The Ulster Coat Reborn: A Versatile Coattress

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Keywords: versatile design, sustainable design, the Ulster coat, coattress

A sustainability concept of “Design Light” is achieved by creating multifunctional garments. With a product that performs multiple functions, we can do more with less and leave less environmental footprints (Fletcher, 2008). In the “Shades of Scenery” series, my goal was to create versatile garments using sustainable strategies (Whang & Haar, 2009; Whang, 2012). For this project I utilized the “Design Light” concept to create a versatile coattress for career women. This coattress can be worn with multiple options; the cape can be worn outside for function or for a dramatic look, and, the underdress can be worn at work with or without the belt and/or the rose corsage brooch.

The modern coattress first emerged in the 1910s and was suggested that it could be worn over waistcoats or underdresses (Cumming, Cunningham, & Cunningham, 2010). It is often recommended for those wishing to portray a professional look. The dress incorporates design elements from the Ulster coat. The Ulster coat is a long belted coat made with removable cape, worn by women and men in the Victorian era (Tortora & Eubank, 2010). To achieve a rhythmic and unified look, a high-low flared cape and knee-length A-line dress were draped. The Peter Pan collar and the exaggerated bishop sleeves were added for an elegant and nostalgic look.

The garment was made with burgundy floral polyester brocade, and linings for the dress (100% cotton) and the cape (100% Dupioni silk) dyed in a natural dyestuff (Cutch). Cutch produces light to dark reddish brown or gold brown tone depending on mordanting and percentage method of weighting the dyestuffs. After a few experiments, the best result was achieved by dyeing the

lining fabrics in the exhaust dye bath with 2% of the Cutch and 1 % of aluminum potassium sulfate mordant.

The dress was cut on the bias to achieve a slinky A-line with fisheye darts at the waist and side darts at the bust. The desired fullness for the exaggerated bishop sleeve was achieved using slash-spread technique based on the basic bishop sleeve. To make the cape detachable, ties and eight elastic loops were inserted around the neckline of the cape, and buttons were attached to the neckline of the dress. Finally, the belt and the brooch were made with the self-fabric. The corsage brooch was intentionally left with rough cut on the edges to give it a rustic look.

This original design contributes to the field of textiles and apparel by exemplifying the sustainable design concept to create a versatile garment. This design is also unique in adapting the historical garment, the Ulster coat, to develop a modern look for those women who want a professional yet bold look. In addition, the garment can be used in a historic costume class to illustrate how designs of the past can be used as an inspiration for modern fashion.

References

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