

The NYC Garment District

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Introduction

It's easy to develop a love/hate relationship with New York. (Take that sentence for example. New Yorkers are so self-centered, we refer to the geographical entity known as Manhattan as New York. We know New York is not only a big city that includes four more boroughs, it's a huge, beautiful and diverse state. But to get you thinking like a New Yorker, I'm going to adopt this reference system and not make any other excuses for it.) It's big, it's loud, it's not easy to do the stuff that's probably easy to do where you come from, like parking or getting to the post office. But you probably aren't thinking of coming to New York because you want to mail a letter or test your parking karma.

You might not have been planning to come to New York to fondle fabric either, but think again. New York is a genuine textile lover's shopping mecca. The following recommendations are just a tiny taste of the abundance and variety that overfills the neighborhood known as the Garment District. Instead of hunting for the materials you find in your local quilt shop, expect to bag uncommon species: bargains like mill-ends and cut-rate decorator fabrics, high end goods like silks and fine wools, non-traditional materials like vinyl and metallic, cottons from Indonesia and African. Not to mention shops brimming with embellishments, some arranged with a museum-like precision, others reminiscent of yard sale chaos.

The lists are divided into Fabric Shops, Ribbon Stores, Trimmings-Buttons-Beads-Notions, and a few Out-of-the-Garment-District suggestions. Don't be intimidated. Walk into these shops with attitude: THEY are lucky to have YOU shop in their store. But, if you don't want to look like a tourist, don't ask for or expect anyone to know what a Fat Quarter is and don't expect many shops to cut less than 1/2 yard lengths.

In compiling this list, I sought suggestions from fellow quilters wrapped up in the fabric of city life. Welcome to our New York.

FABRIC SHOPS

The fabric shops in the garment district are mostly on 39th and 40th Streets, between 7th and 8th Avenues. Although they are open to the public, they cater to the apparel industry, meaning come with an open mind and don't expect many calicoes and traditional quilting fabrics. But don't be shy: ask for cottons. Depending on the season, you could get lucky. Generally, the hours are Monday to Friday 9-6 and Saturday 10-5 (or 4:30). Interestingly, Saturdays are not as busy as weekdays when wholesale customers in the trade make up most of the traffic. A few stores open and close an hour earlier, and some are closed on Saturdays because of religious observance.

B&J

525 Seventh Avenue,
between 37th and 38th Streets,
2nd floor
(212) 354-8150,
www.bandjfabrics.com
Open Monday to Saturday

After 45 years in a multi-level storefront on West 40th Street, B&J Fabrics was forced to move to make way for the new headquarters of The New York Times. Huge selection of expensive, gorgeous, luxury goods. I always start here and I've never regretted a purchase. The stuff I've bought here has become grist for inspiration, sparking new quilts and directions.

Mood

225 West 37th Floor,
3rd & 4th floors
(212) 730-5003,
www.moodfabric.com
Open Monday to Saturday

Large warehouse ambiance with knowledgeable staff. The stuff is pricey but for pricey stuff, the prices are good. Many designer end-cuts at great prices. I bought cloth here, shlepped it to Beijing and had a cashmere coat, cashmere pants and two pairs of linen pants made in a week.

Paron West, Paron Annex
206 West 40th Street
(212) 768-3266,
www.paronfabrics.com
Open Monday to Saturday

These two neighboring stores feature designer fabrics. One is full price, the other is half price, and both are definitely worth a visit. Their motto: Your Source for Better Discount Fabrics!

Lace Star
215 West 40th Street
(212) 840-0555 or 840-0440,
www.lacestar.com
Open Monday to Friday

Breathtaking lace yardage beyond imagining, including imported and beaded goods. Seems like a store full of lace should be listed under trimmings except this one is stuffed with lace cloth sold by the yard, organized by minute differences in shades of colors, each one more elaborate than the next. Even if you're not looking for lace, it's worth pressing your nose up to the window.

Sposabella Lace
252 West 40th Street
(212) 354-4729,
website under construction
Open Monday to Saturday

Manufacturers of specialty bridal headpieces and laces. According to Esther Z. (from Benartex), this shop is filled with yardage of gorgeous, beautiful lace. And when it comes to gorgeous, Esther is a maven.

Fikret Fabrics
264 West 40th Street
(212) 719-2252
Open Monday to Saturday

Lots of bargains at close-out prices: discount fabrics, end-of-mill runs of dress goods, decorator & drapery fabrics, etc. Once sighted: denim in three metallic versions. Excellent prices, but you need to ask the friendly, helpful staff.

Butterfly Fabrics
235 West 40th Street
(212) 719-9617,
www.butterflyfabrics.com
Open Monday to Saturday

A full line of metallic silk organza and other wonderful stuff, including a fantastic line of dupioni silks, both 45" and 60" wide, at reasonable prices. (They will offer wholesale prices if you purchase twenty yards.) The proprietors own a factory in India that weaves a two color dupioni seen nowhere else.

Ayazmoon Fabrics
235 West 40th Street
(212) 869-3315,
ayazmoon@aol.com
Open seven days a week.

Big array of Chinese silk brocades and beautiful saris.

Spandex House, Inc.
263 West 38th Street
(212) 354-6711,
www.spandexhouse.com
Open Monday to Saturday

Suggested by a friend who says it's one of her favorites, since it's such a unique type of store - everything stretches.

Fabric for Less
239 West 39th Street
(212) 391-7504
Open seven days a week

Best selection of decent fake fur - all the way in the back.

Beckenstein Fashion Fabrics

257 West 39th Street
(212) 475-6666,
website under construction
Open Monday to Saturday,
closed on Saturdays from
Memorial Day to Labor Day

Wool suiting, shirting, linens.

Leather Impact

256 West 38th Street
(212) 302-2332,
www.leatherimpact.com
Open Monday to Friday

Everything you could need related to leather.

Ribbon Stores

Here's a list of the ribbon stores on 38th Street between 5th and 6th Avenues, and a few close by additions. (My friend, Robin, wants me to make sure you know that 6th Avenue is also called Avenue of the Americas.) Start at Lord & Taylors on 5th Avenue and walk west. (You might want to stop first at Lord & Taylors to use the facilities.)

So-Good

28 West 38th Street
(212) 398-0236
Open Monday to Friday

A mess of a store; cheapest with huge selection.

Tinsel Trading

47 West 38th Street
(212) 730-1030,
www.tinseltrading.com
Open Monday to Friday

A ribbon boutique, beautifully arranged by color.

Hyman Hendler

67 West 38th Street
(212) 840-8393,
www.hymanhendler.com
Open Monday to Friday

Beautiful and fanciful French silk ribbons and a large selection of grosgrain. Just as dusty and decrepit as So-Good.

M&J Trimmings

(Button store two doors down)
1008 6th Avenue
between 37th and 38th Streets
(212) 391-9072,
www.mjtrim.com
Open Monday to Saturday

This isn't a store, it's an event. The content is mind-boggling: ribbons and sequins and appliques, oh my! M&J Buttons is two stores away. Don't go midday when it's swarming with garmentos on their lunch breaks

Mokuba

55 West 39th Street
(212) 869-8900
Open Monday to Friday

Just ribbons. Exquisite variety displayed in a museum-like ambiance. Very Expensive but definitely worth aspiring to. It's important to have a business card available to give to the salesperson. Here's their idiosyncratic procedure: don't handle anything yourself. After you've decided what you want, an assistant follows you around with a cart and cuts what you ask for.

MORE TRIMMINGS/BUTTONS/BEADS/NOTIONS

The Bead District is around 6th Avenue from 36th St to 39th St.

B & Q Bridal Inc.

210 West 38th Street
(212) 398-0988

Bridals, veils, lace, trimmings (like to-die-for beaded fringes), laces, appliques, gloves, sequins, costume jewelry, artificial flowers, appliques, and things you've never even dreamed of.

B & Q ARTS CO.

274 West 40th Street
(212) 869-2930
Open Monday to Saturday

Daytona Braids & Trimming

251 West 39th Street
(212) 354-1713,
daytrim@worldnet.att.net
Open Monday to Saturday

Lots of buttons, trim, embroidery thread, and pillow inserts.

Toho Shoji

990 Avenue of the Americas,
between 36th and 37th Streets
(212) 868-7466,
www.tohoshojiny.com
Open Monday to Sunday

Good assortment of beads, ornaments, and related stuff.

York Novelty Imports Beads

10 West 37th Street
(212) 594-7040,
www.yorkbeads.com
Open Monday to Friday

A spokesman for this mammoth retail store, in business at the same site for over sixty years, says they are the major New York importer of Czech beads. Good selection of small containers of seed beads.

Beads World

1384 Broadway
(212) 302-1199,
www.beadsworldusa.com
Open seven days a week

From the outside, this new store looks well lit and well stocked. Large selection of Swarovski crystal, lampworked Czech beads, semi-precious stones and seed beads.

Steinlauf & Stoller

239 West 39th Street
Toll Free: (877) 869-0321,
(212) 869-0321-2;
www.steinlaufandstoller.com,
Open Monday to Friday, 8-5:30

Thread, zippers, tools, shoulder pads, etc. They will put on snap sets. I buy the featherweight fusible interfacing (CL-FW) that enables me to play nicely with silks at this notions distributor; \$30.00 minimum for mail orders.

Panda Threads

247 West 38th Street
(212) 302-9434,
www.zipperbank.com
Open Monday to Saturday

Great prices on giant spools of name brand threads (like Guttermann),
elastics, hangers. Plus, they make labels.

Great Buttons

241 West 40th Street
(212) 869-6811
Open Monday to Saturday

Top Tex

222 West 38th Street
(212) 221-6433,
toptextrim@aol.com
Open: Monday to Saturday

Manufacturers and importers of home furnishings, accessories,
trimmings, woolen and pashmina shawls

Eskay Novelty

34 West 38th Street, 3rd floor
(212) 391-4110,
www.eskaynovelty.com
Open Monday to Thursday,
half day on Friday

Imagine: this shop only sells feathers.

Stanley Pleating

242 West 36th Street
between 7th and 8th Avenues
(212) 868-2920
Open to the public:
Monday to Friday, 12-1:15, 4:30-5:30

Pleating, stitching, embroidery services

Out of the Garment District**The City Quilter**

133 West 25th
between 6th and 7th Avenues
(212) 807-0390,
www.cityquilter.com
Not open on Monday.

This may be a small quilt store by American
quiltmaking standards, but its goods and services
are equal to the best. The knowledgeable, kind
staff will be happy to give local restaurant
recommendations along with sage quilting
advice.

Handloom Batik

214 Mulberry Street
(212) 925-9542. Call for hours. Then, due to an inconsistent schedule, call again just before you plan to be there to make sure the shop is open.

This amazing Soho store is brimming with batiks and handwoven fabrics from India, Indonesia and Malaysia. And it's probably the only shop in New York besides the City Quilter with precut fat quarters. Ask for assistance! DO NOT remove the bolts by yourself -- don't even think about it. And take home a T-shirt or two. They "breathe," you can dress them up or down, and the colors look pristine forever. Tell Usha, "Paula sent me."

Tender Buttons

143 East 62nd Street
(212) 758-7004
Open Monday to Saturday

The cream of the contemporary and antique button crop. Worthy of multiple ooh-and-aah moments.

Old Japan

382 Bleecker Street (@8th Ave)
(212) 633-0922
Open Tuesday to Sunday, 1:00-7:30PM

Lots of kimono, obi and Asian artifacts. Ask to see the fabric drawer with cut-up kimono fabric in silk, cotton and yukata. The friendly couple that owns the shop enjoys the company of quilters.

Greenberg & Hammer

24 West 57th Street
(212) 246-2835
Open Monday to Saturday

Dressmakers' supplies & notions, cotton threads, scissors

P&S Fabrics

355 Broadway
(about four blocks below Canal)
(212) 226-1534.
Monday to Friday and Sundays.
Closed Saturday.

According to Shirley Levine, it's the best stocked notion center, with a great selection of brand name rayon threads (including Madeira) and stuff like rat tail and cording for piping, and it's one of the few spots in the city that carries clothing patterns (at 25% off).

According to Judy Speezak, this shop always has a good selection of genuine African cottons, cheaper than most anywhere else in the city. They also have an odd selection of quilting cottons, and she's recently seen woven patterned Chinese silks there, too.

Erica Wilson

717 Madison Avenue
(212) 832-7390
Open Monday to Saturday

Best place for hard-to-find pearl cotton

Bruce Frank

215 West 83rd Street
(212) 595-3746,
www.brucefrankbeads.com
Open seven days a week

BEADS!

Beads Of Paradise

16 East 17th Street
(212) 620-0642
Open seven days a week

Everything related to beads, plus lacquerware and African, Asian and Indonesian artifacts.

Djema Imports

70 West 125th Street
(212) 289-3842,
www.djemaimports.com
Open seven days a week

Specializes in African fabrics: mudcloths, korhogo, and African cotton prints.

Lunch Advice from Friends Who Work in the Area**Joyce (a quilter/lawyer):**

"On nice days, people can have more money to spend on fabric by picking up the scrumptious curried chicken or spicy chick peas and vegetables (both over rice) at the Healthy Halal food cart at the corner of 43rd Street and 6th Avenue and take it to eat in Bryant Park."

Teresa (a patternmaker/art quilter):

Veronica Ristorante Italiano,
240 West 38th Street, (212) 764-4770
"The best lunch in the neighborhood."

Alex (Benartex Sales Manager) :**Bryant Park Grill**

25 West 40th Street (off 5th Ave), (212) 840-6500

Windfall Lounge

23 West 39th Street (between 5th and 6th Avenues), (212) 869-4606

Brendan's Bar & Grill

42 West 35th Street, (between 5th & 6th Avenues), (212) 564-5405
Sandwiches, salads and very good burgers.

Deb (Free Spirit Sales Director):

"Restaurant row (46th Street between Broadway and 8th Avenue) is very charming to walk down. There are some good inexpensive places and the menus are all posted outside. Also, on Ninth Avenue, between 44th and 54th streets, there is every kind of ethnic food you could possibly want and all are very reasonable."

Here are some other suggestions from Deb:

O'Caseys

41st & Madison

Serves excellent continental cuisine at really good prices: very good burgers, sandwiches and salads.

Simply Pasta

41st Street between 6th Avenue and Broadway

Café Metro

35th Street between 5th and 6th Avenues

A little more expensive but good food and atmosphere.

Keene's Chophouse

36th Street between 5th and 6th Avenues

\$\$\$\$ but according to Deb, one of the best steakhouses in the city.

Eric (School Superintendent and My Husband):

"Lamb in pita from the fast food guy on the SW corner of 45th Street and 6th Avenue. Formerly a chef at the now-closed, world famous Russian Tea Room, you won't regret sampling this culinary masterpiece." (Although I don't consider this to be the Garment district, my husband insists it's worth walking the extra blocks.)

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