



## Secessionist *Reformkleid*: Striped Day Dress that Converts to a Tunic

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**Design Concept:** To create multiuse and multisize daywear that fits different body types and age groups. Inspired by the bold geometric styles of the Viennese Secession art movement, this design addresses demands made in *The Human Ecology Fashion Design Manifesto* (Bissonnette, Chartrand, Furler, Sayegh & Siefert, 2017) that was part of the 2017 exhibition *Misfits: Bodies, Dress and Sustainability* at the University of Alberta, where co-curators explored sizing issues in the ready-to-wear industry and their impact on people and consumption.

**Process, Technique & Execution:** The garment can be worn as a maxi dress or a tunic. A portion of the front bodice is not sewn to the belt and can fit a smaller body via cinching. The stripes of the Ponti di Roma knit are placed vertically at the skirt, which is gathered to accommodate various body types and allow a wide walking stride. The bold visual effect on the straight skirt is slimming yet the knit allows ease of movement and comfort. The medium weight of the fabric provides enough structure to forego the wearing of a slip, as the knit is opaque and does not cling to the lower body. A quilted band at the bottom of the skirt helps to bring the hem away from the body and adds to the graphic effect. The inner hem band has four buttonholes near the center front and three near the center back that link to buttons hidden on the underside of the below-the-bust belt for the tunic option. A quilted band hems the short sleeves, which are extensions of the flat bodice pattern mostly placed along horizontal stripes. No set-in-sleeves fits women with broad shoulders. The sleeves are pleated to maximize the graphic effects of the stripes and a checkboard section is placed on both sides of the center front bodice panel to add graphic impact. Fit is provided at the neckline by two triangular gussets. The pattern pieces are thus mostly geometric (rectangles and triangles) but can fit body types beyond the slim boyish type devoid of feminine curves. The dress/tunic is distinctive yet familiar, flattering, casual and comfortable. It can appeal to different age groups: from young people who prefer sporty stretch clothing, to an older generation who embraces comfort yet prefers not to wear clingy revealing knitted clothing.

**Contextual Review:** The bold stripes of the knit are reminiscent of the graphic styles of the Viennese Secession and creators who applied this new visual language to dress at the turn of the century until the eve of World War I. One such creator was Emilie Flöge (Fischer, 1992) who is seen in a photograph in a black and white striped, floor length caftan with checkered bands (Böhler, ca. 1909). This visual treatment of the fabric was a source of inspiration, but the fit of my *reformkleid* is more closely linked to the new linear Empire styles emerging in Europe and championed by such designers as Paul Poiret. By 1909 such linear reform styles were fashionable and worn in posh Viennese resort towns and spas, which suggested a “link between health culture, modernity and current aesthetic taste” (Houze, 2001, p. 38) that I endeavored to apply to my design. By focusing on a place and time when dress styles became closer to our own, I created a garment inspired by the past that does not feel anachronistic to the wearer.

The dress/tunic addresses several demands made in *The Human Ecology Fashion Design Manifesto*: it is conceived to be worn in different ways; it is a multisize garment; it can be worn by different age groups and body types; and care is given that comfort is as important as aesthetics by assuring a wide walking stride and variability of cinching below the bust. As part of a human ecological focus that explores everyday life, I tried to create elegant and fun daywear that reflects our casual mindsets and need to acquire fewer garments that can be more serviceable and worn for a longer span of time to address issues of sustainability.

**Techniques:** Overlock and cover stitch machines were used. As such, the process, techniques and quality are as high as casual knitted attire mass-produced for the ready-to-wear industry.

**Materials:** 70% rayon, 25% polyester and 5% spandex Ponti di Roma knit.

**Date completed & measurements:** May 2017, dress form selected 12-14 (fits sizes 10-14)

### References:

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A: Dress Front



B: Dress Back



C: Tunic Conversion Side



D: Tunic Conversion Detail