

# NYC Brother Dealer Brings Sewing Style to 7th Avenue

With energy that matches the pulsating activity in nearby Times Square, Brother International Corporation dealer, Sew Fast Sew Easy (SFSE), is teaching scores of fashion-hungry New York City dwellers how to sew.

This Brother-only dealership, co-owned by Elissa Meyrich and Gregory Garvin, is located on West 35th Street in the middle of New York's Fashion District; it draws on its strong connections to the fashion design industry to fuel its edgy learn-to-sew curriculum. The dealership's classes have even helped launch students, including *Project Runway* season five finalist Kenley Collins, into their own fashion careers. And although the dealership seems to excel at reaching teens and young adults, its teaching staff takes delight in teaching anyone—regardless of age or gender—about the rewards and satisfaction of sewing.

Beginner classes include working with commercial patterns, learning fabric characteristics, threading techniques and using a sewing machine. In the beginning, students learn how to make pillows and simple skirts, while advanced students learn fitting, dart manipulation, pattern-making, installing zippers and lining garments.

Students also can take classes on specific projects, such as a leather clutch or a lacy tonga panty, or classes focusing on fashion trends, such as a current one teaching how to make box-pleat skirts.

Although SFSE has been selling Brother sewing and embroidery machines for about four years, the company started in 1991, offering only sewing classes. Founder Elissa Meyrich channeled her love of sewing into teaching others after a long career in fashion design. Garvin says that her signature line, Elissa K., retailed at such stores as Macy's, Saks Fifth Avenue, Henri Bendel and Ann Taylor. Uncomfortable with the increasing computerization in fashion design because she thought it diluted creativity, Meyrich opened SFSE, developed her own custom-fit patterns and created a workbook to teach her methods. That workbook was the springboard to Meyrich's first book, "Sew Fast Sew Easy: All You Need To Know When You Start to Sew," published in 2002. The book includes three patterns.



“We don't really teach like everyone else,” says co-owner Gregory Garvin, who manages the store, sells machines and teaches classes. “SFSE teaches beginner sewing techniques,” he says, “but with garment industry style and methods for fast, quick construction.”

“That book really opened up a lot of doors, and opened up a lot of eyes,” says Garvin. Two more books followed: “Rip It: How to Deconstruct and Reconstruct the Clothes of Your Dreams,” in 2006, and “Sew Fast Sew Easy Sew On,” in 2008. The books document the SFSE philosophy about teaching, which is to make sewing fun, easy and straightforward. Garvin explains that the city's fashion district certainly provides some influence, but that direction also comes from other things. “I just came back from a trip to Italy, and I picked up this cute little top that was very popular there, and we made a pattern and now we're teaching it,” Garvin says. “We develop our own patterns, and then develop the curriculum from that.”

The SFSE curriculum has proven strong enough to attract serious fashion design students, such as *Project Runway* season five finalist Kenley Collins. She learned to sew at SFSE, and now is a teacher there, while continuing to design. This is a nice parallel to the fact that, for the past two years, Brother has been the exclusive sewing and embroidery licensee for that popular fashion reality television show.

Garvin himself began his association with SFSE as a student about seven years ago, when he was working for the federal government. He found SFSE online, came to New York five weekends in a row to take classes and decided to move there so he could learn more. He eventually joined the SFSE staff to assist with Web design, and has worked to become a teacher and co-owner.

One reason SFSE has such a strong connection with younger sewers may be its Web-based marketing. The store does little advertising. Most customers find SFSE via the Web, from both the official site, [www.sewfastseweasy.com](http://www.sewfastseweasy.com), and from its relatively new YouTube site, [www.youtube.com/sewfastseweasy](http://www.youtube.com/sewfastseweasy) which includes videos of students using Brother machines and video testimonials from satisfied customers.

“They find us,” Garvin says. “People in New York are very industrious. They're looking for classes. They're looking to better themselves.”

The store's location also shapes its profile as a Brother dealer. Garvin says that storage space in New York City apartments often dictates how large a machine a customer can buy. SFSE excels at selling Brother's sewing machine line, including such beginner-friendly machines as the NX-450 and the compact sewing and embroidery combination machine, the Innov-is 900D.

The store does sell a lot of embroidery machines, including the PR-620, but most embroidery machines are sold to young entrepreneurs who plan to open their own embroidery business.

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Garvin admits that SFSE did look at other lines of sewing and embroidery machines several years ago when it was considering what line to stock, but Brother's machines were “the best bang for the buck,” he says. That value, plus the company's strong loyalty to its dealerships, made the decision easy. “I'd rather have something good quality for the customers so they stick with sewing and aren't frustrated,” Garvin says.

“SFSE customers really like the fact that they can go home, sit down and make things they want to wear. That's really what our whole focus is,” Garvin says. “They remember the enjoyment, they remember the energy they get here, and they come back.”

