

Elevating Scraps

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A recent exhibition at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum, *Scraps: Fashion, Textiles, and Creative Reuse*, served as a source of inspiration for the creative reuse of pre-consumer textile waste (Brown & McQuaid, 2016). This exhibition had a goal of creating “innovative and sophisticated design solutions for transforming pre-consumer textile waste into new and usable materials” (Brown & McQuaid, 2016, p. 7). The designer adopted this goal for the present up-cycled piece. This piece began with a large donation of fabric samples from a local furniture store to the designer’s university. Within this donation, there were forty leather samples of varying colors. Therefore, the purpose of this design was to create an up-cycled garment from pre-consumer textile waste utilizing a historic inspiration process as a statement about sustainability.

The worn look of the samples, some even featured silver grommets and holes for hanging, brought to mind historic garments and particularly suits of armor. Therefore, the second source of inspiration came from the tonlet walking armor of Henry VIII (Dufty, 1968). Tonlet refers to a skirt made of armor plates (Dufty, 1968). This specific suit of armor has a skirt comprised of nine small concentric rows, which allow the skirt to flare out at the knee and gather in at the waist. The skirt rows are divided into small rectangles much like a quilt. Some of these rectangles are engraved with the double layered Tudor Rose.

Parsons (2015) provided a process for the inclusion of “historically informed analysis as a framework to examine studio design practice” (p. 280). This process was utilized to guide the design. After analysis of the historical garment, the designer wanted to integrate the visual concept of the conical silhouette and stiff layers of the armored skirt into a contemporary women’s garment featuring a leather vest and linen underdress.

Most of the donated leather samples were 5.5” x 9” and were too small to make many traditional pattern pieces. Thus, a layered look using strips of leather that were 2” in diameter was the best solution to the size limitation of the samples and mimicked the layered tonlet skirt of the armor. First, the designer cut all the samples into 2” strips and then created a simple tent-shaped pattern for the vest using draping. The vest pieces were made from wool flannel flat-lined with cotton organdy for additional body. The leather was arranged into a chevron pattern to further emphasize the width at the hem. The leather strips were stitched down in rows using a walking

foot. After each vest piece was completed the coat was assembled and lined. Padding was inserted to create additional body at the hem. The leather was quite heavy so crinolines were added to build a large, conical silhouette. Other edges were bias bound.

Small amounts of leather remained after the vest was constructed. A goal of this up-cycled design was to maximize the use of the leather samples. Thus, the designer decided to create laser cut leather flowers to adorn the hemline. The remnants were cut into 2" x 2" and 1.5" x 1.5" boxes. The flowers were copies of engraved Tudor flowers on the original armor. An image of the engraved flowers was loaded into Adobe Illustrator and traced. The designer precisely created the Illustrator file to fit the laser cutter bed. A wooden board was cut in the same size as the laser cutter bed and each leather scrap was affixed to the board using double stick tape. The leather scraps were carefully arranged in a grid to align with the Illustrator file. Then the file was loaded into the laser cutter. Despite the careful preparation, it took four tries to perfectly align the board and laser cutter. The flowers utilized almost all of the remaining leather. Once the flowers were completed they were stitched to the hemline of the vest. Finally, three leather snaps, which echoed the straps utilized on the armor, were added to the center front.

A dress was created using flat pattern to go under the vest. The dress was constructed from an antique linen sheet. Leg-of-mutton sleeves with cowl accents were included to create width at the shoulders. The draping of the sleeves mimicked the pauldrons (metal which wraps around the shoulders and over the arms) on the original armor of Henry VIII. The sleeves also helped balance the exaggerated hemline. Finally, a draped collar was added to the neckline. The collar balanced the sleeves and related back to the extravagant necklines popular in the time of Henry VIII. The collar opens at center back with hooks and eyes.

In conclusion, a visually complex and interesting garment was made from pre-consumer textile waste from the home furnishing industry (Brown & McQuaid, 2016). It also utilized a historical context to inform studio practice (Parsons, 2015). Other designers should further explore the use of home furnishing textile waste in up-cycled pieces. Other designers should also endeavor to utilize more than one design process or goal to create pieces with visual and intellectual depth.

Brown, S. & McQuaid, M. (2016). *Scraps: Fashion, textiles, and creative reuse*. New York, NY: Cooper-Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum.

Dufty, A. R. (1968). *European armour in the town of London*. London, UK: Her Majesty's Stationary Office.

Parsons, J.L. (2015). Historical patents as inspiration for digital textile and apparel design. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 33(4), 280-296.

