Introduction

COSTUME Design requires: study of proportions of human figure and methods of improving existing proportions; a study of color in its relation to types of complexion and figure and material and of materials from point of view of suitability to different types of individual and occasion; it also includes designing of type dresses, hats, wraps; discussion of dress, coiffure, foot-wear, et cetera.

THE AIM:

1. To gain knowledge of the evolution of line and color in the designs of clothes and, through study of textiles and historic costume, their relation to present-day clothes.
2. To consider the use of appropriate and becoming materials and styles.
3. To adapt current styles to individual appearance.
4. Logically to analyze details, their use and abuse.
5. To understand the proper value of accessories and of color.
6. To correlate Costume Design with all the arts. Ruskin has written: “Good taste is essentially a moral quality. Taste is not only a part and an index of morality. It is morality. The first, last and closest
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trial question to any living creature is, ‘What do you like?’ The entire object of education is to make people not merely do the right things, but enjoy the right things. What we like determines what we are.”

If personality is the visible expression of character, if it distinguishes the individual, and if it is the sum of his vitality and mentality, then there is no doubt that our clothes are seriously to be considered. They reflect our character, as well as our social status and the customs of our times. The old proverb, “Tell me your friends and I will tell you what you are,” may be changed to, “Tell me how you dress and I will tell you what you are.” It is possible to live above one’s apparel, but dress is of the greatest importance, and its elegance depends upon two fundamental principles: the search for greater simplicity, and the search for detail and personality.

Not only has costume a psychological effect upon the wearer, but for personal charm it means as much as the speaking voice or a pleasing manner. One’s dress attracts or repels at all times. The whole problem seems to be to subordinate it to the wearer and have unity of the whole in mass, line, and color, so that dress reveals one’s best characteristics and one may expect the remark, “What a charming person!” instead of, “What a lovely gown!”

Good taste, or a fine sense of the fitness of things, may be attained by observation and study and by surrounding oneself with worthy and beautiful things. Good taste is subtle and requires imagination as well as observation. Its absence results in such
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incongruities as the wearing of ermine in the daytime with any heterogeneous type or texture of cloth.

Indeed, ermine is a striking example of a misused accessory in a costume. It is fascinating, because it conjures up visions of royal personages, knights and ladies. The laws of the Middle Ages (Edward III) required that it be worn only by nobles, and to-day in Europe ermine is worn on state robes; the rank and position of the wearer is in many cases indicated by its presence or absence and the disposition of the black spots, and when worn in crowns or coronets it is a recognition of heraldry. Therefore, at all times it should be reserved for state occasions or worn formally with certain royally textured and dignified clothes and fabrics, just as velvets and satins are reserved for formal gowns and not for kitchen or garden work, just as large velvet hats are not worn in the morning with workaday clothes or short skirts, and just as royally plumed, large velvet hats are suited only to formal afternoon or evening gowns of velvet or satin. Much might be written upon this subject of good taste and imagination in the wearing of clothes.

One of the best New York designers of costume, speaking of suitability, said that when she designed a gown for a certain celebrity she invited her to be her week-end guest, and breakfasted, lunched, and dined her for three days, in order to study her personality. Monday she returned with her to the shop and draped the fabrics upon her. The costume was designed for that particular person. Later the manu-
facturers of ready-made clothing copied the gown, which was wholly unsuited to any other kind of person. In spite of this, it was hideously displayed in shop windows and worn by all types of people.

Taste may be developed by a continuous effort to choose among lines, forms, and masses, fine and less fine, and it is certain that with logical thought and observation any one may be a good designer of whatever he may really want to possess. It is not necessary to be an artist for one to choose a sketch from a magazine or book and change the lines to suit one’s own requirements and type of figure. But although designing in this way may seem a simple process, it involves consideration of textiles, historic costume, and costume design. In the succeeding pages these subjects will be briefly discussed, in the hope that the reader will want to experiment and search further.