



Comme un Diamant

Sarah Buoni, Katya Roelse, University of Delaware

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## **Mentor Statement**

This design was created as part of a mini-collection in a senior capstone course. This student experimented with surface design, fabric dyeing, and zero-waste design to create a sensational and beautifully crafted garment. I chose to sponsor this student not just because of the resulting innovative and visually impactful design, but because they were able to make a case for sustainability while employing two different creative techniques.

## **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this design was to create a zero-waste dress that uses an entire bolt of fabric while remaining aesthetically pleasing to modern fashion tastes. As much as 15% of a bolt of fabric is wasted in modern pattern making (Rissanen, 2013) making zero-waste clothing an attractive alternative. Currently, common methods of zero-waste design often create baggy, loose garments. While this is still a useful utilization of the entire cloth, a large silhouette is not always desired. Body-conscious looks are a perennial trend (WGSN, 2017), and I wanted to find a way to create that whilst still wasting as little fabric as possible. To do this, I turned to methods populating fashion history. Many cultures in history have found ways to make beautiful, cinched garments while wasting as little fabric as possible, so I researched these techniques to find skills I could apply to a modern garment.

## **Aesthetic Properties and Visual Impact**

In order to appeal to a modern audience, I created this gown to fit within Alexander McQueen's brand. The woman wearing this dress must be simultaneously fierce and feminine, and that identity is present throughout the garment. The fabric is a hand-dyed 100% polyester satin with a hand-painted ombre from gray to pink that is splattered with spots and stripes. This color choice blends the seriousness of gray with the innocence of pink in a way that ultimately connotes power. The front torso of the dress is pleated and smocked in a diamond formation and accentuated with black beads to suggest luxury. The back of the gown is pleated several inches from the top and then left to billow out below the waist in a ball gown silhouette.

## **Process, Technique, and Execution**

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The first step towards making this garment was dyeing the fabric. Using a mix of red, purple, and gray synthetic dye, I sprayed the wet fabric with spray bottles and painted on the gray parts with a brush until I achieved the desired look. Once dry, the fabric was pressed and steamed to prepare for pleating. For both the front and back, measurements were marked on the fabric to make sure I was taking in the exact amount of fabric I needed for it to fit comfortably against the wearer. The front panel had three layers of pleats: one-by-one pleats on the bust, half-by-half on the waist, and back to one-by-one on the bottom. The back pleats were 3.25 inches in total with 7/8" in between. Once the measurements were confirmed with a drape test, I sewed each pleat exactly to my markings. The back panel was complete after that step, but the front needed to then be hand-smocked with the beads following the same spacing (1", 0.5", 1"). The extra seam allowance from the front panel became an oversized dart on the side seams. An invisible zipper allows for entry on the left side-seam. The lining was much simpler, being only gathered at the top to match the circumference of the gown, and finished with an elastic trim. Both the lining and dyed fabric were given a 5/8" hem.

### **Cohesion**

This design incorporates sustainability, surface design, and historical influences. There were several historic garments I took inspiration from to design this dress, including 15th century mantles and 18th century French court gowns. Both of these garments have fitted elements without the use of cut-and-sew patternmaking. In the 1400's, smocking and pleating were popular methods of bringing loose garments close to the wearer for an interesting visual effect, and to establish a waistline (Tortorra and Marcketti, 2021). I used diamond smocking on the front of the gown to tighten the silhouette, and the smaller 0.5-inch pleats create the illusion of a cinched waist. The 18th century is recognizable by the robe à la française (Majer, 2021). The back of this historic gown was one wide piece of fabric pleated at the top and sewn down the sides to create a cape-like effect, and my gown utilized this same technique. My gown also used the entire yardage of the lining, and the very common tightening technique of gathering. All extra seam allowance is encased within this lining to allow for future fittings. By emphasizing the natural body, this evening dress can appeal to a wider, modern audience without sacrificing an incredibly sustainable technique. Additionally, the smocking creates an elastic effect, allowing for moderate adjustability.

### **Originality and Innovation**

With current waste volume expected to increase to 2.2 billion tons per year by 2025, producing clothing with as little waste as possible is imperative (Yalkin-Enis et al., 2019). While many companies are exploring this sustainable alternative to traditional patternmaking, the final products end up looking very similar; specifically, loose. This is not a bad thing, but it is not on trend. Today's female consumers prefer a tighter, body-conscious fit, and current zero-waste production is not supplying this silhouette (WGSN,

2017). To find a solution, we should turn to the past to learn how historic civilizations used as much fabric as possible when making clothing. Just by using 15th and 18th century fitting techniques, I was able to create a zero-waste dress that hugs the body exactly the way modern consumers prefer it to. The two techniques I used are just the first chapter in a history book of potential. If more brands take inspiration from historical fitting techniques, zero-waste can grow in popularity and truly make a difference in the world of fashion sustainability.

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