



Required trimmings: 0.35 m × 0.10 m 265 g 100% cotton canvas, cut on the bias; 0.35 m × 0.10 m 265 g 100% cotton canvas, cut on the straight; 0.20 m × 0.10 m 185 g 100% cotton canvas, cut on the straight; 0.50 m lightweight 1¼" fusible cotton-canvas tape; sewing thread, polyester, 120s; button-hole thread, polyester 80s; 1 × 16 line 4-hole button for collar; 7 × 16 line 4-hole button for fronts and cuffs plus spare if required.

MAKING A SHIRT

*A step-by-step guide to making a shirt by hand,
following the method of Lizzie Willett*

WHAT SAVILE ROW is to tailoring, Jermyn Street is to shirt making. This short street, a stone's throw from Savile Row, one block to the south of Piccadilly, is home to many of the most celebrated and finest shirt makers on earth.

Just as with Savile Row bespoke tailoring, so shirt making is taught through a lengthy apprenticeship, building through the simpler stages and culminating with learning to make collars and cuffs. The collar was once so important that up to the late 1950s many men wore shirts with separate collars. They were laundered and starched separately from the shirt and replaced more frequently to ensure they were always crisp and beautifully white.

Shirt making requires less handwork than tailoring, and a shirt-making apprenticeship typically lasts no more than a year, but it requires great skill; perfect hand-eye coordination; unparalleled control over the sewing machine; and exceptional manual dexterity to handle what in many cases are extremely lightweight and often delicate fabrics – much lighter than anything used by the tailors of Savile Row.

To make a shirt you will need a sewing machine with variable stitch length and a metal sewing plate to which a magnetic guide can be attached. You will also need a rotary cutter, shears, small scissors, snips, a magnetic sewing guide, and an iron.

The great majority of English handmade shirts are cut and sewn from high-quality two-fold cotton or linen shirt fabric, typically in qualities from 'two-fold 80S' to 'two-fold 140S', most often poplin or Oxford weaves. White remains by far the most popular choice, as are pale and deeper shades of blue. Finer fabrics including Sea Island cottons are also used, and linen is rising in

popularity because of its great comfort in the heat, its durability and its incredibly low environmental footprint. Also popular are brushed flannel-finish cottons, chambrays, and lightweight denims. Most good shirt cotton today is made either in Italy or Turkey, where a lot of cotton is grown. The best-quality linen is grown in Belgium, the Netherlands, and northern France.

The list of required trimmings is short – just the floating canvases used in the collar and cuffs, and the fusible canvas that stiffens the front hem. Two weights of canvas are used – a heavier one for the top collar and collar band, and a lighter one for the cuffs. This canvas is bought on a roll: the top collar is cut on the bias and everything else on the straight. A fusible canvas, which is bought cut-to-width on a roll, is used in the front hem.

Just as with bespoke trousers, there is a cutting-out stage to prepare and cut your chosen fabric. Following a lay plan, a card pattern is laid on to ensure no fabric is wasted, and pieces are typically cut directly without marking using a rotary cutter, as well as shears for some steps. As with bespoke tailored clothes, considerable attention is paid to matching the stripes and checks often found in men's shirts.

Making a shirt is typically divided into seven distinct stages: yoke to back; sleeves; fronts; side seam; collar and cuff; collar and cuff attach; button and buttonhole; ending; and press.

The combination of machine sewing during the setting stage and hand sewing during the finishing stage results in a functional and immaculately crafted garment that showcases the artistry, attention to detail, and exceptional quality that defines this age-old tradition. •