

Wearable Basket

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The present design explores the application of handwoven basketry techniques to apparel design. Basketry typically falls into three types of construction approaches: (a) twined, (b) coiled, and (c) woven (Christopher, 2014). Coiled techniques were previously applied to a wearable art garment by Chang (2005). But to the knowledge of the designer, handwoven reed basketry techniques have not been applied to apparel design. Thus, the purpose of this design was to explore the application of handwoven split reed basketry techniques to create a wearable art piece.

Inspiration for the overall silhouette of this design was ultimately dictated by the rigidity of the basket materials and the need for donning and doffing. The designer began by acquiring basketry skills through the completion of numerous basket-making kits and by watching instructional craft videos online. Once a sufficient set of skills were developed, the designer began to ideate potential approaches to a wearable basket. After considering donning and



*Fig. 1: Antique egg basket.
(One Source Auctions, 2020).*

doffing, the designer felt that a basket that could be pulled over the head was the best approach. The designer also figured that suspending the garment from the shoulders using shoulder pads was an ideal method to carry the weight of the design. The panniers of the design were based on the basketry approach used for a traditional egg basket (see Fig. 1). An egg basket is built using two intersecting hoops and by inserting ribs to create volume on the sides. The weaving is then done around the ribs and horizontal hoop.

After settling on the basic design of the basket, the designer began to search for inspiration for the “look” of the piece. Ultimately, the planned oversized shoulder pads

and panniers of the basket suggested the fashions of the 1980s and specifically the designs of Arnold Scaasi (2004). Scaasi (2004) was known for flamboyant silhouettes that were accompanied by oversized ornamentations and exquisite tailoring. The images of Scaasi's 1980s designs were kept in mind as the designer began to construct the final garment.

The wearable basket was constructed first using eight ¼" round reeds. The reeds were centered on the shoulders (four reeds per side), twisted in the center front and center back, and then fanned out over the hips. Next, ¼" flat reed was used to weave the shoulder pads. Secondary ribs were added to increase the width of the shoulders after four rows of plain weave were completed on each side. Once the shoulders were the appropriate size, the secondary ribs were cut, and the weaving tapered down. After the weaving was complete, the reed weavers were cut and tucked into the shoulders. Next, each shoulder was soaked in water and then rubber banded to create the proper width for a shoulder. Then, the reeds were allowed to dry into shape. Next, the panniers were constructed. A 7/8" flat reed was utilized to create the top ring for the panniers. The initial round reeds from the CF and CB were fanned out and woven over/under the top ring to hold it into place. The weaving for the panniers was also done with ¼" flat reeds and new round reed ribs were inserted at key points to add additional volume as the panniers grew. Once the weaving for each pannier was completed the weavings were soaked in warm water and a string was tied from the CF to the CB of the top ring to achieve a closer fit. The reeds were then allowed to dry.

Once the main body of the wearable basket was constructed, the designer felt that the overall balance and effect of the design were lacking. Thus, the designer began to create an oversized basket bow. This bow reflected the large ornamentations (also frequently bows) employed by Scaasi (see Fig. 2). The bow loops began with four round reeds which were woven with ¼" flat reed for seven rows of plain weave. Each loop was woven on the opposite sides of the same set of four main ribs. Next, three additional ribs were inserted to add width to the bow. After the loops were deemed to be a good size, the supplementary ribs were clipped, and the weaving was tapered down and then stopped. The loops were soaked in water to make the material pliable and bent into shape. Then rubber bands were applied to the loops and the bow was allowed to dry.



Fig. 2: Scaasi bows (Gokavi, 2022).

The lower, unwoven parts of the four ribs were then soaked in water and bent behind the top ring of the pannier to place the bow and begin adding the bow tails. The tails were fashioned using plain weave and three additional ribs were again added after seven rows to create more width to the bow. Once the desired length was woven for the tails, the ribs were trimmed and tucked back into the weaving to finish the ends. Each tail was soaked and then rubber banded into gentle waves to create volume and mimic the nature of fabric bows. Finally, a small woven center was created and attached to the bow.

Golden oak wood stain was then applied to finalize the wearable basket. This color was chosen as it is a traditional woven basket color. Following the completion of the basket, the designer set about creating the underdress. To balance the extreme shape of the basket, a full high-low skirt made from tulle was chosen. This shape was also favored by Scaasi (2004) in the 1980s. The body of the garment needed to be extremely close-fitting to provide the proper visual separation of the wearer's body from the basket. Thus, a sueded jersey knit was chosen for the bodice. V-necklines in both front and back were adopted to highlight the basket. To protect the wearer, wide shoulders were incorporated. Bands were added to finish both the armholes and necklines. A deep plum color for chosen for the underdress to provide balance with the golden oak color of the basket.

The present design represents an original approach to wearable art by incorporating split reed woven basketry techniques. It represents a new line of inquiry for the designer, who plans to create many additional wearable baskets. Furthermore, it is a unique combination of handwoven basketry techniques along with inspiration from designer, Scaasi. Future design inquiries into wearable baskets should investigate other traditional basket materials such as fiber rush, pine needles, willow, and raffia.

References

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