

Full disclosure: I have taken Laurel Hoffmann's classes on pattern engineering, fitting and couture construction techniques and I have participated in Laurel's process of improving her books with each class that has used them until she deemed them ready for publication. Her standards are very high and her willingness to make any changes in her books necessary to make them clear, useful and easy to follow is impressive. I was already an accomplished seamstress with over thirty years of experience when I first saw garments Laurel had made at a local event sponsored by the American Sewing Guild. I already knew how to make garments that did not look "homemade" by a long shot, but I knew immediately that I wanted to be able to produce garments of the quality of Laurel's garments. I started taking her classes as soon as I was able to and I took every one that she offered. Laurel's classes and her books used in them did not disappoint. I was able to take my expertise to levels unattainable with "home sewing" methods. I loved every class and eagerly and admiringly participated in the editing process of the books, but I have to say that Design Room Techniques was my favorite, probably because each week I learned something new that I could immediately apply to my own sewing.

Every technique explained in this book is accompanied by step-by-step scale (and whenever possible full-size) diagrams detailing every single aspect of the process, from the most elementary (where to sink your needle, how many stitches to take, etc) to the most comprehensive (how does the piece you are working on relate to all of the others in the garment, etc). It is possible to "see" everything that Laurel demonstrates in her classes by following the diagrams and the instructions that accompany them. You will learn how to put in a zipper in ways unimaginable from the instructions in the zipper package. The results will be elegant and secure. You will learn how to make welt pockets and trouser flies that home-sewing techniques simply cannot do. Cutting fabric in general and to match, seams and seam finishes, hems, gathering and pleats (including a gorgeous kick-pleat no longer found in any but the most expensive garments), neckline finishes, pockets (Think it's impossible to sew an invisibly stitched patch pocket? Think again!), lapping, various buttonholes including bound, linings, and drafting the patterns for a lined dress sewn with a pull-through method that leaves no unfinished edges in sight—all can be found amply explained in Design Room Techniques. Both machine- and hand-sewing techniques are explained, as well as the reasons why one would choose one over the other.

Design Room Techniques also has a very useful appendix and has every cross-reference possible included in the text or the notes. This is rare in books published now-a-days and it makes the book a delight to use. I have read many sewing books and magazines and none comes close to the detailed explanations in Laurel's books or the ease in using them.

If you are just learning to sew and this is your first book on sewing techniques, I envy you because you will start out learning the very best. If you are an experienced seamstress and/or tailor who learned to sew the "home sewing way," you will find in this book invaluable lessons on how to do everything you know how to do even better. If you are not able to take Laurel's classes you will miss the warmth, humor and encouragement that are her hallmarks, but with the detailed instructions and incredible diagrams in her books you can truly learn from the books what you can learn from her classes.