Sew You Want to Be a Designer

Well Maybe You already ARE

If you are a home sewer, wouldn't you like to feel the satisfaction of designing your own clothes? If you answer YES, you might be in for a pleasant surprise. This article addresses these talented individuals as a subgroup of Recreational Fashion Designers, or shall we call them RFDs - are YOU one?

Fashion Designers are apparel artists who combine specific elements of fashion and design following universal principles of design to create personal interpretations of desirable garments. This means that the designer is the one who chooses all of the things needed to create a particular garment, how much of everything will be used, where it will appear and how to combine the details effectively to create an attractive garment.

Recreational fashion designers are the apparel artists who have had no formal training and may or may nor get paid for their creative work. They often limit sewing subjects to family and friends.

If you are a recreational home sewer, then you too, no doubt are a recreational fashion designer. Most people who buy patterns styled by other people willingly give the design credit to these others, quite appropriately - to an extent. Modesty is a good trait that should be shown in good taste but not to the point of minimizing your input or achievements.

Elements of Design are things that you can see and/or feel and some of them are quite specific to the particular field of the arts while others recur frequently. For example elements of landscaping design include plants, soil and rocks whereas elements of fashion design combine apparel, jewellery and other wearable items. Both and all other fields of the arts use the elements of colour, texture and line.

More specifically, elements my be described in terms of

- Colours – a red dress might be crimson, cherry red or scarlet. Natural colors come from pigments and are represented using the color wheel with primary colors of red, yellow and blue from which can be combined for secondary and tertiary colors and others.

  Digital colours are related to the refraction of light and are in the simplest of descriptions combinations of red, green and blue.

- Textures such as "smooth as silk" and "rough as burlap";

- Line such as the lines that appear solidly in the print of a fabric or figuratively in the outline of a silhouette (shadow-like shape of the garment).

The fashion artist combines these elements with sensitivity toward the principles of design.

Principles of Design are the unwritten "rules" for combining the elements to achieve a pleasing result. These principles include, but are not limited to:

- A centre of interest – much like the fulcrum (the balancing point, or control point) of a see-saw. In fashion, it may be the element or combination of elements that first draws your attention. If you tie a pretty scarf around your neck, others are unlikely to notice your shoes or the size of your waist.

- Balance and proportion - imagining the see-saw again, the heavier child must be closer to the centre. So too larger or more attention demanding elements should be closer to the centre of interest in order to balance;

- Harmony and contrast - Consider the little wooden sticks that can be harmoniously bound together in placemats as compared to letting them scatter for a game of “pick-up-sticks”

- Form that fits function - consider the comparison between a wedding gown and an office suit where the forms (garments) are not interchangeable with the functions (purposes).

These are not all of the elements or principles involved, but are good examples. Just remember that elements can be experienced with your senses whereas principles require addition of your thoughts.

By the definition of a designer above, anyone who chooses patterns and fabric to cut and sew an attractive and functional garment is a designer. It doesn't matter whether she or he works in a fashion boutique or at home, and whether doing it for profit or for pleasure.

When you choose and purchase fabric, pattern and notions, then you cut and sew them into a garment, you are making design decisions repeatedly. Color and texture of the fabric and the lines in the shape (or silhouette) of the finished garment are just the beginning. You also choose how much and where to use each of the colors and textures in order to have a pleasing result.

Even after the garment is finished, you still must add other elements such as shoes, jewellery and other accessories. By co-ordinating these elements to create a garment or an outfit that suits a particular event or purpose, you are applying principles of design.

"Designer" patterns that you can buy share that person's interpretation of a particular type of garment. This will likely include great shapes and innovative details which affect the fit and appearance of the garment and make it appealing to you. However, *unless you use the same fabrics, colours and details in the same places*, then **you** have pulled it together as the designer (or at the very least a collaborator).

Consider that since you choose the garment pattern, the fabric colour and texture, the notions and accessories, *you* are the designer. Even if you haven't realised it, you have probably designed every garment that you have ever cut and sewn *(*unless you made them by request or contract for someone who makes all of these decisions and simply asks or pays you to fulfill them).

Being able to make good decisions regarding these elements and principles does not require attending a design school. Design school *would* definitely enable you to make these decisions in an easier, more focussed and professional way. All of your sewing projects have combined elements of fashion with principles of design even if you haven't done this consciously.

Welcome to the world of the recreational fashion designer!

Feel your creative satisfaction ***soar*** when you *consciously* make your designer decisions choosing the elements of fashion that you apply with principles of design.