

Sparkling socialite. A snow-dyed silk gown using inventive patternmaking and construction techniques for minimal fabric waste

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The goal was to design a gown for a vivacious woman who attends philanthropic social events and desires a lively aesthetic through creative fiber arts techniques. A secondary goal for the designers was to highlight a unique piece of snow-dyed 100% silk charmeuse while keeping the 5 yards intact for potential future reuse in another garment. Scholars have creatively designed to minimize fabric waste (e.g. Kallal, 2007; O'Rourke-Kaplan, 2012) and to feature unique hand-dyed fabrics (e.g. Allyn, 2007; Cho & Pedersen, 2007; Kramer, 2007; Sanders, 2007). This



design combines both aspects. To achieve these goals, a strapless gown was designed with the snow-dyed fabric *width* from an empire styleline to the floor and its *length* pleated around the body. Above the empire styleline, pink silk charmeuse with hand-applied sequins and beads in colors complementing the snow-dyed fabric was used.

To snow-dye the fabric, the charmeuse was pre-soaked 30 minutes in a soda ash fixative bath, twisted, placed on a screen over a container in a 70°F room, and covered with snow. Citrus Yellow, Antique Gold, Fire Red, and Fuchsia Procion fiber reactive dyes were placed on the snow and, due to the cold temperatures, decomposed into their component colors, imparting more colors than the four applied. The melting snow carried the dye through the fabric.

Princess-seamed bodice pieces were flat-patterned, then spaced along the 5-yard length, to determine the pleat intake, and marked on one selvage of the snow-dyed fabric.

To construct the gown: (a) interfacing and spiral steel boning were attached to bodice underlining panels; (b) pink upper bodice panels were sewn to the snow-dyed fabric at the empire styleline, according to pre-marked pleat spacing; (c) underlining panels were hand-basted to outer fabric; (d) princess seams were sewn above the waist, enclosing excess fabric in the bodice and creating box pleats in the skirt. The gown includes a waist stay, invisible zipper, and full lining.

The creative patternmaking and construction techniques used highlighted and utilized the entire 5-yard piece without a single cut of the fabric. The snow-dyeing technique is innovative because Procion fiber reactive dyes are typically used in warm water.

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