



## Designing Coordinated Separates: Use of Inspirational Sources in Apparel Classes

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**Introduction:** Ready-to-wear apparel design development follows a number of phases (McKelvey & Munslow, 2012). Designers create clothing for specific target markets, based on information that includes demographic parameters such as age, occupation, income, marital/family status, and retailer preferences. Marketing and sales representatives augment this information and provide guidance on best-selling styles from the previous season. While the order of activities within the fashion product development cycle may differ, it typically begins with trend analysis and review of industry forecasting publications that provide seasonal reference on styles, silhouettes, colours, fabric trends and print motifs. Teaching students how to interpret such information, translate applicable elements and not simply create modified copies of images found in trend forecasting sources can be challenging, hence we advocate the use of inspiration from primary sources.

**Inspirational Sources:** The use of inspirational sources is something that is commonly used and considered to be useful when designing, including knitwear (Eckert & Stacey, 2000, 2003a, 2003b), clothing (Mete, 2006) and textiles (Strickfaden, Stafiniak & Terzin, 2015). Research interests on inspirational sources are typically based on the seminal work of Eckert and Stacey; however, other research investigates the differences between influence and inspirational sources (Strickfaden et al., 2015) and teaching with inspirational sources (Dazkir, 2013). Furthermore, in the fall of 2015 the designers behind Proenza Schouler based their collection on the works of ceramist Ron Nagle, while Derek Lam looked to German Lava pottery from the 50's-70's for his inspiration. Clearly, using inspirational sources has become a means towards deepening creativity. The following discussion highlights a course that utilizes these concepts through a project with undergraduate students where they use inspirational sources to design coordinated separates.

**Project Brief:** The work reported here is based on an assignment done with a 2<sup>nd</sup> year apparel design class. First, the students were introduced to the process of inspiration through the iconic collection of colour blocked jersey knit dresses created in 1965 by Yves St. Laurent based on the work of the Dutch abstract impressionist painter Piet Mondrian. Second, the students were asked to find their own inspirational source through primary research at one of the city's national art galleries or museums. They were required to choose an artifact or the work of one artist as inspiration to begin the design process. Whenever possible the students were asked to use a physical artifact or painting, not photographs of them, to enhance the process. While this approach is not new, it was employed as a structured means to spur creativity.

**Design Problem:** Once the students researched their painting and/or historical artifact, they were asked to translate this into women's wear, day time outfit made up of coordinating separates, for the Spring/Summer season. As a pre-cursor to designing a collection, project requirements

included the creation of three separates, using size 10 women's wear blocks: a jacket, pant and sleeveless top. The pant and jacket were to be made up in a different, but coordinating, woven fabric. Knit or woven fabrics were allowed for the sleeveless top. Use of at least one printed, embroidered or woven multi-coloured textile was mandatory. Pants were to be unlined and required a waistband or facing, zipper or button closure and two pockets. The jacket was to be lined, have a one-piece sleeve, intermediate collar and front closure. The jacket and pant were pattern drafted, prototyped in muslin and sewn in fashion fabric, the top was designed but not fabricated due to the time constraints of a 12-week term. Students were encouraged to choose natural fibres such as: cool wool, linen, silk, bamboo or cotton as well as natural/synthetic blended fabrics and to consider silhouette, proportion, colour harmony and fabric texture. Students are required to keep a design process journal in order to document their use of inspirational sources, colour, fabric and concept development.

**Learning Outcomes:** While the students engaged in this project were given the opportunity to explore and develop their creativity through the design process by working with primary sources of inspiration, they also learned that mapping inspirational sources to a design could be done in a variety of different ways. The most successful clothing designs were based on how the sources were integrated in innovative, creative, and versatile ways. Additionally, the details incorporated on fabric surfaces (use of materials), through silhouettes, proportion, balance and focal point/s were significant. It was clear from the design outcomes that adapting inspirational sources to designs were done on larger levels and smaller ones including suitability of the fabric choice to styling, fabric colour, texture, and print dynamics.

**Future Directions:** The greatest obstacle faced by students is sourcing fabrics at retail outlets in September that align with their source of inspiration and are suitable for the design of garments for the spring season. The recent acquisition of a digital printer by the School offers unlimited potential to advance the design of coordinates based on sources of inspiration.

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