



Costuming and Care Tips

The following is summarized from a variety of posts on the Med-dance mailinglist, which are stored in the [Dancer's Archive](#). Addresses and other information on most/all of the vendors of costuming and fabrics mentioned below can be found on the [Suppliers](#) and [Fabric](#) pages.

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Beads and Sequins

Cleaning

"I would try taking a scrap strand of sequins and washing them the same way you would the costume and see what happens." --Z'alandra

"I might even suggest attaching the strand [of sequins] to a scrap piece of the cloth your costume is made from, just to make sure the colors do not run on to one another! Who knows what might happen to a white satin with dark colored sequins." --Jennifer

"[Washing sequins in cold or any temperature water] MAY ruin them. You would certainly not put them in

the washing machine! The reason is the dye on the plastic (that is what sequins are made from today) they used to be metal) may not be very stable. Of greater concern, frankly, is the backing fabric. If it is silk, or cotton, or rayon that was not preshrunk before the sequins were attached, you run the risk of shrinking that fabric and bringing on a real disaster. If you know how to do a burn test on the fibers, that would be one way to find out. Otherwise, try putting drops of water on an inside or unnoticeable spot. If you notice any shrinking of the backing fabric or a change in color in the sequins, stay away from it. You should be able to safely clean the outside of the sequins with a DAMP cloth." --Kareema

"Yes sequins do run in cold water--once washed a top with purple sequins and guess what--by the end of this time I had silver." --Donna L.

"Um, well, gee, actually, I've done that [washed costuming in a washing machine], with a sparkle georgette skirt, in the gentle cycle, with cold water (I did hang it up to dry). Hot pink plastic sequins on a hot pink skirt--it looked okay. I do, whenever washing is possible, prewash my fabrics before sewing them." --Shoshannah

"[Regarding how to clean bead strands] ...this really depends on what you used to string the beads. Cotton thread could shrink and cause problems. I would not ever send a beaded anything to a regular dry cleaner. I would attempt to change the lining fabric (the most likely source of the *smell*), and then try an at home cold water bath. All the caveats about washing sequin fabrics will apply." --Kareema

"[Regarding cleaning bead strands] Air them! And a bit of sunshine. Also, only wash the bra straps under the arms (where there shouldn't be too much beading or you can't see it). Also I put on my most vicious super sports underarm deodorant and this keeps them fresh a little longer. I know one woman who 'never' washed her cabaret costumes. Some she had for 15 years!!" --Donna L.

Colorfastness

"...a tip about colourfastness of beads: Being a tight-arse with money, I spent 8 months beading a long fringe in purple. Wore it half an hour and the colour came off, revealing the silver underneath. Despite the fact I had asked for advice about suitability, the retailer wouldn't refund my money, so I ended up taking legal action (small claims [court] here, cost nothing) to no avail. In the end I found a product, Dulux spray-on water-based clear varnish, which has set the remaining colour. I sprayed it on the sequins too, which were purple and started to lose their colour as well, with my sweat (must be acid!!). The only colour loss now is in the cracks between the beads and back of the sequins where the varnish couldn't reach." --Jenny L.

"One of my dancer friends bought a pretty hip scarf, imported from Egypt, and edged in purple sequins. After wearing it tucked inside her costume at the hip, she found she had purple sequin stains on her skin, so definitely beware imported sequins that may run!" --Kim

"Hmmm. That's funny; the purple costumes I have are colorfast. Oh! Wait! Maybe the beads are like the sequins. Here's the tip on sequins I was about to deliver--garnered from my friend Nazaree, who originated dazzlers (crocheted scarves and clothing for dancers composed of metallic threads, sequins and beads. Very gorgeous...). I suspected as much but she confirmed: *iridescent* sequins do NOT fade to silver or clear with sweat like plain colors!! And I suspect the laser [hologram] ones don't either.

"I imagine the [reason] is in the process putting the stuff on that makes them iridescent. From my bead store owner friend at Byzantium (Columbus, OH's WONDERFUL bead store): iridescence is put on beads by a special treatment. It will NOT sweat off (and it's likely that the color underneath might not either, because of the overlay) but it will bang or scratch off! In some cases. So recall this when using beads, and remember...the more motion the beads have, the greater the chance of banging against one another...put 'em in places/ways to minimize this...

"In general, consider what the beads may look like once their iridescence is gone. If you think you'll still like the color, use 'em. None of my iridescent beads have started to 'lose' it (well, none of the *glass* ones) yet. And I dance pretty hard..."

"Over here, the beads that lose their color are the hot pink/fuchsia ones. Bleeds right out, right away. The cotton candy pink ones seem ok...I have some fuschia 'iris' ones I'm itching to try out... Many times a simple test will determine if a bead will 'bleed'. Wet your fingers and rub the beads between 'em. The infamous fuschia ones will bleed right to silver...right away. Sigh." --Shakira

"My dance teacher also sells beads and beading; *every* shade of pink bead appears to fade, including the bright pink (but not fuschia) seed beads." --Kim

"I think, perhaps, that all intense, fuschia-like pink beads fade, but not the lighter shades of pink? At any rate, there is *one* color of pink that will not fade--but we would not be likely to use it. It is opaque, usually shows up in seed beads and other beads for Native American beadwork, is not particularly (well, not at all) flashy or metallic but is a nice 'mauve-y' light pink. It's called 'Cheyenne Pink'. Never fades. But unless you're going for flat colors...it's not glitzy at all." --Shakira

"I use spray Varathane on the bead strands. I hang them up outside on a clothesline and apply a few thin coats, letting it dry thoroughly in between. I have turquoise, red and purple all treated like this. In fact the only beads I ever have problems with are the ones I don't spray. I have very little breakage and all remain colorfast. One thing I need to warn you about, at first the beads seem very stiff but it wears off in a very short time and then they are just fine." --Sadira

"I've also heard about spraying Varathane on beads to keep them from running, although I haven't tried it yet. I've got another type of spray used for miniatures that I'll try first. It's made to take more of a beating than Varathane, not to mention that it's cheaper." --Z'alandra

"Tahia Alibeck recommends Varathane too. She has a book on costume beading called 'Be-Dazzling' [which] I've seen for sale at [Jehlor Fabrics](#) in Seattle..." --Maisun

Beading Threads

"I used quilting thread for bugle beads that dangle as a fringe on my bra, believing this was strong enough...threaded down and back (very small holes!). On Saturday, I sprayed the audience with my costume as the beads came off and flew through the air! (I used bugle beads and half inch beads so they would clink when I move--I believe sound is very important in the costume)." --Jenny L.

"I use quilting thread if the holes on the beads are big enough. So far the only problem I've had is the knots untying. That was before I started putting a drop of glue on each knot." --Joanne

"I don't know what quilting thread is like so I can't compare, but I use dental floss for all kinds of sewing occasions that require a strong hold, and they seem to work pretty well. If the opening is big enough, I use the waxed kind [of floss]." --Shu-Ju

"Being a crazy someone who also makes most of her own fringe, I use a special beading thread, or you can use dental floss. After tying it off, I fray check [a product called 'Fray Check' that effectively glues the ragged edges of fabrics so they won't fray] or use jewelers cement on the end of the strand and at the point of attachment. This is a good idea for any fringe even if you buy it. I can sympathize with the feeling of all the time and effort spraying across the floor." --Z'alandra

"Jenny: have a look at those beads that flew off. The problem may not be the quilting thread. Bugles, and the longer the bugle the worse this phenomenon is, look beautiful but tend to break when they hit each other. Obviously, the more they swing, the greater the chance. And, they often break unevenly, creating sharp edges. Several things you can do:

- Use shorter bugles. I know, less of a nice effect and slower to string.
- Use different thread:
 - I recommend Conso, a triple twist of synthetic tough stuff. H*** to get through a beading needle, but great.
 - Some like dental floss; some hate it. Of those who like it, some prefer waxed, some unwaxed.
 - Surgical suture is another possibility.
 - I *don't* recommend using nylon fishing line; it is strong when pulled on, but prone to sideways shears. In other words, brittle. And it hangs ugly. Yech.
- Some argue that waxing (with beeswax) good threads such as quilting thread helps. Well...maybe. The usual problem is broken beads with sharp edges sawing their own thread in two. Wax could help as a protective layer...for awhile.
- Some argue that putting one rocaille between each set of bugles will decrease breakage and bead spill. Not sure of this myself, but it does make for a nicer hang and movement; not so stiff and angular.
- This will help a little: use 2 strands of thread to string the stuff, and when you get to the bottom, put a small rocaille bead and tie a knot around it. This is a stopgap--if the beads saw through one of the two strands, the other may hold and the bead at the bottom, which is knotted, will not let the beads above it off.
- Another thing is to check your source of bugles: some distributors have fewer jagged edges on their bugles. Those are the ones you want.
- If you love long bugle beads, put them in the places of least movement.
- I tend to knot between strands... Anal-retentive? Yes, but it works! I only lose one strand at a time...IF I lose any (slammed a suitcase on one once. That was the only time that costume lost beads...).

"It makes beading *slow*, but I rarely lose beads... Now you know why all the Egyptian dancers went to those short bugles! ;-)" --Shakira

"I have been using regular sewing thread and running it through beeswax for my beading. However, I like beading thread--I have some which seems to have more than one strand to it--but I can't find any more like it." --Myrrha

"Myrrha, there are many sizes (thicknesses), colors, strengths, compositions of beading threads! What you need is a beaders' supply catalog! :-) Unisyn beads (in Ohio?) in particular was one of the first to get beading thread in various colors. It is co-owned by famous beader Virginia Blakelock (author of 'Those Bad, Bad Beads')." --Shakira

"[Regarding multi-strand beading thread] Conso, Conso, Conso! Try Conso brand thread--I think it's upholstery thread--and a little wax to keep it from tangling..." --Maisun

"One thing about Conso: it's great, but *hard* to get through a beading needle. It's a 3 strand twist; I've been known to untwist it and coax 1 strand at a time through if I have a particularly small-eye beading needle... and it does come in several colors." --Shakira

"...be careful with pre-beaded fringe intended for bridal or evening gowns. The thread isn't strong and it's not made for heavy use... [Atira](#) of Seattle sells Egyptian fringe made with heavy carpet thread she sends to the

beaders herself. Very durable." --Maisun

Bodystockings

"I too wondered how the body stockings were attached to the bra, until this weekend when I helped a friend of mine get costumed at the Grapeleaf restaurant in San Francisco. She had snaps on the body stocking that snapped to the bra on the inside of the bra strap. The snaps were at the top of the body stocking and the corresponding snaps just underneath the bra. She had about six snaps over the length of the costume. So simple, but I'd never have guessed it!" --Meg

"[Bodystockings] are made of various things. Many of the Egyptian dancers seem to have foil-printed knits to match their costumes. They are also made of heavy-duty mesh fabrics--like swimsuit bra material. And of panty-hose like material (but tougher, and less prone to runs.). Some are lycra swimsuit material or leotard material. Many are made of stretch laces, but the commonest thing is fishnet.

"Some have a ghawazee-coat/turkish vest-like cut below the bust for the arms, then they come up over the shoulders and have sleeves. (My favorite.) But the commonest ones are like a leotard, though ending below the bust, as you describe.

"Some people use snaps to attach them (I never would--snaps--even heavy duty ones--can 'blow.' ;-); some put spaghetti straps, which are then covered by a vest, on them. (The ones with shoulders don't need anything.) The commonest thing is the hook part of hooks and eyes, sewn at strategic points on the bra and just hooked thru if the stocking is tough lace or fishnet or something like (nothing that is fragile or will run). Another really common thing, is to sew them right to the bra, leaving a v-shaped opening in the back center, if that's where your closure is. A zipper can also be put in there. If the bra is front closure, the opening makes a "keyhole" below the center front, which can be attractive, depending. ;-). If you sew it to your costume, obviously you can't change it; you then have a leotard with a dance bra for the top of it. Also, you want to be *sure* you get it long enough! and that it has enough stretch. Last thing you want is your body stocking pulling your bra down... <:-0 " --Shakira

Bras

Brands, Sizes

"By the way, I'm also looking for hard-cup bras in larger cup sizes. You'd think Frederick's of Hollywood would have them, but I've had no luck, even with the catalog." --Alizah

"[Arlene's Classic Cups](#), designed for the belly dancer by a belly dancer, will have your size no matter what it is--guaranteed! They're [pricey], however... She's in CA, and I saw her ad years ago in [Nafisa](#)... I have two bras made with them, and I think they're great! They are not a whole bra, just cups. You gotta build all the strapping yourself." --Andrea R.

";-) ;-). and if you think finding a band size larger than 36 is fun as regards bras, try finding a *32* *D*. 'I'm sorry Miss, 32's are always A's or B's. Everybody knows them D things won't fit on a 32 around...' ;-).)" --Shakira

"[Responding to the above post] Try using the next size up in a C cup--in desperation I've used the opposite, a 14C instead of a 16B. The result may not be perfect but by the time you've reconstructed it, it should be a reasonably good fit. Might just require some strapping in grosgrain [ribbon] with size 3 hook and eye at the appropriate space. If you choose the grosgrain in an appropriate colour and cover with sequins, it doesn't look like a patch job." --Jenny L.

"If you're looking for a quick fix bra, I've found that (for average sizes) the MAX bra (\$9.99 at KMart) is just the trick. Buy several types of braid and fringe by the yard and machine stitch right onto the bra, through the padding and all. The straps are set far out on the shoulders and are elastic, so this might not be ideal for all of us, but since I've started wearing these every day, I find them very natural-feeling. They push up just right without releasing the breasts..." --Shadia

"Up here in Seattle we have a gal named [Atira](#) who sells really great hard cup bras especially suited to 'more curvy' dancers. She designed them herself. I'm a 34D and my partner is a 36 D/DD and we LOVE them. The Babylonian Ensemble swears by them too." --Maisun

"I want to second the opinion on [\[Atira\]](#)'s classy cups. They're worth every penny. I bought mine from [Cost Less Imports](#) in Berkeley, CA... Mine came with straps... I like the straps, they fit great." --Tracy

"A good bra for A, B and C cups (pad, pad, pad if you want to!) is the Adonna, found, I think, at JC Penney. Go to a Jantzen outlet and pick up a pair of bathing suit bra cups (the Jantzen ones are really firm! almost plastic but flexible). Stitch the suit cups to the outside of the Adonna cup and voila, a great shaped hard cup bra. Don't forget to get rid of the elastic straps attached to the bra and replace thm with grosgrain ribbon (sew a casing and double some elastic in for some give). Got this idea from Tahia Alibeck. Works great." --Maisun

"Recommended in our studio are underwire bras, firmcup, such as Lillyette and Partner's found at Mervyn's or JC Penney's department stores." --Kim

"[Regarding she who is a 32D and can't find bras] As a 34 D, I feel your plight. Try different sizes like 36 C's, but just for th ecup size. If you can find good cups, you can construct the bra from there (always replace the elastic straps the bra comes with! you can custom create a perfect fit and elastic ROTS with sweat!)." -- Maisun

"I have found the bras carried by [Atira's Fashion](#) to be very good. I believe she calls it a Costumer's Bra (not the Jezebel) and the cups are very sturdy for holding beads. The straps are adjustable without being elastic..." --Kahena

"Also Frederick's of Hollywood does have one useable style (not at all of their stores), #5731. It has a slip in pad and comes in DD sizes." --Kahena

Other Tips

"As for the bra's, I've used fabric stiffener on a regular bra. The advantage to this is that you can make it as stiff or flexible [as you wish] by [varying] the amount of stiffener and how much you dilute it. Be sure to get a water soluble stiffener for easier clean up." --Z'alandra

"Yup, the fabric stiffener on bras is a great idea. But be sure to line them after! ;-) I've actually sweated enough that both fabric stiffener and glue re-liquidized. ;-) Imagine the results...or don't ;-) ;-)" --Shakira

"I also wanted to share my tip for bra cleanliness. I use thin shoulder pads in my bras. I tack them in about 3-4 places and they absorb the sweat and keep it away from the costume. When they become worn or stinky, they're easy to remove and replace. Thicker ones can also serve as padding or shaping." --Tracy

Costume Jewelry

"...watch out for hairspray on diamontie jewelry; spray your hair before putting on any costume jewelry. If you have diamonties on costuming which touches the skin, the sweat will turn them green after a while. A light dip in cold water will remove the sweat or I just replace them every yer or so if necessary." --Donna L.

Deodorizing

"...a dancer...Jeannie I believe...showed me this tip: put a tablespoon or so of baking soda in a square of fabric, tie off the fabric into a pouch and place the pouch in your bra cups when ready to store. (Remove for dancing, of course ;-). Jeannie stores her bra and belt in a large zip-lock bag, but the baking soda absorbs the sweat and smell from them." --Similaar

"I've had good luck in taking off my sweaty bras/girdles, hanging them with plenty of space to air, and spritzing (especially the insides) them *ever* so lightly with Lysol." --Shoshannah

"My mother-in-law, who is also a belly dancer, mentioned that the traditional method for de-stinking one's garments was to expose them to incense smoke." --Tracy

"I've also used Lysol on the inside of my costume bras. Also, I always leave them open to air out after use. This includes all costumes, i.e. dresses with sequins. I've washed one of those Egyptian dresses once and both sequins and dress are slightly faded. I won't risk another washing until absolutely necessary. Then there is the tried and true method used by Arab ladies--perfume!" --LibbyPar

"Regarding incense smoke--this is another traditional method of improving the smell of garments in the Middle East. In fact, at women's parties in some areas the hostess provides braziers of incenses on the floor and the ladies waft their skirts over the incense." --LibbyPar

"Regarding cleaning of beaded costumes, someone else already mentioned replacing the lining. I've heard that from several sources...in fact, one very experienced dancer, when asked how you clean your Egyptian costumes, answered 'You don't--you just change the lining'. Someone else mentioned airing it out after shows. I do something similar to that--I toss it in a pillowcase with some baking soda in a sock (the sock is clean, of course, and its purpose is just to keep the baking soda from getting all over the costume). A friend of mine suggests that kitty litter (unused, of course) is also good for this purpose. I imagine anything with odor-absorbing properties (like a bar of soap) would also work." --Sherezzah

"I always air my costumes and have carefully sprayed the linings of the older bras and belts with Lysol. They still are a bit 'iffy' in the odor department. Here's a thought: I'm now using a special product from Arm & Hammer--baking sodadesigned particularly to remove litter box odors. It works... I wonder if cat box baking soda might be effective in a bean bag next to odiferous belly dance bras and belts." --Stefania

"[Regarding airing things in sunshine] Hmmm, you might want to be careful with this technique. UV energy [in sunlight] is not known for being nice to fabric--especially natural fibers." --Andrea R.

"[The] baking soda idea is great and chemically sound, but I'd think it would be better to store [costuming] in fabric, not plastic. If put away damp, you could have problems with mold, and the baking soda wouldn't do much for that." --Andrea R.

"Andromeda of Portland bought some old canvas mail bags to store her costumes in, with baking soda. It breathes and they're just the right size." --Maisun

"I work as a costumer on commercials and movies and we use a product called End Bac. It sanitizes and destinks and is ok for fabric. Try your costume shops or sports shops to find it." --Amy

Dry Cleaners

"As to dry cleaners, look for one that specializes in wedding dresses and ask for references. They should be happy to provide them." --Z'alandra

"If you want to try a dry cleaner [for sequined, beaded, etc. costuming], contact your local Antique store and ask where they have their fabrics cleaned (vintage clothing, drapes, etc.). The issue with dry cleaning is the very harsh chemicals that are used. Water usually is much safer... I have a book on vintage clothing...which talks about the specific chemicals used in dry cleaning and which are the most gentle... In the vintage clothing collecting world, we have a saying that applies here: Cleanliness is next to impossible." --Kareema

Miscellaneous

"One fun thing to do to decorate costumes is to do fabric painting on them." --Andrea R.

"[Regarding how much skin to show] Realize that how much skin to show, and where you are allowed to show it is purely cultural. I have a 1.5 hour video of Tahia Carioca clips from the '30's-'50's, and she wears extremely revealing skirts with almost all her costumes. She'd be run off the weekly [belly dance] stage of the small town I now live in, here in 1995! On the other hand, you never see her navel (guess the fishnet bodystockings didn't pass muster with the Egyptian censors back then)." --Andrea R.

"Bellydancing outfits and Tatting - I have consulted the number of middle-eastern women in this office, and have what I think may be the answer.

"Prior to the Paris Exhibition in the mid-1800's, belly dancing was merely performed within the Harem by the women for the women. The Outfits at the time were the loose baggy trousers, cut-away loose tops, and a sash around the hips to emphasise the movement there. No veils, and definitely no tatting.

"The Bellydancing exhibit at Paris excited much interest in the "exotic", and the outfits were modified, modified, modified until they hit Hollywood for the grandest of the grand excesses. All the gold coinage, tatting, veiling, dance-of-the-seven-veils, and especially doing it as a public exhibition was added by the European and American influences. This then seeped BACK to the middle east, where it has now been incorporated.

"So in short, Tatting was NOT part of the genuine belly-dancer's outfit prior to the Paris exhibition, and would probably not have come into the Middle East until early this century.

(Thanks to Shireen Chidiac of mixed Middle-eastern extraction for this information)" --Gillian Richards

Other information sources

"Singer puts out a series of sewing books. One, every human who wears clothes should own: Clothing Care and Repair. The stain removal chart in the middle of the book is worth its weight in gold. The other book is: Sewing Specialty Fabrics. I believe this is worthwhile to own even if you don't sew because it talks about sequin fabric, velvet, metallics, etc." --Kareema

"Also, check out alt.sewing and rec.crafts.textiles.sewing newsgroups for more information or specific requests." --Kareema

"The Clotilde sewing notions catalog--call 1-800-772-2891 for a free catalog (Monday-Friday, CST, located in Wisconsin)--has both black and white Nymo beading thread (72 yd. spools, 6/pkg., \$4.72 each package).

"...Clair Shaeffer's Fabric Sewing Guide, which takes fabrics from their beginnings as fiber through the process of making and caring for the projects. It's over 500 pages of valuable information." --Shoshannah

Specialty Fabrics

Assuit

"[Assuit]...gorgeous stuff, it's a lace-like mesh fabric patterned with silver wire, which is wrapped around the threads and then beaten flat so the effect is of very delicate foil ribbons in the lace. Usually, but not always, the background fabric is black. Some sources claim the wire is not beaten but *chewed* flat, and that the Truly Authentic stuff shows toothmarks.

"It's originally from the town of Assuit, about halfway up the Nile toward the Fayyum area. What I'm remembering from 'A Thousand Miles Up the Nile', published in 1863 (? or so) is that Amelia B. Edwards doesn't mention it, instead discussing the red pottery as Assuit's major industry, which *could* mean the fabric happens later on. But then, she thought the Ghawazee were too disgusting for a well-brought-up Englishwoman to watch, and takes pains to disassociate herself from the only shopping spree mentioned in the whole 1,00+ page book, so what does *she* know.

"Assuit was wildly popular with the European fashion industry in the Art Deco era--that might be a lead to follow. A recent TV miniseries about a family of sisters and their dressmaking empire was illustrated on the cover of the TV schedule magazine with them all in Poiret-like assuit gowns....maybe their prop department had to do major research; maybe they'll share it with us." --jofalcon

"I have recently acquired an antique piece of assuit of the cream colored variety...didn't know this color existed until now..." --Yasmeena

"...I believe the original color [of assuit] was always white/natural, and if it's anything else it was dyed after purchase..." --Andrea R.

"Re the history [of assuit], I heard that during World War I a lot of diggers (Australian) soldiers who were overseas bought this fabric and sent it back home. Thus there is in this country [Australia] no assuit under 70 odd years old. Last I heard it went out of production 50 odd years ago which is a shame as most dancers interested in baladi would snap it up. Also in Australia it costs \$250-\$500 a piece in reasonable to excellent condition (that's if you can find it)....Suraya Hilal uses this fabric exclusively for her performance costumes."

--Donna Lapre

"I know [assuit is] 'relatively' available, have seen them in second had stores and antique shops....the pieces I've seen went for \$150-\$200 US dollars..." --Shu-Ju

"I found some assuit information in 'The Bellydancers Folkloric Costume' by Rebecca Long. She states that assuit dates from ancient times (although she is not specific), and is known by a few names. The Copts called it Tillis, and the Egyptians called it Tulle bi Telli (Net with metal), and the dresses made from it Tule (pronounced 'tulley'). We Americans call it Assuit (spellings vary) after the town in Egypt that makes it. It is still being made, by the way, although in small quantities of lower quality.

"Each metal stitch is formed into a knot that is cut and pounded flat (she doesn't mention any teeth!). The designs are usually geometric patterns or animal forms.

"One interesting point is that the strips of metal are not actually silver, they are fine copper or brass wire plated with chrome. Long says to notice that the assuit does not tarnish as silver does. She also notes that an 'Assuit glitter fabric' was made a few years ago, although it, too, is hard to find. Long even includes some tips on how to create your own 'fairly realistic' assuit using knit net and silver metallic thread!" --Qadishtu

"My name is Trish St. John, a.k.a. Hanan of the San Francisco Bay Area. I have been dancing and costuming for many years, performing for 6 years during the great heyday of San Francisco's Broadway Cabarets. Anyway, I am now a dealer and vendor of quality antique assuits. I sell some showstopper large solid pieces whole. But quite a bit now I am making them into beledi dresses for dancers, since most dancers are too itimidated to cut and sew them. (Rightfully so; it's tricky). I will be putting up a web page soon... I call my business Liquid Silver Designs..." --Trish St. John, [E-mail address](#).

Misc Info

"It's not a costly fabric, but I can give some tips on foil fabrics (sometimes called liquid lame). They are great for veils and skirts, but the greater heat or rubbing on the body between the legs and under arms will bleach the color out--so don't use them for vests or harem pants. Also, never leave anything made of this fabric in a sealed car on a hot day--it will melt together." --Andrea R.

"I second the opinion on [Jehlor's](#) catalog. It's got swatches of most of the fabrics that they carry with listing of the colors. If you sent them a swatch of material that you're trying to match and type of fabric, they will send samples of what they carry that matches. Prices are fairly reasonable too." --Z'alandra

Sweat Stains

"Unfortunately, there is no way, via dry cleaner or anything else, to remove perspiration stains. :(The only way to get rid of them is to replace the fabric." --Kareema

"Sigh... Maybe I can sew an applique over the stain... A terrible solution, but less annoying than taking all those yards of trim off and putting them on some other vest..." --Shiraz

"You mean 'White Wizard' won't take out sweat?? My mother swears by it... (admittedly, she has not told me she used it on vintage fabric or anything like *that*! It might take out color as well... I made the mistake

once of making a costume from *white* satin. Not only does perspiration stain it, it turns into cream satin whether you like it or not. Drat." --Shakira

"...it may well be oxidation that turns white satin yellow or cream. It's moot now, 'cause I re-did the costume--covered it with white iris sequin fabric! Solve that problem!" --Shakira

"[Regarding the above post] This is the BEST way to deal with perspiration stains!" --Kareema

"Then there's the central Asian solution...Those central Asian coats made with tightly fitting arms have a simple solution for practicality and ease of movement... they just cut out the area under the armpit and leave it open. Practical, huh?" --Me'ira

Swords and Scimitars

General Description and Balancing

"[General Description of Scimitars:] The scimitars are curved, but are not a thin blade. They get wider at the end, have fancy designs on the blade on both sides, and a brass-colored handle that you can reverse for balance that usually has a dragon-head design. They are *very* heavy, compared to the newer cavalry sabers [which look like swords and usually come with a scabbard]. Great for balance, lousy for swinging unless you're an ol' ex-woodblock artist like me. ;-) Takes a lot of wrist and arm strength...scimitars do NOT come with a scabbard!! Haven't seen any scabbards available." --Shakira

"This sounds just like the scimitar I have. I didn't know you could turn the handles around, mine came with the handle already "backward" [handle guard hanging down when sword is on one's head] and personally I'd rather it wasn't. It balances fine and maybe it wouldn't with the handle on "right" [handle guard up], but I think it might look better. ...Also, we all cheat...right after I bought my sword, my teacher had a friend of hers make big notches in it so it wouldn't slide all over my head. This has made a *huge* difference (it no longer falls off) and though the notches are rather large, you can't see them from the audience." --Ranaiyah

"Thanks for the tip; my scimitar is heavy enough and balanced enough that I don't have trouble with it sliding off my slippery hair (except for moving really incorrectly, of course :)), but the head wrap + scimitar sounds like a nifty costume idea. Actually, now that I think about it, I've heard that head wraps are pretty necessary to keep those wooden canes from sliding off one's head (I wouldn't personally know)." --??

"[Regarding cane balancing on one's head] mine stays up there just fine. ;-) especially the heavy wooden one. The trick can be the texture of the cane as much as the texture of anything on your head. My shiny-silver-wrapped cane requires more control...it's both lighter and more slippery. Tip: this won't hold a cane or sword on your head, but it *will* create a surface with more friction: put a piece of double-sided sticky tape (scotch makes some, among others) right at the balance point. then you can *feel* the balance point with your hands, so it'll also help you position it right! and, it offers some slight protection from sweat to your unchromed scimitar!" --Shakira

"[Regarding reversing the handle if it's on backwards] just unscrew the dragon head, remove it, remove the grip piece, then remove the handle and replace the way you want it. I can't *guarantee* this with your [scimitar], but all of mine have been reversible...(I own 3). If the dragon head isn't tight enough for you after this, or some other piece isn't, or to be tight it really wants to finish at a diagonal to where it should be, insert leather "washers" (you can make them out of old gloves) to tighten." --Shakira

"[Saroyan](#) makes really nice quality scimitars--a good weight, they balance really well and with the

handguard in the correct position (pointing up) and they have a few small notches etched into the edge of the blade at the balance point so you can find where to place your head without looking and to help keep the scimitar from sliding off your head as easily. From what people are saying, their scimitars (pewter or chrome bladed) are in the pricier range (about \$65), but their scimitars are the best of the 3 or so kinds I've tried. I'm really happy with mine." --Kim

"[Regarding etching notches at the balance point yourself] This is adding friction, like the 2-sided tape. however, the 2-sided tape doesn't change the sword itself..." --Shakira

"Also, I reversed the handle, putting it "right", but it wouldn't balance on its edge after I did that, so I had to put it back. Oh well..." --Ranaiyah

Rust

"I live in north Florida, where it stays humid most of the summer. Here's how you get the rust off [swords/scimitars]-- steel wool and naval jelly. Use gloves! Once the worst of the rust is off, you can use very fine grit sandpaper to get off what's left of the rust, and finish with the steel wool again. Then get some Simichrome polish (available in auto/bike supply shops) to polish the blade again.

"Now, so you don't have to do this *again* -- put a thin coat of petroleum jelly on it; just enough to rub into and coat the metal without getting gunk all over your hair & costume. This will keep the blade out of contact with the air. Also, keep your blade wrapped in an old towel. This really helps!

"This will save you the embarrassment of having some weapons enthusiast come up to congratulate you on your performance and then start berating you for the poor condition of your sword!" --Athena Mizelle

"Antique dealers like a product called "Simichrome." If it's good enough for brass scales that devalue if the print is rubbed off, it's good enough for swords! ;-) That plus some ultra fine grade steel wool or just a rough cloth..." --Shakira

"Last night while watching Endless Summer (I wish!) I whipped out the Brasso I use on my tea kettle and it worked really well. It got off most of the rust, and shined up everything else. Boy was it dirty! I completely trashed two white washcloths I was using, and there was still dirt coming off of it." --Ranaiyah

Veils

Fabrics, Veil Types

"By the way, if you like silk, use the more inexpensive silk lining material (usually called 'China Silk'). It's better if you wash it--it gets softer and softer and has a nice weight to it. Here in Boston we often get it on sale for oh, say \$10 a yard, so that you can have a nice silk veil for \$30. The way that they can flutter is oh so wonderful--and it feels nice next to your skin :-)." --Cheryl

"Each type of veil is good for a particular style--silk does certain things ell, other things it collapses on. With silk, I like rectangular, lots of yardage. Other fabrics do other things well... I teach a seminar class I call 'Flash vs. Float', about different kinds of veils and styles/steps/techniques that work with each, or with both. Students of Ibrahim Farrah lean heavily toward the 'float' style, in general... others lean to other styles... Suzanna Del Vecchio does some *wonderful* veil work. Really incredible stuff; she is master of both flash

and float, but tends to the latter these days, as I see it. Delilah is well known for veil, California folks like Kamaal, Deena and others are pretty nifty, Azur Aja is one fo my faves for double veil." --Shakira

Another type of fabric that moves almost as exactly like silk is pearlized chiffon. I know that [Gaylene](#) in Wilsonville, OR carries it and it's about \$10 a yard...she does sell mail-order." --Z'alandra

"I'd just like to put in another vote for Pearlized Chiffon--looks and moves *very* much like china silk, only with a little bit more sheen, and doesn't wrinkle like it! And [Gaylene](#) is a great lady to deal with. She said she gets this fabric from Japan from an importer who sells it to ballroom dancers." --Andrea R.

[Regarding definition of a para-veil] Para-veil: Huge piece of chiffon. I've seen modern dancers, or the Isadora Duncan dancers use real silk, circular. Sorry, don't know ths size. Silk is best if you can afford it. Lightweight chiffon (polyester, or nylon)is usable. We have one that is two lengths of 45" material sewn together to make a 90" x 8(?) foot veil. This one has tassels sewn on to the 4 corners to make the corners easier to find and hang on to. Another of our p-veils is an unseamed chiffon, as big or larger than the one just descibed. (luckily found at a former B-dancer's tag sale!)

"Ive seen pictures of physical education classes or dance classes (or something) using a nylon parachute thing. Don't know the proper name. But, I bet these things can be found commercially, if one knows where to look. Maybe a phys ed supply house....they carry those neat Huge physio-balls.

"(I and my husband were priveleged to have my troupe mates carry the paraveil on "sticks" at the corners, over us as a canopy at our wedding reception. Oh yes, one threw rose petals too. I guess this is to hide the bride and groom from evil spirits. And very entertaining for the guests.)" --Zemyna

Sewing, Etc. Tips

"Evening star veils tend to lose their sequins. It is worthwhile securing each thread with a tiny dob of craft glue...sequins look better on the veil than on the floor." --Jenny L.

"I heartily recommend this practice [referring to the above post]--it really works, and at \$80 a veil, well worth the half hour you'll spend." --Andrea R.

"[Regarding hemming 'sheer, very slippery' white veil fabric, other than sewing a rolled hem] It would really help to know what type of material you are using (beyond "sheer and slippery"), but here goes. One method I've seen used reasonably successfully is to glue single-strand sequin trim onto the edge. This will only work if your material is porous enough for the glue to get inbetween the fibers of the material. Since you say that your material is sheer, it is likely to be the case.

"This method decorates the edge of your veil as well as keeps the material from unraveling. You may still experience a little raveling afterwards if the glue isn't close enough to the edge -- just trim the threads off and it should eventually stop.

A couple hints:

- use a glue that is still flexible when dry. Sobo is an excellent brand. Use the glue fairly liberally -- don't be stingy when applying it -- make sure it squishes out somewhat when you press the sequin trim on.
- use flat sequin trim, not cupped (cupped will tend to snag on everything, but flat will tend to slide off)
- use wax paper on your work surface to protect it from the glue. Also, it is easier to peel off in case the

glue dries quick.

The drawbacks of this method are that the glue edge is much stiffer than if you did a rolled hem. This can be good if you want a veil that flies more away from your body, but bad if you want the veil to be soft and very drapey. Another negative is that you'll be handling an edge with sequin trim, and the sequins will probably come loose sooner or later. You might want to consider hand-sewing that one edge, and use the glue/sequins on the rest." --Kalilah

Waistbands

"[Regarding using non-elastic waistbands] Either way, you avoid the problem of pulling down your skirt if you accidentally step in the hem (or get it caught getting up off the floor.)" --Susan

"I'm a baby dancer so maybe I don't know, but it seems to me that it would be better to pull your skirt down some than to have it rip or trip you." --Joanne

"Okay. if you pull your skirt down, you WILL trip on it and your butt will hang out. You will finish your routine with a bad case of costume anxiety. No fun. I'm fine with elastic in my skirts. If a skirt seems too long you can roll the waist down to shorten the skirt. Pinning your skirt to your belt is also a great idea (should do it anyhow). I've been really happy with my Egyptian style costumes with the skirt sewn directly to the belt. It don't go nowhere!" --E. Taylor

"[Regarding pinning one's skirt to one's belt] That's what I've always done--two humungous safety pins, one each front and back, through undies, harem pants, skirt, into the lining of the girdle. Everything stays put!" --Shoshannah

Zills and Metal Belts

"...I've used normal liquid brass cleaner (container said safe for jewelry) to clean my zills, and they shined up really quickly. As for belts, Cathy once said something about taking the appropriate (and safe) metal cleaner paste, diluting it in water and soaking the belt in it, then just rinsing the belt (and tarnish) off. Or soaking the belt in vinegar and salt, I think... hmmm, I'd have to double check that." --Kim

"My boyfriend, who is much neater, cleaner and attentive to detail than I am, also a lot more inclined to do projects in his spare time rather than hanging out in coffee houses reading mysteries--anyway, this paragon of usefulness recently cleaned most of my zills, with a 3-stage process: [He uses] 1) this remarkable stuff called 'Barkeeper's friend', which looks like Comet or Ajax granules, but cleans better, and a dishwashing scrubby pad; then 2) brass polish and a terrycloth rag; and then 3) car wax and a buffing cloth. My zills have never been shinier! I dance convinced my audience will be blinded by the shining of my zills, and totally ignore the flashing of my hips! ;-)

"Of course, I still have to replace the raggedy elastic--and Shakira, don't tell me to use hair ties. I'm one of those whose fingers are just a little too big to use hair ties and retain full finger function! (Though my extra student pair has hair ties and most of my students can use them!)." --Andrea Deagon

"When you are able to put down the mocha and mystery..., go to the local leotard shop and buy a bit of the pink elastic they have for ballet slippers and use that for your zills. Think it looks much better than black, and shows less dirt than white. Glad to hear someone else has, umm, full fingers. I almost snorted when I read the elastics post 'Not on these sausages!' :-)." --Andrea R.

"I use Never Dull. It is a bit messy, just like when I use it for silver, etc. But it really cleans them, without scratching. My partner uses Never Dull to clean his Tibetan Sing Bowl. Same fabulous results." --Kareema

"It's a puzzle to me why people want their zills shiny; I like mine with a mild shine, to look 'old'. I put orange oil on them. It shines them a little, the oil protects them for a while from any more tarnish, and they smell nice! Those of you into Wicca/herbology won't mind the connotations either, I think... got the idea from my friend Libby, who used to put it on her old metal cash register. Made working in the store more pleasant! ;-)" --Shakira

"Wll, ok, as long as we're talking tarnish removers: the one my antiquer friends like is Simichrome. Very gentle on old things but very good at getting tarnish off. Nice combination." --Shakira

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