

Thunderbird – Sacred Bearer of Happiness Unlimited

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Keywords: Symbolism, Peace, Design, Nature

The design goal was to create an ensemble that reflected the spirit and cultural heritage of New Mexico. The early Native American inhabitants called Santa Fe the "Dancing Ground of the Sun." The high desert, surrounding the pueblo communities, transitions into foothills and upward to gorgeous mountains covered in early morning mist, with dusty greens, sage and light lavender foliage enveloping the low lying plains of New Mexico. The combination of New Mexico's topography and Native American culture and symbolism of the region inspired the design and execution of *Thunderbird – Sacred Bearer of Happiness Unlimited*.

The two piece ensemble was created to represent symbolic elements of Native American culture in the silhouette design and accessorizing details. The wing-like sleeves set on a trim, fitted body mirror the shape of the Thunderbird pictograph; the paneled bi-level skirt, anchoring the design as flight feathers finish the bird. Both the use of sunrays and mountain range symbolism were introduced through the metallic and linen trim which coordinated with the sage green nubby linen base fabric. The raw character of the linen reflects the natural beauty of New Mexico, and the selection of tonal buckles brings in the earthy wood tones to compliment the sage.



The two piece suit design was patterned on a CAD system built from basic blocks, plotted and sewn first in muslin followed by nubby linen. The design challenge involved using size 8 industry blocks within the Modaris software to translate the design sketch into functional panels set to fit the ninety degree angles of the embroidered trim. The trim sample was mitered, then measured, and measurements were input into the patternmaking software. Because the trim came as embroidered tissue linen yard goods, the fabric had to be trimmed down to five inch border strips. The linen edging was either pressed under where stitched in place or left open, and

seamed neatly along the edge of the embroidery. The geometric pattern featuring sunrays, foliage and mountain ranges, was placed along the panel edges with mitered corners while matching patterns at 45 degree angles.



The raw nubby linen pressed well despite the density of the fabric. The decision was made to reduce bulk in inner seams and facings where possible, thus, internal seam allowances were bound with bias tissue linen, while a thin linen/rayon blend was used for areas of full lining. To finish out the lines of the design, linen belting was created using a combination of raw linen face fabric and tissue linen backing and threaded with tonal buckles. Spacing for the buckles was aligned to trim pattern edges and the use of uneven numbers of buckles for a pleasing design aesthetic. All elements were combined to create a balanced and harmonious ensemble reflective of the peace and harmony of the Native American culture.

The final design was mounted rather than worn to display the aerodynamic and flight-like structure of the ensemble. The tubular sleeves float fluidly, yet weightily with any movement of the design. The final design displays strength and harmony, earthiness and ethereal qualities.

Storm, Jonathon. "Santa Fe: 'Dancing Ground of the Sun'", Collections, Philly.com, 11 June, 1989.