

Structured Elegance

Nicole Eckerson, and Barbara Frazier, Western Michigan University, USA

Keywords: Design, couture, apparel, construction

Justification for my research was to illustrate use of advanced couture sewing methods. The application of couture methods will enable me to educate others on couture sewing and to sustain the practice and use of such techniques.

As part of my research, I examined the techniques and methods used in couture sewing from the past to the present, drawing inspiration from historical couture garments by designer Charles Worth (19th century designer). The two pieces I drew inspiration from include Charles Worth and Bobergh's evening gown (1861), and Charles Frederick Worth's evening gown (1883). Charles Worth was chosen based on his use of structure and form throughout his pieces. After researching couture sewing methods and using the gowns mentioned above for inspiration, I used my interpretation of these gowns to create an original garment.



I first created design illustrations and then chose my top design. Based on the style, use, and type of garment, I selected my fabric and color palette that I wanted to use. I chose my fabric carefully using fine fabrics such as silk and luxury wool. Next, I draped patterns for both the bodice and skirt and made flat patterns for the sleeves and back flounce. After I had my patterns complete, I constructed the first fit sample in muslin fabric. I performed several fittings on my model to ensure the fit was just right before cutting into the fashion fabric. The muslin enabled me to make all the appropriate markings needed to achieve an accurate fit. This ensured a close-to-perfect fit before cutting into my fashion fabric. Once all corrections were made on muslin sample, I constructed the garment in the final fabric and did one last fitting to make sure it fit perfectly. If any final adjustments were needed, I made the necessary adjustments at this time. The jacket and skirt were constructed using temporary and permanent hand sewing techniques and by machine.

I experimented with fabric manipulation, trims, and embellishments and used the different materials needed to create form as an esthetic in my design. Techniques used include, ½ inch seams that were serged, pressed open and catch stitched down. Parallel pad stitching was used to tailor both the front and back bodice of the jacket. Metal boning was used on all seams and darts encasing them with self-made casings and/or inserting the boning in the darts and encasing them. Spiral metal boning was used at side seams encasing them with self-made casings. Hook and eye tape was used for the center front closure. Pressing techniques were used along construction to give the garment shape. I used basting and permanent stitches for seams and markings on the garment. Flat and inverted pleat embellishments were used for the collar, center front and back flounce. I also created and hand sewed a spiral flounce on the center back of the garment. A running stitch was used to hand sew pleats on the collar and pleats on the center front bodice. Techniques used for the skirt include ½ inch synthetic horsehair braid at bottom hem to provide structure. Stay tape was used at waist to prevent stretching. An invisible zipper was used for the side seam closer. This was my first time using many of these techniques. I had to experiment when it came to interfacing and finishing techniques in order to achieve the desired outcome.

The jacket and skirts outer shell is constructed of 100% wool. Silk organza, horsehair interfacing, and synthetic horsehair braid were used as interfacing on bodices, and back flounce to give structure. Handmade shoulder pads and sleeve heads were created for the sleeves. The shoulder pads and sleeve heads were made of fusible horsehair interfacing and synthetic batting. Pressing techniques were used to give the shoulder pads shape. The sleeves were backed in silk organza to create a similar weight and drape of the rest of the garment. The entire jacket and skirt was lined in charmeuse silk.



A major part of fashion history would be gone if couture techniques were no longer taught and practiced. Teaching higher education apparel design students mass production techniques is important in meeting the needs of today's consumer. Couture techniques give students the ability to conceptualize larger concepts, which, in turn, helps them to rethink the application of these techniques and how they can be applied to mass production. Learning couture techniques enhances students' critical thinking skills when designing complicated garments. It is critical to preserve couture sewing techniques that have been practiced for centuries.

References

Long, T. A., & Steele, V. (2008). *Chic Chicago*. Chicago: Chicago Historical Society.

Page 2 of 2