



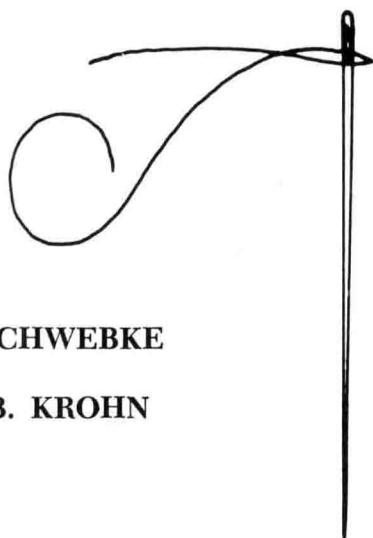
HOW TO SEW LEATHER, SUEDE, FUR

PHYLLIS W. SCHWEBKE
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VOGUE Pattern #7515

HOW TO SEW *Leather, Suede, Fur*

REVISED EDITION



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HOW TO SEW
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FOREWORD





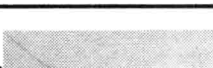

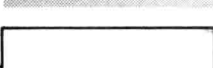



This book has been written to assist the home sewer and student in the fashioning of garments from leather, suede, and fur. It may be used not only at home, but in the adult education, college, or high school classroom.

It is assumed that the person who creates garments and accessories from leather, suede, and fur has some knowledge and skill in the fundamentals of sewing. In this book, we have attempted to present, briefly and concisely, the basic techniques of sewing with leather, suede, and fur. This has been done in a step-by-step format with numerous illustrations so that the person who uses this book will have as much information and help as she needs to make fine garments and accessories.

The authors wish to express their appreciation to their former students in their classes during the years the materials were tested. They are grateful to Mrs. Willard L. Fuller for the inspiring fashion sketches. Mrs. Krohn desires to thank her husband, Dr. Armin F. Krohn, and her children, Timothy, Jennifer, and Priscilla; and, Mrs. Schwebke, her husband, Prof. Howard Schwebke, her sons, John and James, and her American Field Service son, Risto Savilahti, for their loyal support and encouragement during this endeavor.

The authors dedicate this book to those who desire to create fashionable garments from leather, suede, and fur.

DRAWING KEY

LEATHER—RIGHT SIDE		FUR SIDE	
LEATHER—WRONG SIDE		SKIN SIDE	
LEATHER—RIGHT SIDE		GROSGRAIN	
LEATHER—WRONG SIDE		TWILL TAPE	
INTERFACING		UNDERLINING	

The various drawings indicate the characteristics of the materials to be used. By comparing the shadings in the drawings throughout the book with this key, you will be able to select the appropriate material for the job.

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LEATHER AND SUEDE



McCall's Pattern # 2279

1

LEATHER— THEN AND NOW

Leather has played an important role in the development of civilization. From prehistoric times man has used the skins of animals to satisfy his basic needs. He has used hides to make clothing, shelter, carpets, and even decorative attire. To the Egyptian lady, a fur piece was as highly prized as her jewelry. From leather, man made footwear, belts, clothing, containers for liquids, boats, and even armor. The principal protective armor of the Roman soldier was a heavy leather shirt.

In recorded history, pieces of leather dating from 1300 B.C. have been found in Egypt. Primitive societies in Europe, Asia, and North America all developed the technique of turning skins into leather goods independently of one another. The Greeks were using leather garments in the age of the Homeric heroes (about 1200 B.C.), and the use of leather later spread throughout the Roman Empire. During the Middle Ages, the Chinese knew the art of making leather. The Indians of North America also had developed great skills in leatherwork before the coming of the white man.

At some time, by accident or by trial and error, man discovered methods of preserving and softening leather by treating animal skins with such things as smoke, grease, and bark extracts. The art of tanning leather using the bark of trees probably originated among the Hebrews. In primitive societies, the art was a closely guarded secret passed down from father to son. As civilization developed in Europe, tanners and leatherworkers united in the trade guilds of the Middle Ages, as did the craftsmen in other fields. Royal charters or licenses were issued permitting people to practice leather tanning. In 1620 Experience Miller brought the knowledge of tanning to the early English colonies in America. In

the nineteenth century, vegetable tanning, i.e., tanning using extracts from the bark of certain kinds of trees, was supplemented by chrome tanning. This process uses chemicals and today accounts for about ninety percent of all tanning done in the United States except for the leather used in the soles of shoes and tooling leathers.

In recent years, about 75 million hides have been used in the leather industry annually. Leather goods contribute about 1.7 billion dollars to our gross national product every year. Most of the leather (about eighty-five percent) is used in the manufacture of shoes.

PREPARATION OF LEATHER AND SUEDE

Leather and suede are made from the hides of domestic and wild animals. The process by which these hides and skins are transformed into supple, pliable leathers is called tanning. The two principal methods of tanning are vegetable tanning and chrome tanning.

Vegetable tanning uses the extracts from tree bark. Since the finished leather produced by this process absorbs moisture, this leather is used when tooling is required. Also, shoe soles, luggage, upholstery, and harnesses are made from vegetable-tanned leather. However, vegetable tanning is a long and expensive process and for many leather products, it has been replaced by chrome tanning. It is a much faster and less expensive method than vegetable tanning. Hence, it is used for almost all the leather to be used in making shoe uppers, gloves, and garments. Chrome tanning makes leather resistant to water, though not waterproof since leather is porous. However, the fibers of the leather are tightened and the tensile strength is increased.

Sometimes a combination of these two methods is used and this is referred to as "retanning" or "combination tanning."

In brief, the processes involved in the making of leather and suede are:

Curing and Cleaning.

1. The hide is salted for ten to fifteen days.
2. The hair is removed with a lime solution and then a dehairing machine.
3. Flesh is removed by a machine.
4. Scudding or scraping the skin by hand removes any remaining hair or flesh.

Tanning.

1. Hides are placed on racks and soaked in the tanning solution. In vegetable tanning they are moved to stronger vats from day to day.
2. The tanning solution is washed out.

Shaving.

If the leather is uneven in thickness, it is shaved in thick spots.

Drying.

Toggling, Staking, or Brushing.

1. In toggling, the leather is stretched to remove excess elasticity.
2. In staking, the leather, which has formed an exterior coat during the tanning process, is washed over metal stakes to break the crust and make the leather pliable.
3. In brushing, the leather is cleaned and made soft and pliable by working it with brushes.

Sorting.

The leather is graded according to specific characteristics of quality.

Coloring and Finishing.

1. Natural leather is plated (ironed).
2. Smaller hides are dyed in tumblers, toggled, and dried.
3. Color is sprayed on larger hides.



4. An embossed design simulating the skin of another animal may be plated or ironed on some skins to give them a more expensive appearance.
5. In the Levant Process, the leather is crushed to give it the appearance of fine Levant morocco which has large, irregular grain patterns.
6. In glazing, the leather is polished on a glass cylinder to produce a high-gloss finish.

Measuring.

1. Machines measure the surface area of the leather, even allowing for the holes.
2. Gauges are used to measure the thickness of the leather.

Grading.

1. Grading is done by the human eye and hand.
2. See "How do you order leather?" on p. 9.

PREPARING DEER, ELK, AND MOOSE HIDES FOR TANNING

1. Skin the animal carefully to avoid cuts and breaks.

2. Spread the rawhide flat with the flesh side up as soon as the skin is removed and remove any remnants of tallow or flesh. If left on, this material heats the hide and results in a poor quality leather.
3. Sprinkle water softener or livestock salt liberally over the entire flesh side.
4. Allow the hide to remain flat for at least twenty-four hours before shipping.
5. Roll the hide onto a cylinder leaving the salt inside. Do not fold, stretch, or lay the hide flat before tanning.
6. Prepare the hide for shipping to the tannery:
 - a) Tie the hide securely with twine.
 - b) Put it in a burlap bag or a sturdy paper carton.
 - c) Ship it express, prepaid, and properly tagged.
7. Chart the hide for size from various dressed weights of deer:

Deer 90 to 125 lb.—Small
 Deer 125 to 150 lb.—Medium small
 Deer 155 to 180 lb.—Medium large
 Deer 180 to 200 lb.—Large
 Deer over 200 lb.—Extra large

2

SELECTING LEATHER FOR CLOTHING

WHY LEATHER AND SUEDE GARMENTS?

Leather has been called "nature's gift to man." Clothes made of leather and suede allow ventilation, absorption, and evaporation of moisture. In other words, it "breathes." The millions of tiny air spaces among the fibers provide insulation and ventilation for warmth in the winter and comfort in the summer. It is ideal for high fashion costumes or sportswear. In Italy, Germany, England, and the Scandinavian countries, as well as in America, leather and suede are gaining in importance as a material for apparel. Leather is practically indestructible, easily cleaned, comfortable to wear, and easy to work on, since it drapes well and is sewn like fabric. Leather is used for coats, jackets, suits, slacks, dresses (floor length or short), jumpers and vests, various trims, and as panels let into skirts and sweaters. Suede has taken the top selling spot in many parts of the country, supplanting leathers and kidskins.

WHAT KINDS OF LEATHERS ARE USED FOR GARMENTS?

A soft leather is desirable for making garments. There are many leathers tanned expressly for garments such as goatskin, calfskin, buckskin, horsehide, cowhide, and some steerhides. The covering of smaller animals, such as calves, sheep, and goats, which weigh less than 15 pounds, is referred to as *skin*. A *hide* is taken from a larger animal of 25 pounds or more. *Kip* is the term used for sizes between 15 and 25 pounds. It is interesting to note that no animal produces both fur and leather.

Some leathers are used expressly for garments, but others have many other uses (Figure 1). Fashion garment leathers are usually suede and capeskin. Suedes are from the inside skin of young lambs. Smooth leathers from lambskin



Pigskin—gloves, saddles, luggage, undersoles, etc.



Buckskin—gloves, uppers of shoes



Cowhide—soles, and uppers for shoes, luggage, etc.



Goatskin—women's shoes, suede, handbags



Sheepskin—slippers, handbags, chamois, hat bands, et



Calfskin—shoes, handbags, gloves, luggage, etc.

Figure 1

are capeskin, cabretta, kidskin (not imported glove kidskin), and glacé leather. Most of the patina on "reptile" leather has been artificially applied.

A *garment suede* is a specially selected New Zealand lambskin with a silky nap and can be used for jackets, hats, and coats (Figure 2). The skins average 6 to 8 square feet in size and come in approximately twelve colors. Suede which is hand washable and commercially dry cleanable will soon be available.

Sheer suedes for skirts, dresses, jumpers and suits are available by various



Figure 2

Suede coat with piped seam edges

names as *Antelamb*, *Plainsman Sheer*, and *Sewsoft Sheer suede*. This leather is lightweight, soft and supple, and handles like fine fabric.

Capeskin is a smooth, full-grain, imported lambskin which is used for coats, jackets, matching hats, and bags. The skins average 6 to 9 square feet in size. A



shelter cape is available at one company in white only and is treated by spraying to resist soiling. It can be cleaned with a sponge and soap and water. *Princess garment lamb* is another brand name leather used for jackets, coats, skirts, and vests. It is available in pastels and many darker colors. *Garment Cabretta* is a popular smooth capeskin garment leather with a distinctive character. It is available in black, brown, tan, red, white, and beige. *Buck-Tanned Cowhide* is a fine cream color cowhide in 20 to 25 foot sides used for Indian garments. *Softan Garment Cowhide* is a cowhide ideal for jackets and coats. It is available in black, brown, beige, and white.

Glove Horse is a soft, supple, easy-to-handle horsehide for outdoor jackets and coats which one expects to give hard wear. This leather is available in cream and pearl in 15 to 20 foot sides.

Hair Calf is a skin with the hair remaining, as the name suggests. The grade of this skin is determined by the marking pattern and the lack of bald spots. In *Short-Hair Calf*, the hair of the animal is left its natural length. Short hair calfskins range from 4 to 6 square feet. Another type of hair calf is *Clipped Hair Calf*; it has been smoothly sheared. It is excellent for garments requiring short hair and large skins.

Cobra is a snakeskin with a definite, flat scale. The full skin averages about 4½ to 5 inches wide and 4½ to 5 feet long. It is dyed in many colors. Cobraskins are used for vests, belts, buttons, collars, and welt pockets. It is available in cording by the yard for edging garments and other trimming.

Deerskin (Figure 3) is a hide from deer averaging 7 to 12 square feet. It is available in black, gray, cork, oatmeal, natural, and white.

Shearling is sheepskin tanned with the wool on. The nap may vary in length from ¼ to ¾ inch. It is used for cold weather garments. Shearling comes in dark beige, pink, blue, and white with brown backs. The skins range from 6 to 10 square feet.

Peccary is pigskin which has a smooth finish with a grained effect since the bristles have been removed. It is soft, pliable, and durable. The skins are generally from 5 to 7½ square feet and are available in cork, oatmeal, white, black, and gray. *Pigtex* or *Pecca Pig* are trade names for lambskins embossed or marked to resemble natural pigskin. The skins average 5 to 7 square feet and come in brown, natural, black, green, cork, red, wine, gray, and oatmeal.

Kidskin is imported goatskin; it is a sturdy leather, very soft and pliable. It is often used in suede.

Antique leather refers to a mottled finish in a textured kidskin with a soft patina handle.

G.M.L. (genuine milled leather) is a yard goods with pulverized leather applied to a textile backing, dyed in leather tones and patterned. It is used for tailored clothes and evening gowns as well as for children's clothes. The surface may be refreshed with a sponge or cloth dipped in suds or cleaning fluid or it may be dry-cleaned.

HOW DO YOU ORDER LEATHER?

Small skins, such as goat, calf, or lamb (suedes), are usually sold in the whole skin. A calf usually runs from 9 to 15 square feet and sheep and goats from 5

Figure 3

Deerskin vest combined with wool

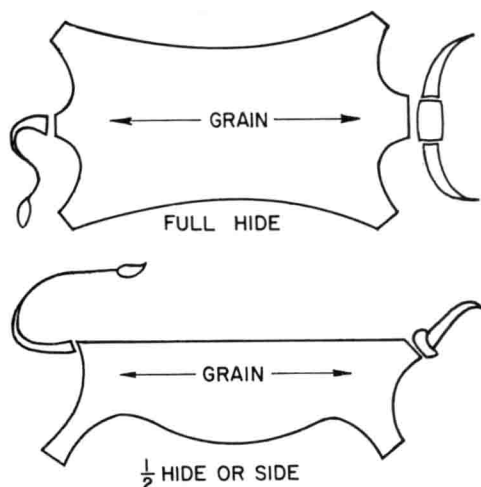


Figure 4

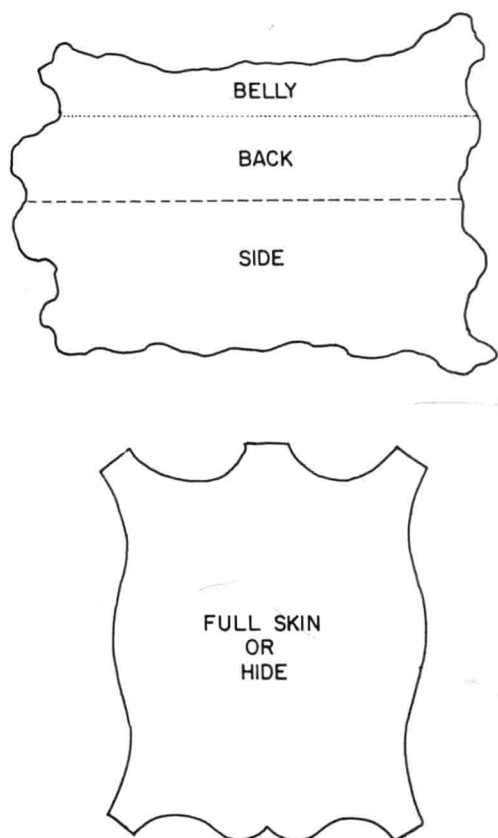


Figure 5

to 9 square feet. A *side* refers to one half a full skin (Figure 4). The lower part of a side is called the *belly*. The choice part of a side is the *back* which has less waste than the side and costs more because the belly was removed (Figure 5).

Because leather is not manufactured as is fabric, it is less uniform than other sewing materials. There are many factors which may cause a variation in the skin or hide of an animal such as the age, climatic conditions, the food and care given it, the season in which it was slaughtered, and the skill used in tanning.

Leather dealers use ounces to designate the relative thickness of leather. One-ounce leather weighs 1 ounce per square foot; 3-ounce leather weighs 3 ounces per square foot, and so on. One-ounce leather is approximately $\frac{1}{64}$ inch thick. Since the weight and thickness of one hide varies slightly, the markings may read $\frac{7}{8}$ ounce. Such a piece of leather would weigh between 7 and 8 ounces per square foot and be $\frac{7}{64}$ or $\frac{8}{64}$ inches in thickness. Figure 6 is a scale for determining the thickness of leather.

There are no exact standards or methods for grading leather since it is done by "sight and feel" developed through training and experience. Thus, a given grade may vary slightly from time to time. Leathers are graded 1, 2, 3, 4, and so forth, or A, B, C, D, DX. Since there is less leather produced in grade 1 or A, the price is higher. The grade does not affect the wearing quality, but it does affect the useable portion of the hide.



Figure 6