

## Heirloom Elegance, Something Old is New

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As products reach the end stage of the life cycle, decisions must be made regarding how to dispose of them. The most common approach is to donate usable items to charitable organizations and to channel those with limited or no use to garbage destined for landfills. Designers dedicated to social responsible actions can develop creative ways to reuse and extend the life of all or parts of end-stage products. Household textiles are ideal resources for up-cycling because while their initial use may no longer be fashionable, their *heirloom* status makes them difficult to discard. Re-purposing heirloom textiles not only extend their life but it also sustains precious and cherished memories associated with their previous uses.

The objective of this design was to repurpose heirloom linens. Three distinctly different table linens including (a) woven damask, (b) embroidered cutwork, and (c) hand embroidered linen served as inspiration for the design. These textiles, handed down over many years from family members, were combined to create an elegant contemporary bridal gown consisting of a corset, peplum, and train.

The exquisite white embroidered cutwork cloth is the featured textile in the bust area, peplum, train, and shoulder ruffle. The hand embroidered white linen cloth with drawn thread work is used in the corset panels and an intricate embroidered motif is centered on the skirt of the gown. Peach colored damask cloth is used as underlining to add a dimension of color in the bust and skirt to emphasize the delicate embroidery. A train wraps around to the front of the gown evolving into a peplum that partially reveals a short skirt. The lower edge of the train is embellished with floral motifs, which were created by extracting and gathering embroidered edges to form a circular lower edge. A removable shoulder flounce adds a modest addition to a strapless bodice and the back of corseted area gives the illusion of exposed skin.



Preliminary design sketches were developed. Next, the linens were draped on a dress form to formulate design options, which would exclude the flaws and stains on the fabrics and capitalize on the linens' sizes, details, and shapes. A final sketch was developed. The linens were draped again and an original pattern sets were created for a corset, skirt, train and peplum.

The train and peplum were cut first from the cutwork cloth. Two pieces of the peach fabric were



cut to trace the scallop of the cutwork cloth, pillow cased together, and stitched to the underside of the train to give the desired blush color from the outside, yet exposing a glimpse of the peach from underneath. Crinoline edged in 3" horsehair braid and gathered in the seam allowance at the waist create the understructure for the peplum and train. The train's scallop edge is reinforced with horsehair braid to provide added body. Additional flowers are extracted from leftover pieces and applied to bottom edge of train to allow it to lie correctly along the bottom back edge.

Next, the corset was cut from the hand-embroidered linen. Pattern pieces were placed to best showcase the beautiful details of the cloth. The corset is underlined with a netting and crinoline for support without negating the illusion of the corseted area. Casings were cut and

sewn from the fabric and boning was fed through the casing. Fabric covered cording was interlaced through the loops to form the back closure for the corset

The bust area is underlined with peach fabric and the cutwork cloth is cut, applied to fit the bust, and then stitched in place by hand. The skirt is also underlined with the peach fabric and the delicate linen hand embroidered cloth is featured as the outer layer. The removable shoulder ruffle has a layer of crinoline edged with horsehair braid for added support. Rosettes were created by hand basting the center of several floral motifs and gathering the center to produce a floral embellishment to enhance the lower edge of the shoulder ruffle.

These magnificent, finely crafted heirloom linens are revealed as something new to allow old memories from the past to meld with new memories in the future.