

MAKE IT LOOK EASY

by Harold & Meredith Sears

When Fred and Ginger made their movies back in the 1930s, they practiced each routine for weeks — even months. By the time they got it on film, it looked so easy and natural that you could believe they were making it up in the moment. They flowed across the floor so naturally and comfortably that it seemed like the most casual of conversations between friends. They had worked out absolutely every detail ahead of time, so they didn't have to struggle with them during the dance.



Now, we are not doing a performance, and we are not going to work on a dance for months, but isn't this how we'd like our dancing to *feel*? As we hear again and again, this is our recreation. We don't want a rough struggle. We want a smooth cruise. And the secret is in the details. For each figure, there is a comfortable way to do it and probably dozens of uncomfortable ways to get through it.

If you only think of the figure in a general way and sort of blast through it, you'll probably happen on one of those uncomfortable ways. But if you can devote a little effort — not months, but a little — to the component steps and movements, then you can find that comfortable way to dance it.

So, this dance tip is to pay attention to how your teachers present a figure and to how they dance it — not just to the the big picture but to the details, too. And experiment with your partner. Reach a little farther. Try some shoulder lead or sway. Trial and error is an unsophisticated form of learning, but it can noticeably polish your effort. One example — let's think about the **Reverse Turn** in foxtrot. We just turn left in three steps, right? But look more closely. Does your lady get to do a comfortable heel turn, or does she have to force it to happen? At the end of the first measure, are you in closed position and connected, or have you separated to a tugging kind of banjo? The difference between a smooth Reverse Turn and one that feels like work is in just a few details.

We might be in closed position, facing line and center. The man steps forward left straight down that diagonal, and the woman steps back right. The first step is not a turning step, but we do need to use upper-body rotation or right shoulder lead (however you like to think of it). The man's feet are pointing line and center, but his upper body is facing center or even a little to reverse. This is the first detail that will keep you in closed position and help her to do an easy heel turn.

The second key is to make the next step forward and side right, stepping on the same diagonal line and stepping through the woman's left hip, turning her.

The woman simply draws her left foot to her right.

She is being turned on her right foot (the heel turn), and as she feels the man take weight on his right, she shifts her weight to her left, ready for the third step. The common error is for the man to get off the diagonal, to dance more down line, and to

think that he has to dance "around" his lady. If you do this, she will be led to progress, will not be able to do the heel turn, and you will end in banjo at the end of the first measure. So, take steps 1 and 2 toward line and center, turning your body as you move through her left side; dance a straight line, not a curved path around her. Her heel turn will happen easily, and you'll be in good closed position for the third step, straight back left for the man and forward right for the woman, now moving down line.



Let's think about a third "detail." We are told that foxtrot has early rise. We begin each figure with a slight lowering action. This is such a tiny action, but it is so helpful in signaling to the woman that the figure is beginning, in getting you started together, and in keeping you together through the figure. But in foxtrot, we complete the rise

by the end of the first step. Making your turn in this "up" position will stop the woman's progression and help to make that heel turn

happen. In contrast, in waltz, we extend our rise over the first two steps. This more gradual rise lets the woman step back right and then side left during a waltz Left Turn, and there is no heel turn.

Are you, by any chance, wondering why this has to be so complicated? We're simply turning left. Why all these fussy details? But they aren't complications to make it more difficult; they are refinements to make it more smooth, easy, even effortless. Any time you get separated from your partner, you are more prone to tug and to feel uncomfortably off balance. Whatever you can do to stay together will help you feel good.

Can we feel good dancing a **Double Reverse Spin**? How about two Double Reverse Spins in a row? The same refinements will help here and in so many other figures, if we can just think about them — early rise, upper-body rotation, stepping through partner rather than around. But the Double Reverse basically gets the whole Reverse Turn done in one measure, rather than two, so we need a little more rotation, and we need to think a little more about the placement of the second step. As in the Reverse Turn, we might be in closed position facing line and center. The man steps forward left with right-shoulder lead and then forward and side right through the woman's left hip. During beat 3, he uses a little extra upper-body rotation to lead the woman to step side and back right on the &-count and then on beat 4 to draw the left in front of the right and take weight. During beat 4, the man only draws left to right with a touch. We end in closed position with lead feet free, maybe facing line and wall. The amount of spin in this figure does vary, and the best way to deliver a 3/4, 7/8, full, or even greater spin is with the man's second step. If he places his foot on the diagonal, the amount of turn should be 7/8. If he uses more rotation and steps farther around, the turn will be greater. Theoretically, if you pay

attention to this step, you should be able to start facing line of dance or even line and wall, do several Double Reverse Spins, and comfortably end facing line and center for an Open Telemark. Whew! But the smooth comfort is in those details.

