

## *We Dress Bleurette*

### **Suspender Dress—1921**

Suzanne Rivière tells us that this pretty little dress is very simple to make and permits one to utilize scraps of matching or different fabrics in solids, checks, plaids, stripes, or dots. The bodice can be made of different fabric from the skirt, and there are many ways to embellish the dress. For example, if using a larger check, in each of the white squares, place an embellishment—a rosette of braid, an embroidered flower, or other motif. If using solid fabric, you can chain stitch around the edges of the bodice, or make an embroidered motif at each point of the bodice. You can substitute braid or ribbon for the shoulder straps: Suzanne suggests you might try picot ribbon. [This is still made—ribbon that has little loops of thread along the edges, like tatting.]

Color schemes of the 1920s: chestnut & pale yellow, marine blue & pale blue, violet & mauve. Other colors of the 20s suggested: cerise, jade, khaki, orange, Japanese blue, or white. If using a plaid, Suzanne recommends that you match your blouse to the dominant color of the plaid.

#### **Blouse:**

First make the simple blouse to go under the suspender dress, if you do not have one that will be suitable already. If you are making the blouse to match the skirt, you could bind the neckline with the skirt fabric, and do the same for the sleeve openings.

Hem the center back edges of the back pieces, then sew, right sides together, the front to the backs at the shoulders. Press the seams open or to the back. With a bias strip of blouse fabric, skirt fabric, or other inconspicuous light-weight fabric (or commercial bias tape) of about 6" x 5/8" (a generous allowance), pin right side of bias to right side of neck opening, allowing a turn under at the center back edges of about 1/4", and stitch the neck facing to the blouse. Clip into the neckline seam allowance to allow the facing and neckline to stretch. You may now turn the facing in at the seam line so that it is hidden by the blouse, or you may leave a little extended above the seam line, like a tiny stand-up collar. Whichever you choose, turn the raw edges and ends of the bias binding under, trimming away any extra, and hem.

With right sides together, stitch the side seams of the blouse. Clip the underarm seam allowance to allow it to stretch and lie flat. Hem the sleeves (or bind them with the skirt fabric or the blouse fabric, if you wish) and the bottom of the blouse.

Add a closure of tiny snaps, or hooks and thread loops, or buttons with loops or buttonholes—your choice—with the right side overlapping the left. Three closures are usually sufficient—top, middle, and bottom.

#### **Dress:**

The original pattern instructs us to sew the two backs of the bodice to the front section at the side seams, and along the top edge of the entire piece, turn under 1/8" and stitch it down. Hem the center back opening of this piece.

### Alternative: Lined Bodice

If you prefer more finished edges, cut two fronts and 4 backs (you can make the lining of the same fabric, or of a lining fabric of your choice), and seam the backs to the front sections. Press the seams open on both sections, and with right sides together, pin the two together, and stitch using a 1/8" seam allowance, leaving the bottom of the bodice open to receive the skirt. Trim the corners and clip as needed, to make turning to the right side easier. When turned, push all the points out and finger press the seams before pressing with the iron.

Next, make the suspenders: the original pattern calls for hemming the long edges of the suspenders, but if you prefer, you can fold the strap right sides to the inside, lengthwise, make a 1/4" seam, and turn right side out. Working with the right sides out, you can also fold the two seam allowances toward the back, and on one, turn a small hem under, and hem it over the other. Measure to make sure your finished width is 5/8".

If you are adding embroidery or embellishment of any kind to the bodice, now is the time. Then sew the straps to the front points, on the inside of the bodice, but leave the straps free at the back until you have had a fitting with your doll.

Next, make a tiny rolled hem along the edges of the skirt (there will be a seam, but not till later), and run two lines of gathering thread through the seam allowance of the top of the skirt. Pull up the gathering to fit the bodice, keeping free 1/8" on each hemmed edge to turn under—this will allow for a seam partway up the back of the skirt. With right sides together, pin the skirt to the bodice, positioning the gathers nicely, turning each hemmed edge under at the edge of the bodice. Stitch in place. [If you have made a lined bodice, now turn under the seam allowance on the lining, and hem it in place over the skirt seam.] With right sides together, seam the back of the skirt from bottom edge to about halfway up the skirt. Press the seam open.

Now have a little fitting with your *Bleuette*, and see where the straps should be stitched in the back, and how long the skirt should be. Put on the blouse, and pin the dress closed over it to make sure you can see how it looks during this fitting. A proper fitting should always be done with appropriate under-clothing on, and shoes, too, so you fit according to real wearing conditions. As *Bleuette* has always had her own dressmaker, she will understand the importance of this step in the process and not object.

Hem the skirt and attach the suspenders in the back, trimming off any extra length. Allow the backs of the dress to overlap slightly right over left, and sew on closures of small snaps, hooks and thread loops, or buttons and loops. You could even make buttonholes, if you have enough overlap, and care to take the trouble. Sew trim buttons to the bodice points, if you are using them.

The ensemble is done!