Proportions of the Human Figure and Designing for Different Ages

CHAPTER FOUR

Let us see how well we may adapt the theory expounded in the foregoing chapters to designing for individual figures. We have three ages to consider—the child, the young woman and the elderly woman.

In order to intelligently design costumes that will enhance the form of the individual, you must have a thorough understanding of the proportions of the human figure. We have stated in our definition of costume design that it should “through line, form, and color, reveal or conceal the personal characteristics of the physique.” It is obvious then that before any one can decide which characteristics are points of beauty, and which are defects, he must have some ideal figure upon which to work as a basis. Figure 16, represents the ideal form. Our aim in costume design is to create costumes that will make the form which is not exactly in accordance with that of the Venus de Milo—considered by all authorities to represent the perfect figure—as nearly like it as human effort can accomplish.

Although some types of figures differ to a large extent from the ideal form, still they may be pleasing
in themselves, and we learn to look upon them as individual "types." It will be seen that in designing clothes, you must take into consideration the various features of the figure for which the costume is intended. Seek to hide the unpleasant characteristics through the effective use of line, form, and color, and to accentuate the favorable ones through the same means. Designing for the individual is a test of the skill and the art of the designer. No two women are alike; and the costume that is suited in every particular to one woman would be entirely inappropriate for another. The thought that should be uppermost in the mind of the costume designer is to make the wearer of his creation more beautiful; but while this is the ultimate object of the designer, his effort must not be too obvious, for it is well to remember that "the purpose of art is to conceal art."

Figure 18 represents the conventional fashion figure which is proportioned more like the ideal form than is the average human figure. For the sake of convenience, we shall say that the height of the head, from chin to crown, is the unit of measurement. This unit we shall call a "head." We are now in a position to divide the figure into a definite number of heads as shown in figure 18. Through constant use in establishments concerned with fashion work, the proportions given have become standardized.

Figure 16, Venus de Milo, eight heads high, represents the ideal form.

Figure 17, seven and a half heads high, represents the human form. Figure 18, the fashion figure, and figure 19, the fashion layout, are made in strict accordance with the ideal form.
In figure 18, observe the location of the details of the anatomy. For example, the nipples are at the second horizontal line, the wedge slightly above the fourth, and the knees slightly above the sixth. The tips of the fingers extend midway between the fourth and fifth horizontal lines. Also note that the width of the hips is one and a half heads, and the width of the shoulders slightly greater.

Note these proportions very carefully, and with them as a basis you are able to represent the fashion figure, regardless of the fact that you have or have not ability at drawing.

The proportions of the human figure vary according to the age of the person, the main point of difference being in the number of heads, in height.

The height of a child at four years, is $4\frac{1}{2}$ heads.
The height of a child at seven years, is $5\frac{1}{2}$ heads.
The height of a child at ten years, is 6 heads.
The height of a child at fifteen years, is 7 heads.
The height of a person at maturity, is $7\frac{1}{2}$ heads.

Designs for children deserve a little more than casual mention. Too often the wardrobe of the child is neglected. Those having the selection of clothing for little people do not always stop to consider that there are certain distinct types in childhood, just as there are types in grown-ups, and that these types require certain definite types of costumes.

A child should be dressed, practically, in accordance with its wishes. That is, do not dress a child up in clothes which it dislikes, for if you do, you will produce an unpleasant and disagreeable effect on the manners and actions of the child.

Simplicity should be the keynote to the child's cos-
tume, and it goes without saying that dainty, delicate colors and materials are befitting tender years.

It is customary to divide children into three groups. First there is the child between the ages of two and six years, whose garments should be of light color and delicate material. The design usually shows a high or a low waistline, but rarely is the natural waistline emphasized.

Then there is the child between the ages of six and twelve who can wear dresses of darker color and heavier material.

The third and last class includes the fourteen-year-old miss, who, eager in her desire to grow up, seeks to wear clothes similar to those of her older sisters. This is an age when care and judgment must be exercised so that the costumes are neither too young nor yet too mature in their appearance, and the personality and inclination of the child will be a determining factor in deciding what clothes to put on her.

Mothers should guard against putting clothes on their children which displease the children themselves. The “tomboy” type of girl would never be happy in dainty frills and laces because they would hamper her inclination to play. Why not put her into clothes that suit her type? The successful designer for children studies the types and arranges his designs to suit the personality of the little folks who are to wear them.

Now we shall endeavor to treat each separately, with a view to designing suitable costumes for each type.

Observe the dress in figure 20, which is designed for the modern girl of twenty, who can wear to advantage the most extreme style that may be in vogue.
The collar winding around the neck and hanging down on one side, finally ending in a tassel, is a feature no one but a young girl should attempt to wear. The substitution of a little cape in place of sleeves, and the pleated insert of a contrasting color at one side of the skirt, are further extravagances suitable for youth alone.

With this design as a source of inspiration, we have created a costume suitable for a child of twelve, figure 21. Note especially the general air of youthfulness about the costume. You intuitively feel that a matured woman could never wear a costume such as this—for it is the incarnation of youth itself, and that is what the child should wear—clothes that bespeak the care-free, unworldly attitude of adolescence. Simple, yet charming, this will make the child as adorable as she has a right to be. The neck is made square, the cape is turned into a little sleeve and the pleating is used in a panel effect at the center of the front. The ribbon on either side of the skirt and at the neck is entirely in keeping with the spirit of youth, and serves to accentuate the simplicity of the costume.

With the costume in figure 20 as a basis, we have designed the costume in figure 22, suitable for a woman of forty-five. Here, unlike the costume for the child, we seek to bring out all the dignity and poise natural to a matured woman, the lines and details being more conservative. The low V neck is outlined with a collar and is partially filled in with a yoke. The dress laps over on one side, forming the drape, as in the original garment, while one end, a continuation of the collar, hangs from under the drape, and a simple motif of embroidery is used around the skirt. The long,
Instructive Costume Design

tight-fitting sleeves add to the dignity of the costume.

Figure 23 is a street dress for an elderly woman. The material used is a navy poiret twill, embroidered in black soutache. A white organdie ruching trims the high collar and the cuff of the undersleeve. The tunic and the loose sleeves are faced with black satin.

Figure 24 shows an evening gown for the elderly woman. Black satin is used for one side of the bodice and for the draped skirt. The other side of the bodice is made of black net embroidered with jet. The short sleeves and the wisp of tulle over one shoulder are plain black. The yoke at the front is of flesh-colored net. A jet girdle and a jet tassel complete the costume.

An afternoon dress for the elderly woman is illustrated in figure 25. It is made of gray canton crêpe embroidered in gray floss with a touch of royal blue. The piping around the neck, the straps across the front and sleeves, and the facing of the sleeves as well as of the sash at the back, are of royal blue. These designs were taken from various sources and made adaptable to the elderly figure.

Figure 26 shows a little play dress for the four-year-old, made of plaid gingham and bound with a plain gingham of one of the colors. Little “pantes” of the same materials are seen for a few inches below the dress.

Figure 27. The party dress for this child is made of white net over a taffeta slip of a delicate tint. There is a panel all the way down the front, of tiny ruffles, while two wider ruffles are placed over each shoulder. A picot-edged ribbon tied at the side front marks the high waistline.

[ 50 ]
PROPORTIONS OF THE HUMAN FIGURE

Figure 28, a school dress for the eight-year-old, is made of linen, and since it is slipped on over the head, is just fastened with a few buttons at the side front. The dress is one piece, and is cut in panels up to a slightly lowered waistline. The panels are tacked at the bottom and are embroidered in circles of colored wool. Two circles are embroidered on each sleeve. A black patent-leather belt is pulled through the panels alternately, and slightly holds in the dress.

Figure 29. When a child reaches the age of twelve, she may wear to school a dress of plain and printed challie. The overdress of the plain material is one-piece and is about four inches shorter than the underskirt, which is of the printed challie. The overdress is slit up as far as the waistline, and is held in on each side with a black velvet ribbon. An unusual collar is made of printed challie and is partly outlined with a one-inch strip of the plain material.

Figure 30 is a play suit for a little boy. It is made of linen in two colors. Pearl buttons are used as trimming.

What have you learned from this group of illustrations? Do you not now understand that one can derive suggestions from a definite source, and yet adapt them to the particular person for whom one is designing the garment?