



Beverly Hillbilly

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Design Mentor Statement: *Beverly Hillbilly* was created as the student's senior honors project. This project aimed to develop a senior collection based on the concepts of diversity and inclusion, focusing on gender, body size, and culture. The purpose of this mentorship relationship was to guide the student to design 4-5 looks for the collection, highlighting the knowledge and skills in design and technology mastered during the entire undergraduate design education experience. The student was asked to develop her collection by elaborating on the assigned concept with in-depth research, suggesting multiple design ideas with sketches, drawing illustrations, drafting digital garment patterns, creating 3D avatars and virtual prototypes, selecting and creating materials, fitting models, and finally constructing garments. *Beverly Hillbilly* is one of the resulting outfits from this collection. This design features high quality tailoring resting on elaborate craftsmanship. It also skillfully expresses cultural aesthetics and identity through its unique yet functional details.

Statement of Purpose: My family has a rich Appalachian history, living in eastern Tennessee for over 200 years. I have a deep appreciation for country music and many of my family members are bluegrass and country musicians. I discovered queer country music as a genre (Groff, 2022) in 2019, and its influence has flavored much of my undergraduate design work. I had the honor of completing my internship with the legendary rodeo tailor and designer to the stars, Manuel Cuevas (known simply as "Manuel"), a key figure in the history of western wear and the development of the overall aesthetic. Throughout his career he has made many notable looks, ranging from the Gram Parsons suit he created while working as Nudie Cohn's head tailor, to constructing Johnny Cash's famously all black wardrobe (Country Music Hall of Fame, 2021). For my senior collection, I wanted the crown jewel of my collection to be a suit that I custom tailored for myself using techniques I learned from my internship. I also wanted to explore my love of textile design and experiment with some of the different hand dyeing techniques that I have taught myself over the years. This suit reflects my identity in every way, from the custom dyed fabric in bisexual pride colors to the cut of the jacket that was bespoke tailored to fit my plus size figure.

Aesthetic Properties and Visual Impact: I define the western wear aesthetic as one that utilizes details such as shaped yokes, piping, and embroidery to create decorative elements on otherwise utilitarian garments. The style has branched off in many ways from that base definition, but the practical needs of cowboys and farmers shaped the clothing that the western wear aesthetic draws upon. One of the key factors driving up the value of Manuel's work is custom embroidery; this translates Manuel's intricate chalk sketches into freehand machine embroidery. However, I could not practically incorporate this

element in my project, due to a lack of access to the needed equipment outside of my internship. Yet this limitation proved a spur to creativity, requiring me to think of how I could create something that would have a similar impact as the kind of western wear I worked on last summer while remaining within my means of creation. In lieu of embroidery, I envisioned hand dyed fabric with a dreamy watercolor look to create visual impact, color blocked with solid-colored fabrics to enhance the overall look. Shaped, piped yokes are another defining characteristic of western wear, so I blended those traditional elements with the more modern colors I dyed the fabric. The overall effect is a suit that is rooted firmly in traditional western wear tailoring with a color scheme that makes it feel new and unique.

Process, Technique, and Execution: The first part of this suit's creation process was dyeing the fabric, which I executed using ice dyeing and vat dyeing techniques. I first dyed all twelve yards of the Cone denim used for the main fabric of the suit in my washing machine with liquid RIT dye, which is my preferred method for vat dyeing fabric a solid color. I dyed it with fuchsia dye to achieve the pink shade of the finished jacket. I then proceeded to ice dye half of the fabric (*Figure 1*), a technique using ice as a medium to melt powdered dye into fabric. I used the shade hot pink, a blend of fuchsia and turquoise, and also sprinkled in a small amount of deep purple and concentrated turquoise. The resulting fabric was used for the suit pants and contrast lapels. I used this same technique to dye the rayon Bemberg lining, the silk chiffon for the scarf, and the cotton broadcloth used to make the suit's piping. The creation process also incorporated the hand sewing techniques used in traditional tailoring. I elected to use speed tailor techniques, learned from Manuel, to structure the body of the jacket. This jacket uses high quality weft interfacing in lieu of the more traditional hair canvas, though I did attach twill tape to shape the roll line of the lapels by hand. I also finished the lapels and collar by hand with the traditional pick stitching, which is both decorative and functional as it serves in place of under stitching. The double welt piped pockets on the jacket, a style used heavily within western wear, as well as the pants are finished with traditional hand stitched arrows—these arrows are often appliquéd on cheaper, lower quality western wear (*Figure 2&3*).



Figure 1. The ice dye process



Figure 2. Inside the jacket and pant pockets



Figure 3. Outside jacket pocket

Cohesion: My usage of the same dyes through several dyeing techniques made the colors cohesive, despite using different fabrics for each element of the look. I carried over finishing details and similar yoke shapes from the suit jacket to the pants, creating a cohesive-feeling suit despite pairing the solid-colored jacket with multi-colored pants.

Originality and Innovation: This design is original and innovative due to its dyeing techniques and fabric aesthetics. Western wear is experiencing a bit of a revival in pop culture outside of country music (Lawrence, 2018), and while my colors are more in line with current pop trends, my usage of traditional techniques keeps my suit firmly rooted within the milieu of authentic western wear. The combination of modern colors and traditional style lines creates a suit that feels innovative and fresh without losing touch with the history of the aesthetic. Preserving history when designing within the western wear aesthetic is important for keeping the work within the realm of cultural *appreciation* rather than cultural *appropriation*.

References

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