

What is Batik fabric, where does it come from and how is it made?

Batik is a basic hand-dyeing method elevated to an art form. The artist uses wax as a “resist” to create patterns on fabric. The word Batik seems to come from an Indonesian word 'ambatik', a cloth with little dots.

Even though its exact history is uncertain, batik dates back to the first century where it was discovered in ancient Egyptian tombs. Evidence of early Batik has also been found all over the Middle East, in India, Central Asia and Africa. By the nineteenth century, after the importation of more finely woven cloth from India and Europe, it became a highly accomplished art form in Java and Bali in Indonesia. Recognizable motifs, patterns and colors were developed and designed to identify one's family, social status and geographic origin.

Today, the majority of batik fabrics that we use in quilting and home sewing are imported to the United States from Indonesia. The fabric used for making batik is a high quality tightly woven PFD (prepared for dyeing) fabric able to withstand the many processes in making a batik. Unlike commercial screen printed fabrics, batiks are still made by hand using the traditional wax and dye methods. There are numerous methods of applying the resist to the fabric. The three most common are: 1) using a Chanting tool for free hand drawing each and every line and dot in the design, 2) applying the wax to the fabric by hand using a metal chop (tjap) 3) using a sponge or brush to apply the resist. For production fabrics, chops are the method of choice, simply because they are faster to use. Batiks are 100% handmade from start to finish.

Once a design has been approved for production, a metal artist needs to make a chop. A chop is entirely made by hand from copper pieces set in a metal frame. On average it takes about 2 weeks to make a chop. A chop is used to stamp the hot wax to the fabric, usually a 12 to 15 yard piece. The wax dries almost instantly. In the batik-making process, the wax that creates the design sinks into the fabric. When the waxed fabric is submerged in to a dye bath, the fabric under the wax resists the dye, and stays the same color as it was before dyeing. As a result, both sides of the fabric show a clear image after dyeing, and it is often hard to tell a difference between the right and wrong side of the fabric. After the initial dyeing, the fabric is carried by hand outside to dry in the tropical sun and

trade winds of Indonesia. Once dry, it is hand carried back inside and the process of dyeing, batikting and rinsing continues until the desired color and pattern is achieved. The wax is boiled out of the fabric and recycled. A final rinse with fixative, drying in the sun and the fabric is ready for inspection. The fabric is then rolled and ready for shipment.

Batik making is truly an art form.

Helpful tips when sewing with Batiks

- 1) Because of the tight weave on a Batik use a Sharp or Microtex sewing machine needle
- 2) Batiks are made “out in the open air”. It's a good idea to prewash yardage. Even with all the rinsing and inspecting, on occasion “a special gift from nature” might remain on the fabric
- 3) Right side, wrong side? Choose the side on which the design is clearer with less fuzzy edges as the right side. When the colors vary from side to side, choose the side that better suits your project as the right side.
- 4) Because batiks are tightly woven, they are an excellent choice for raw edge appliqué because they don't fray
- 5) Most batiks have gone through a final rinse with fixative so they rarely bleed. Wash in cool to lukewarm water with a low-sudsing detergent. Tumble dry on low heat.
- 6) Batiks are made in limited quantities, designs change often. If you find something you love, buy it! Chances are you won't find it again. No two batiks are the same.