

Vera[®] Textiles

ADD COLOR TO EVERYDAY FASHIONS



Jeanette Michalets & Katherine Michalets



A Schiffer Book With Price Guide

Vera[®]

Vera Textiles

Add Color To Everyday Fashions

Jeanette and Katherine Michalets



4880 Lower Valley Road, Atglen, PA 19310 USA

Dedication

This book is dedicated to Donald Michalets, husband and father extraordinaire. Thank you for your unwavering faith in us, for your creative input, and for your willingness to chauffeur us to just about every thrift shop and antique store in Wisconsin.

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Sources for Vera clothing, scarves and textiles:

Linda S. Byram
<http://GoAntiques/members/lindasclassiccollectibles>
eBay: crazyforvera

Luv Unlimited
2343 S. Kinnickinnic Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53207
Luvunlimited.com

The Yellow Jacket
2959 N. Lincoln
Chicago, Illinois

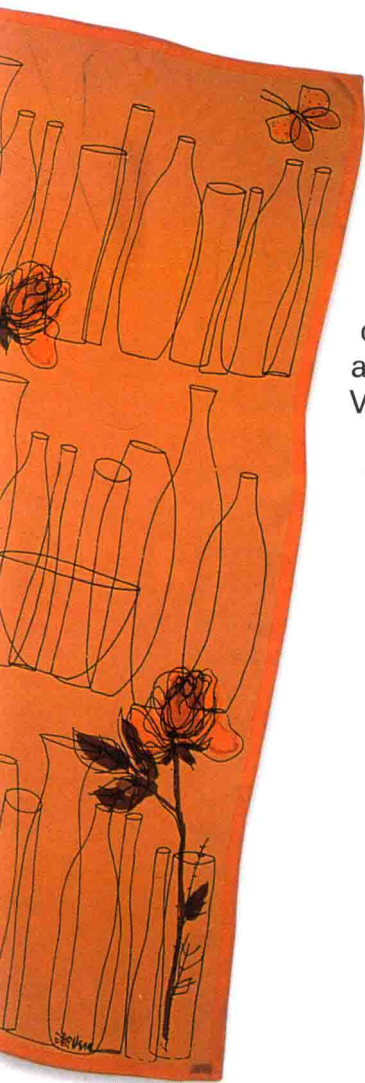


Preface

Our appreciation of Vera Neumann's designs began with a small collection of scarves. Several years ago, while Katherine was still in high school, she began collecting vintage scarves to stitch into pillows. Along the way, she found brightly-colored scarves in bold geometric patterns and abstract floral prints. All of these scarves were signed with only a first name, "Vera". Katherine began to wonder who this mysterious "Vera" was. Did Vera have a last name? Was she still alive?

Having come of age in the 1970s, I vaguely remembered seeing scarves in the department stores that were signed by Vera; however, at that time, I thought the signature read "Vena"! I do not recall seeing Vera-designed clothing for sale, but I am now certain the department stores I loved to frequent were filled with Vera clothing and textiles.

Katherine's interest in making pillows waned when she started college, but her interest in Vera's designs did not. At thrift stores and yard sales, Katherine and I began to find place mats and tablecloths, bed sheets, and napkins with Vera's signature. We conducted Internet research and discovered that in addition to scarves, Vera designed sportswear, blouses, dresses, and sleepwear. She also designed a myriad of items for the kitchen and home: sheet sets, bath towels, hand towels and wash cloths, tea towels, potholders, place mats, tablecloths, and aprons. She created a line of fabrics and wall-coverings for Schumacher & Co. and a vast array of dish designs for Mikasa and Island Worchester. She even designed goods as varied as facial tissue and luggage! Long before Martha Stewart, Vera Neumann was cross-licensing her work.



Introduction

Vera Neumann was truly a Renaissance woman. As an artist, designer, businesswoman, mother, and grandmother, she wore many hats and she wore them well. At a time when women were just beginning to venture into the corporate world, Vera was blazing her own trail, paving the road with bold-colored scarves and trendy garments. She was not afraid to take a fledgling business, one so small it could aptly be called a “kitchen industry” and run with it. She turned her tabletop silk screening craft into a multi-million-dollar empire.

While sorting through newspaper interviews and after speaking with a few people who were fortunate to have crossed paths with Vera Neumann, we came away with a sense of this remarkable artist. She was an intelligent, positive, determined, and daring woman who managed to remain humble. She was energized by her work and strove to constantly improve her art and her designs. She loved nature, people, and travel and took inspiration from them all. With her vivid-colored scarves and her up-to-the-minute clothing and cheerful home furnishings, she made everyday life a little brighter and, like her ladybug logo, the name “Vera” became synonymous with “happiness.”

Design Motifs and Use of Color

According to Wolfgang Saxon, writing for the *New York Times*, “Vera Neumann ...was a painter whose work was exhibited in many countries and her designs typically began as paintings.”¹

Many of Vera’s paintings were inspired by nature, by her travels abroad, and by Asian culture and motifs. She traveled to Ireland and incorporated shamrocks and cobblestones into her work. She traveled to China and utilized Chinese calligraphy in her designs. Some of her scarves were fabricated in China and bear her famous signature in both English and Chinese. She visited Africa and returned with artifacts she later incorporated into textiles and scarves. Vera traveled the globe, sketchbook in hand, while her husband, George, toted his camera.

Vera also incorporated flowers, trees, leaves, nuts, fruits, and butterflies into her art. Fruit is a design element on many aprons, napkins, and tea towels. Vera even used fruit in clothing designs, creating dresses with watermelons or strawberries displayed prominently on the garment. She sometimes included butterflies in her floral prints. Ferns and leaves were also favorites of this nature-loving artist.

With her floral designs, Vera looked to her own garden for inspiration. She was partial to poppies, daffodils, orchids, and daisies. Her flowers are generally abstract (especially in her mid-century work) and often simply “suggest” these particular flowers. As with her geometric designs, Vera created designs that are open to interpretation. This makes her work intriguing. Is the design a star or a flower? Fish scales or just squiggly lines? A poppy or a tulip?

I feel it is safe to say Vera’s earlier work was more conventional in both motif and color than her later designs. On her early scarves and handkerchiefs, a rose

is a rose is a rose. Her use of color also tended to be more traditional. Later, throwing convention to the winds, Vera painted blue carrots, tan radishes, and tan pea pods and then transferred these uniquely colored vegetables to a blouse. She painted blue carrots and blue apples on a place mat.

Vera did favor certain colors, however. Orange was one of them. Stephanie Mansfield quoted Vera as having said, "I'm a Leo, a sun person. I've had a sun in every collection."² Besides sunny oranges and yellows, Vera appears to have favored combinations of blues and greens. Many of her scarves and textiles featured these two colors in shades from turquoise to navy, lime to emerald. She also created elegant designs in shades of copper, brown, black, and white, as well as red, white, and blue.

According to Sharon Cheswick, from the rich blues of the skies of Morocco, contrasted with the North African country's white buildings, came the Vera Industries' Porto Fino blue. From Mexico, Vera brought back combinations of color (hot pink) and texture.³

Vera was well known for her bold geometric designs, as well as for her floral ones. Rectangles, squares, squiggly lines, bold stripes and sunbursts were just some of the forms that took shape on her canvas. Like Emilio Pucci, another fashion designer to whom she is often compared, Vera used bright colors to bring these geometric designs to life; however, while Pucci designed for the more affluent crowd, Vera's designs were affordable for the average American. Vera was quoted in a *New York Times* article as having said, "More of the ordinary people can buy my things than a \$500 dress or a \$200 scarf. It's not because it's cheaper, but I feel I have given people more joy with the designs I create for them."⁴

Fabric also played an important role in Vera's work. Her earliest scarves were made of silk, some of it parachute silk that was available after World War II. Her designs were silk screened in her Ossining, New York studio and had hand-rolled edges. These scarves feel wonderful to the touch. This silk feels slightly more delicate than the silk used a bit later. Many of Vera's finest designs were created on silk and usually command higher prices than the designs printed on synthetic materials. For the purpose of this book, we have placed higher values on the scarves that were screened on silk and screened in the United States.

Silk scarves were also produced in Japan, as were scarves that are part silk and part rayon. The ratio is generally around 60% silk, 40% rayon. These partial-silk scarves also have a luxurious feel.

Vera employed an array of synthetic materials as well. They include acetate, polyester, nylon, and vinal.

Cotton scarves are less common, as are wool ones. Cotton scarves were made in Italy and Japan. The Acute© line began as a line of cotton scarves, designed for women aged 18-35.⁵

Special Scarves

Reader will note a section in this book devoted to Vera's scarves designed to commemorate special events or places. We have discovered a souvenir-type scarf from the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, as well as a scarf that was designed for "The First Lady's Luncheon, May 1984," held at President and Mrs. Reagan's ranch. Another special scarf depicts a stencil found in an historic home in New York, the Lippitt House. Also of note is a scarf commemorating premium wines of 1953. Additionally, included in this chapter, are scarves that depict people and animals, which stand out from other Vera designs.

The Famous Signature and the Ladybug

The only Vera-designed scarves we encountered that are not signed are some scarves in solid colors, some tube scarves, and some "specials." These unsigned scarves have tags that indicate that Vera designed the scarf; all other scarves we found with pattern or design are signed. Sometimes the Vera© signature is very small, at other times it is quite large. There is a medium-sized signature, as well.

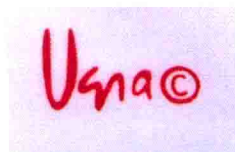
The size of the signature can be used to help date the scarf. Early signatures are quite small. The earliest signatures are not copyrighted and, thus, are not followed by the copyright symbol that first appeared in 1968. The appearance of the signature itself also changed a bit over time. On the earliest scarves, the "V" in Vera's signature is more open and almost resembles the letter "U".

Mid-century scarves were signed, with a ladybug coming either before or after the signature. Because of this, some collectors refer to Vera as "the ladybug lady." It is commonly believed that the ladybug appeared on scarf designs created from the mid 1950s and continued into the 1960s, although some sources say the ladybug was in existence until the 1980s. One of the scarves in this book features a ladybug design throughout the scarf.

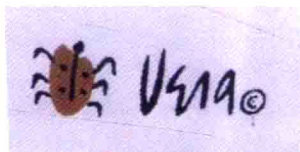
Vera used the ladybug symbol because it meant "happiness" in all languages. Vera's distinctive signature also appears as a design element in many of her clothing items, being incorporated right into the pattern. Not all clothing features the signature in the pattern, but many items do. Unless the purchaser has removed the tag, a clothing item will have a tag with Vera's signature. In blouses, the tag is usually quite large and is stitched into the neck of the garment. Some cotton shirts and skirts have only a small tag sewn into a seam, with "Vera" in smaller script. Sleepwear was designed for a company called "Formfit Rogers." The tags in these garments read: "Vera© for Formfit Rogers." The sleepwear was often two pieces, a gown and a robe. Sometimes, the gowns are sold as dresses on the Internet.

If a patterned scarf is not signed, it is probably not a Vera design. Clothing can be more difficult to determine if tags have been cut out. First, look for the signature in the design. If there is no tag and no signature in the design, it is a judgment call as to whether a garment is a Vera design or not. Many look-a-likes and knock-offs exist, so buyers beware.

For other textiles, some are signed and some are not. Some of Vera's napkins are signed, usually the more elaborate ones, while others are not. Tea towels and hand towels are generally signed. Many tablecloths are signed, but we have found some with only labels. Sheets and pillowcases often display Vera's signature. Leather belts have Vera's name on the inside of the belt.



Detail of small signature with no ladybug.



Detail of small signature with a ladybug.



Detail of large signature with no ladybug.



Detail of large signature with ladybug.

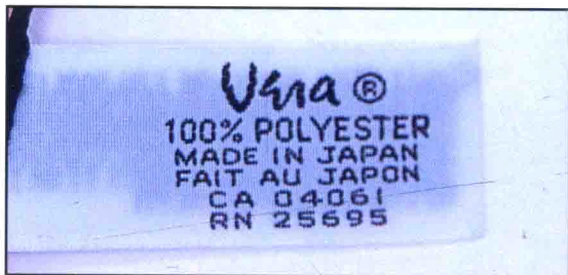
Vera Tags



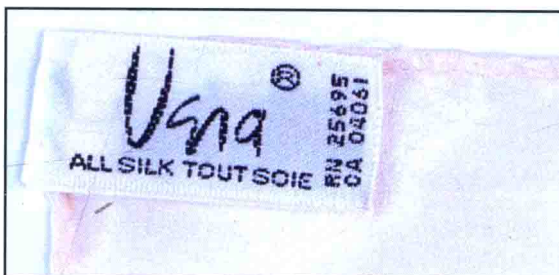
Detail of © scarves by Vera tag and care instructions tag.



Detail of "all-wool" scarf tag.



Detail of Vera © tag.



Detail of "all silk" tag.



Detail of Verasheer® tag.



Detail of Veracrepe® tag.



Detail of Veresa™ by Vera® tag.



Detail of Acute © tag.



Detail of tag for cotton scarf made in Italy.



Detail of Prima Vera™ Collection tag.



Detail of © Gold-Piece collection collector scarves by Vera tag.



Detail of Vera collection by Burlington Co. tag.



Detail of Anne Klein® for the Vera® Companies tag.



Detail of Vera collection by Burlington sheet tag.



Detail of Burlington Co. tag.

Where to Shop

Vintage clothing stores and boutiques are a good source for Vera garments. These stores sell clean items in good to excellent condition. The shop owners are usually knowledgeable about vintage textiles and are happy to keep their eyes open for specific items for their customers. Another advantage to boutique shopping is that the customer may try on a garment and get a good idea of style and fit. Prices for designer vintage clothing are generally still lower than prices for new designer clothing and the stores are fun to shop in.

Antique shops are another good source for Vera designs. Look for shops where dealers sell vintage clothing. Pricing depends on how much the dealer knows about Vera, and how much the dealer paid for the item.

What also makes hunting for "Vera" fun today is that scarves and kitchen linens may be found quite frequently at thrift stores. There is nothing like the thrill of finding a Vera scarf in mint condition for .25 to \$2.00. It seems that scarves are items that are still readily donated to thrift shops, so these stores are a good source for the collector. The downside of these stores is that one often has to "rummage" through merchandise in order to find a bargain and these "bargains" may be soiled or torn. It often takes a lot of time and dedicated searching to find items in thrift shops.



Vera paints the Vale of Kashmir

"Vera paints the Vale of Kashmir"
fashion ad from 1969.

Models wearing Vera's Vale of
Kashmir line of clothing.

COPYRIGHT 1969. SCARVES BY VERA.

Vera wraps you in the verdant green of the Vale of Kashmir. Wear Vera's sun-splashed, water-dashed "Kashmir" canvas as a silk scarf for head, shoulders, waist, what-you-will, \$8. Or, left: Wrap yourself full-length in it as a toe-touching, fringe-sashed sheath, \$50. Center: Shift into fashion high with this shift that has its own sash scarf, \$38. Right: Languish in a belted tunic, \$30, with Ban-Lon® stretch pants, \$16. Most in sizes 6 to 18. Prices slightly higher in the west. Vera's Vale of Kashmir is at fashionable stores now. In Ban-Lon® knits.

...for you to wear

Vera
FOR ART LOVERS

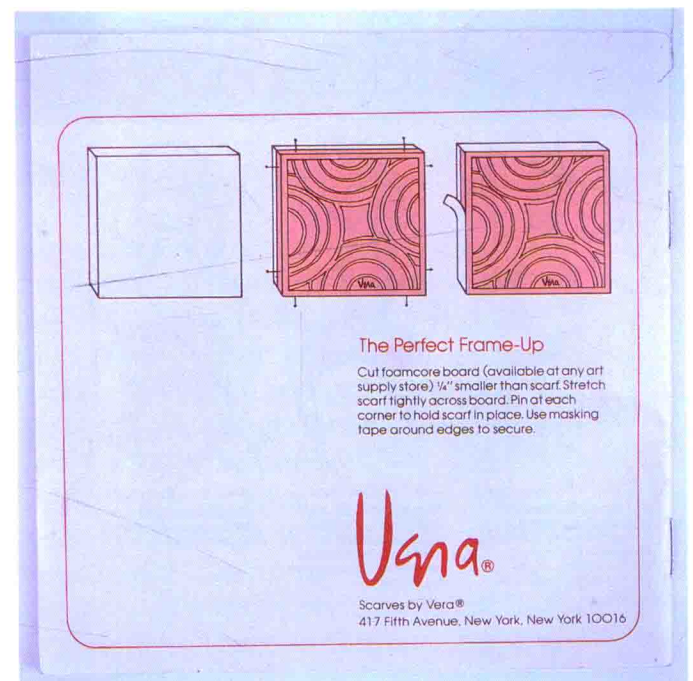
Yard sales and estate sales are another source, but these are often hit-and-miss. Look for estate sales that offer items from the '60s and '70s. If clothing is for sale, one will often find scarves and other textiles. If you are lucky, you might find a whole box of scarves, some of which are by Vera, or like me, you may find a Vera blouse hanging in a closet, waiting for a new home.

If you enjoy the ease of armchair shopping, then online auctions are for you. They are a great way to find the biggest variety of Vera items all in one place. You can type in a specific category such as "Vera place mats," or "Vera dress" or "Vera scarves" and be presented with a rainbow of choices. Many people enjoy the bidding wars and the thrill of getting a bargain on eBay or the thrill of locating that one item they are missing from their collection. For a vast selection, online auctions cannot be beat.

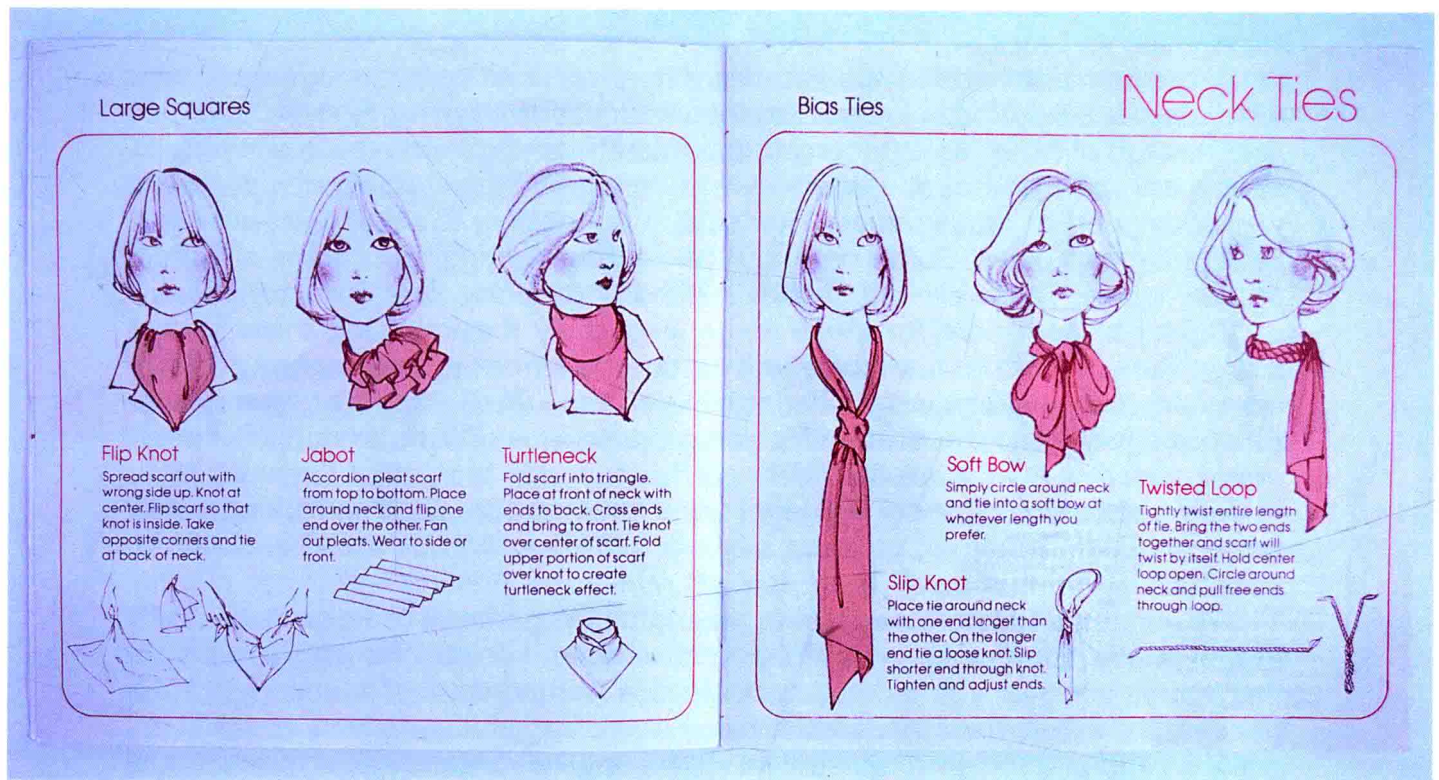
Last, but not least, ask your mother or grandmother or their friends if they have any Vera items. Don't be surprised if they don't know they have Vera items tucked away in a drawer or a closet or if they are unaware that Vera textiles are collectible. On the other hand, they may fondly remember purchasing Vera items and have treasured them for years. Just "asking around" is how I found many items to photograph for this book.



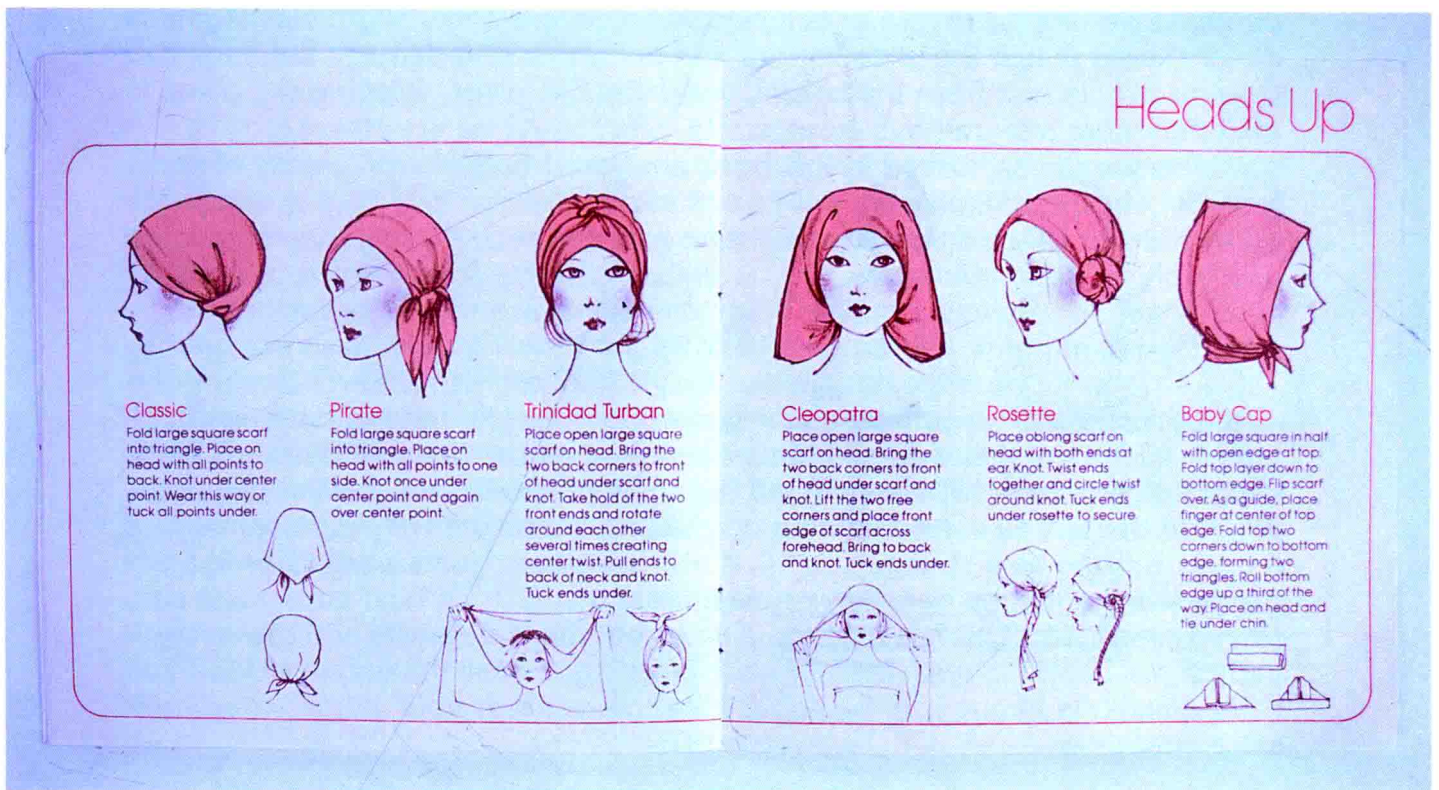
"The art of scarf tying" booklet from Scarves by Vera.



Detail of back cover of booklet.



This page from scarf tying booklet illustrates neck tying techniques.



This page from scarf tying booklet illustrates head scarf tying techniques.