

With needle and thread

Kathy Renwald

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You can buy a needle and thread downtown again. Fabric, too. If you don't know how to sew, you also can learn how.

The just-opened Needlework is a boutique fabric store and sewing room. Like the hip ones on Queen West in Toronto as well as London and New York, Needlework caters to a growing crowd of people who want to make it themselves.

Textile student Kate Hunter and friend Liz Simpson opened the store at 174 James St. N. after a year of planning, and a few "am I crazy?" doubts and worries, according to Hunter.

Needlework sells fabric and sewing supplies, including needles, thread, scissors, patterns, zippers and buttons. Since Eaton's closed 13 years ago, stitchers in the King and James area had to trek to Ottawa Street just for a thimble. What makes Needlework unique is the classes they hold — from basic sewing to more skilled projects such as making shirts and pants. The three-hour sessions on evenings and weekends are \$45, plus materials.

Hunter and Simpson will teach some of the basic courses and specialists have been recruited to teach quilting, felting, embroidery, even moccasin making.

Needlework is equipped with five Bernina sewing machines, a large work table, and an ironing station. Sewing machines can also be rented for \$6 an hour for individual projects.

Opening Needlework is a leap of faith for the two twentysomethings. Hunter is a few months away from graduating Sheridan College's textile design course. Simpson is self-taught in sewing and textile crafts.

Though it's a passion for both women, they're learning about the financial side of running a business.



NEEDLEWORK. Liz Simpson, left, and Kate Hunter sell sewing supplies, offer classes and rent sewing machines at Needlework, a new store on James Street North. Photos by Kaz Novak/The Hamilton Spectator Source: The Hamilton Spectator

They received a \$10,000 grant from the Canadian Youth Business Foundation.

"We had to make a business plan, and that really forced us to think through our goals and expectations," says Hunter. A loan from "the bank of my parents" also helped, Hunter adds.

Equipment and furnishings were bought second hand, and the pair worked long hours painting and decorating the attractive space.

"The response has been amazing, especially on social media," says Simpson. After mentions on Twitter and Facebook, they had a steady stream of visitors during the February Art Crawl.

"We were getting asked if we hemmed pants too. We sent people next door to Olinda's for that work," says Simpson.

A mini textile row might be developing on James North, next to Needlework, Olinda's Fashion Studio does alterations, designs and dressmaking, and further north, Hansen and Lubbers make drapes and furniture coverings.

Fabric at Needlework is cotton, some of it organic with water-based dyes. The selection is a colourful blend of vintage and modern prints. Both women like the work of American textile design Amy Butler, and carry her whimsical fabrics. The average price is \$14 a metre.

Visit iloveneedlework.com for a list of sewing classes and other projects

Kathyrenwald.com

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