch**
Sew Fast Sew Easy, 147 West 57th Street, New York, tel (001 212) 582 5889. Website: www.sewfastseweasy.com.

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