COSTUME DESIGN

In costume design we consider mass, line, and color, and how to analyze dress logically.

The first interest in a gown is at the head; second, at the throat and shoulders; third, at the waist. In color combinations the hair, eyes, and complexion are the first consideration. After the gown is finished, it must be comfortable and suited to the occasion and the personality of the wearer. There are two ways of dressing: fashionably and suitably. If one strives for suitability, comfort, and becomingness, one will be well-dressed at all times, and there will be no trimmings at all if they be not simple, beautifully spaced, and of fine quality. Always it is well to remember that garments may caricature.

To design a costume logically involves:

1. The study of the structural lines of the human figure and the personality of the wearer.

2. The choice of suitable materials, their color, texture, and weave.

3. Beauty in shaping and ornamenting the gown according to the laws of design, which are proportion, rhythm, harmony, and balance in line, mass, and color, requiring: (a) log-
ical thought, \((b)\) common sense, and \((c)\) good taste and imagination, to attain a perfect whole.

More explicitly, the elements of costume design are:

1. Line and Drapery.
   a. Long line.
   b. Continuous line.
   c. Repeated line.
   d. Opposed line.

2. Silhouette—outline.

3. Texture of cloth.
   a. Surface.
   b. Weave.
   c. Weight.

4. Decoration.

5. Color.

6. Detail.

In the following paragraphs this outline will not be fully followed, because some of the subjects are discussed under other headings.

LINE AND DRAPERY

The best designs of the clothes of past ages, from the standpoint of knowledge of textiles, construction, and the principles of design are: \((1)\) proportion, \((2)\)
rhythm, (3) harmony, and (4) balance in mass, line, and color. These should be carefully studied, as all art is applied, and the great artists of the past were craftsmen with tools in their hands. To-day materials and tools are our most efficient teachers of design, whether we use textiles and a needle, canvas and a paint brush, or marble and a chisel. Give an artist a piece of paper and say to him, "I want a design," and he must ask, "What for?" Therefore a designer is influenced in choice of materials, their color, their texture, and the ease with which they can be cut, beaten, or worked into shape.

An intelligent analysis of costume design requires a process of orderly thought, common sense, and good judgment, and proves that the basic principle of costume design depends upon the anatomy of the human figure. The "architecture" of the gown demands that the lines of the material follow the bone structure and lines of the body. If they do not, the lines become ugly and artificial. The draperies of the Venus de Milo are structurally draped; therefore the lines are very beautiful, because the material hangs from structural points,—the shoulder and hip. The Greeks always emphasized the lines of the chest, neck, and all structural points from which the folds of cloth fell. Drapery belongs to the whole attitude of Greek simplicity and freedom, and not to the later Gothic or Renaissance period.

Greek draperies expressed the life and movement one sees in the Winged Victory. In contrast, the stolid clothes of the Chinese, for instance, convey no
sense of action, because they hang in straight lines and are not draped at structural points. The Greeks’ use of the band around the waist was the beginning of the bodice. Thus it became evident that in order to secure curved and interesting lines, the material must be gathered at structural points.

Observation of the skeleton figure will lead to a realization of the many structural points which must be considered, and will help to eliminate the many bad examples of costume design resulting from the violation of simple structural rules. See Plate VIII. For instance, the so-called bolero jacket illustrates lines following rib structure. Ribs reinforce structure. To be designed structurally, the bottom lines should end at the lowest rib, at the hip bone, or at the end of the trunk—not in between. So must lines of collars conform to the lines of the cords and bone structure of the neck, which may be seen by turning the head. Directoire gowns were beautiful because the material fell in folds from the bust line to the feet.

It may be true, as someone has said, that dress began, not as a modest covering, but as ornament. However, if the evolution of draping from early Greek times is followed, it is evident that the Greeks subordinated all decoration to line, not only in dress but in their architecture, and still secured a beautiful unity of the whole in mass, line, and color. The simple beauty of their draperies and their regard for silhouette, for materials, and for texture, stand out in sharp contrast to the over-decoration of modern costumes.
PLATE VII.
Beautiful Example of Line and Drapery
in Greek Sculpture
In the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
COSTUME DESIGN

Costume design is very simple and logical. Costumes combine utility and artistic effect, inasmuch as the simple lines allow perfect freedom of movement.

M. Poiret said, “Simplicity is the great basic principle of costume design. If a garment is logical, it will not have buttons or pockets merely for ornament. Buttons will button, and pockets will be designed to hold things conveniently.”

Again, consider costume design as a whole in relation to all types of figures. It requires:

1. Study of proportion, rhythm, harmony, and balance in relation to the individual figure, involving
   a. Finely related mass, line, and color arrangement.
   b. Good spacing.
   c. Fine grouping of parallel and horizontal lines in the material and trimmings.
   d. Depth and delicacy of color tones.

2. Study of lines for stout and slim figures (not considering normal figures), in regard to
   a. Kind—
      (1) Horizontal.
      (2) Perpendicular.
      (3) Curved.
   b. Effect.
      (1) Changing height of individual figure.
(2) Determining breadth.
(3) Resulting in caricature, through ignorance in use.

c. Use, by
   (1) Domination.
   (2) Subordination.
   (3) Opposition.

3. Good spacing in line, form, and color, involving
   a. Proper arrangement.
   b. Good proportion.
   c. Unity and variety.

4. Proper color combination—dark, light, or contrasting—demanding that color be subdued, not striking, in
   a. Design.
   b. Materials, in
      (1) Lustre and color.
      (2) Texture in striped and figured goods or trimmings.

SILHOUETTE

Within the silhouette, which is the characteristic outline of the figure, there may be designed lines (aside from those for the normal figure) suitable for the stout-tall, stout-short, slim-tall, and slim-short
PLATE VIII.—Structural Lines and Proportion
Length of Head Used as Unit of Measurement
COSTUME DESIGN

figures. In the suitability of design and materials it should be noted that

1. Materials demand honest frank consideration of their quality, weave, texture, color, and design.

2. Main structural lines of design or materials depend upon shape or type of figure—
a. Normal.
b. Stout.
c. Slim.

3. Right proportion of figure may be gained through using length and shape of head as unit of measurement of fairly tall person. For example: One might measure
a. From top of head to feet.....8 heads
b. From chin to shoulder........ 1/3 head
c. From chin to waist............2 heads
d. From waist to hips.......... 1 head
e. From hips to feet .......... 4 heads
f. Across shoulders............1 3/4 heads
g. Face length..................feet length

Because the human eye overestimates height, it is of the greatest importance in designing a costume for the stout figure to create and further this illusion.
1. In stout-short or stout-tall figures, the problem is to change height and decrease breadth, as all structural lines of stout figures express breadth and circumference in
   a. Broad head.
   b. Square face.
   c. Short neck.
   d. Usually square shoulders.
   e. Full chest.
   f. Broad and short waist.
   g. Large hips.

2. As whole structure and lines of stout figure express breadth and circumference, the stout person must avoid broken silhouette and must wear the simplest gowns with very little trimming and only touches of bright color. Must avoid:
   a. The use of broad horizontal lines in design and in the designs of the fabrics used.
   b. The use of horizontal lines in all trimmings and decorations, such as
      (1) Hats.
      (2) Collars.
      (3) Cuffs.
      (4) Belts.
      (5) Ruffles.
c. The appearance of breadth and circumference, such as that produced by a light shirt waist and dark skirt or by short elbow sleeves which end at waist-line and therefore continue it.

d. Pleated skirts. (But if well draped, with finely related perpendicular lines, they will make a stout person's hips appear slender.)

e. Wide, broad, over-decorated, flat hats (because of horizontal lines).

3. In textiles, the stout person must avoid:

   a. Conspicuous stripes or designs, and large spots of color (choosing instead subdued colors and well-designed, well-placed spots of color).

   b. Shiny textured cloths—satin, et cetera.

Every part of the gown may assist in creating the desired effect or illusion of color and long lines. Pockets can be so fashioned and placed that they help to produce the effect of long or short line; and for stout, large-hipped women elaborate draperies of soft pleats may be used without hesitation if they are chosen with straight lines carried below the hip, and if pointed panels are employed. The stout woman must shun plain, tight-fitting skirts, and she must remember that the corset is not worn merely for support, but to give the figure harmony, and that the line of her gown must always taper toward the part of
the figure which she wishes smaller in appearance. The lines may be carried out within the silhouette, as in Plate IX, or they may not have to complete themselves within the silhouette.

Buttons may be used to improve and lengthen the line of figure. Applied to the skirt or waist, they may make a figure appear taller. If possible, it is well to have them button and not merely decorate. Pockets will decorate logically if they are placed conveniently for wear, to hold things; and buttons will decorate logically if they hold and button. Simplicity and consistency in every part of the costume should be observed.

THE SLENDER FIGURE

1. Structural lines of slender figure involve consideration of
   a. Slender head.
   b. Thin face.
   c. Thin neck.
   d. Narrow sloping shoulders.
   e. Slender hips.
   f. Flat chest.
   g. Narrow waist-line.

2. Costume for the slender figure
   a. Must avoid
      (1) Exaggerating height and slender-ness by many perpendicular and long lines.

[46]
PLATE IX.—Lines Within the Silhouette Which Accentuate Height
(2) Narrow, clinging, close-fitting dresses and coats.
(3) Tight sleeves, or angular lines in sleeves, waist, skirt, and coat.

b. May permit
(1) Increasing width by breaking up silhouette with horizontal or vertical lines.
(2) Horizontal lines in sleeves, waist, skirt, and coat.
(3) With discretion and restraint—frills, decorations, short skirts, broad low hats, et cetera.
(4) More trimmings and color than for the stout figure; decoration or line at the waist or neck, by color or trimming.

It may be repeated that if one cannot evolve and design a costume for oneself, there are good fashion plates in costume books and magazines to fit the individual style. Improve the lines of such a skeleton figure for the particular use required. It is interesting to take a sketch of the Mediæval or Greek dress and design a modern dress from it.