

Disco Comet Dress

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Mentor Statement:

This design was a final project designed and constructed by a student in an upper-level undergraduate course. This mentorship relationship aimed to guide students to design and construct an evening dress by using the internal structure of a strapless dress after learning and understanding the structure of eveningwear and haute couture production techniques. As a design mentor, I gave the student pieces of advice on how to incorporate his inspiration, Funky Disco, into the internal structure design and fabric selection for creating a delicate, stretchy dress with a corset. This design was chosen to be sponsored based on its high-quality construction technique and the novelty of the design.

Design Statement:

The fast fashion industry formed under the industrial assembly line provides many low-cost clothing choices for people in modern society. However, due to the mass production and low quality of fast fashion, the wearing life of fast fashion clothing is short (Crumbie, 2022). By contrast, I was inspired by vintage clothing that cared more about quality than production speed. The goal of the project was to create a stunning, red carpet evening dress using high-quality materials. Regarding evening wear designers, Bob Mackie is one of my favorite designers, and his gowns are known for their show-stopping designs. His designs inspired this project. The purpose of this project was to a) challenge me to make something that would rival Bob Mackie's designs, b) explore haute couture and surface design production techniques, and c) experiment with unconventional materials.

The "Disco Comet" dress was inspired by the visual aesthetic that comets give when flying through the night sky. As a comet gets closer to the sun, chunks of it break off and give the dazzling tail for which they are known. Combining the dazzling tail with the 1970's Bob Mackie design inspiration is how the "Disco Comet" dress was born. One notable garment that inspired me was Bob Mackie's "Flame Dress," which Cher is most remembered for wearing. I loved the movement of that gown and the visual impact that the sequins have on a nude garment.

The design consists of a basic shell made from a tulle corset and a knit skirt attached at the waist. To make the corset: two layers of tulle were cut and sewn together for each layer, then boning

casings were sewn onto the middle layer. Six grommets were inserted into the back panels once the outer and lining layer was sewn. After the corset was made, the skirt was surged onto the waist of the corset. The skirt itself consists of a front and back pattern surged at the side seams and around the hem. Once the basic shell was made, making the sequin panels began. The dress features eleven of these panels made from a sequin fabric cut to the desired shape, lined with fusible Pellon interfacing, and then surged to finish the edges. The panels were hand sewn to the dress shell. The loose nature of the hand stitches helps to ensure the panels stretch with the skirt. These panels provide the dress with an eye-catching shimmer and convenient coverage for the person wearing the dress. When all of the panels were on the gown, individual polyester tassels were pulled through the holes in the knit and secured with a knot.



Figure 1. Hand stitch of all beads

Aside from the tulle corset, one of the most innovative uses of materials was the tassels. Originally, they were all a part of one big curtain and were cut off one by one to use on the gown. The fringe spans the circumference of the waist and trails down the sides of the sequin panels. In order to mimic the style of Bob Mackie, the fringe was cut to be shorter in the front and floor-length in the back, which helps the wearer to walk without getting caught in the fringe. Finally, the beaded finishing touches were added to the entire corset with the Swarovski and other glass beads. The Figure 1 shows an internal view of the hand stitched beads. The neckline of the gown features cylindrical navy-blue beads to contrast the light blue details of the gown and provides a flattering focal point. This gown took four weeks to construct and another five days to bead by hand from start to finish.

One of the biggest challenges of constructing this gown was the tulle corset. Tulle fabric is a very delicate fabric that does not like to hold a specific shape and tears very easily. However, the end effect was completely worth it because the sequins and beads appear to be coming out of the body, representing the comet inspiration with the symbolic sequin "tail" flowing out of the wearer's body. The tulle was helpful when it came to the boning because of the stretchy nature of the fabric that conformed to the structure. Another challenge was attaching the sequin panels without over/under stretching the knit skirt. To combat this, I pulled the skirt end of the gown over my knees and stretched the fabric to create a flat surface appropriate for the dress form's dimensions (Size 8). There are still some places where the fabric does not sit completely flush with the skirt, but this is not noticeable when the gown is on a human body. While figuring out how to make the sequin panels, several changes were made from my original idea. I had originally planned to line the sequin fabric with a satin fabric and sew it to the garment. However, upon trying this method, I

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learned that it was impossible to have the width I desired on the ends of the panels and turn the casing inside out. After the original plan failed, the fusible interfacing was utilized on sequin fabric panels because it would provide structure to the fabric while keeping the dimensions I wanted.

While there is significant inspiration drawn from Bob Mackie's "Flame Dress," this gown is unique in its own right because of the utilization of haute couture production techniques to make a corset with the unique combination of tulle and boning. The hand-sewn details add that extra bit of quality lacking in modern-day fast fashion construction. The fun fringe elements emphasize the comet inspiration, with the added sparkle of a disco.

References

Crumbie, A. (2022, October 5). *What is fast fashion and why is it a problem? Ethical Consumer*. Retrieved May 24, 2022, from <https://www.ethicalconsumer.org/fashion-clothing/what-fast-fashion-why-it-problem>

