

I Heart Africa

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textile innovation, couture techniques, sustainability
bust = 36", waist = 27", hips = 37", length = 30"

Contextual Review and Concept

Clothing and textiles researchers have long acknowledged that the clothing one wears is an “extremely powerful symbolic way of expressing and reinforcing subtle values, relationships, and . . . culture” (Hamilton & Hamilton, 1989). Could what one chooses to wear affect how daily experiences are perceived? “The clothing worn, influences cognition broadly . . . how objects, people, and events are construed.” (Slepian, Ferber, Gold, & Rutchick, 2015). Therefore, one's clothing choices can provide overture to meaningful cultural connections. This was the explicit purpose of this design project.

Assuredly, (Bye, 2010) “clothing and textile design has a long tradition in creative practice, but due to the increasing complexity of our world, there is a need to formally capture the knowledge”. Bye (2010) has asserted, the fashion design is uniquely hands-on and experiential. It was the intent of this designer to contribute to the field by delving into a unique, hands-on encounter with artisan yardage. The textile was acquired in Accra, Ghana, by the client who requested an ensemble appropriate for international business occasions. She described her experiences in Ghana as inspirational. The designer purposed to create an ensemble appropriate for business events reflecting the client's experiences in Africa.

Aesthetic Properties and Visual Impact

The surface design of the wax block print served as inspiration for the apparel design. Initially, this textile is perceived as a colorful, overall print with precise borders. Upon closer inspection there are intriguing details: Motifs of miniature hearts, humming birds, and flowers. This paralleled the client's experience in Africa: An initial positive impression (overall print) grew into a multi-faceted relationship (many motifs).

Process, Techniques, and Execution

A dress and jacket were draped on a form. Trial garments were made to fit the client. The cotton face fabric was underlined with cotton batiste then lined with rayon satin. The underlining was used to suspend the hand stitching so that no stitches would puncture the face layer. Intentional placement of the maroon horizontal bands at the hems and the vertical bands at the centers guided design process. Several tiny, pink heart motifs were discovered and placed on covered buttons. Three buttons pass through the slot buttonholes of a partial belt atop the box-pleated peplum at center back.

Cohesion

The vertical/horizontal bands were aligned at the armholes and princess seams. Horizontal bands were placed at the hemlines while closures were incorporated into the vertical bands at center front and center back (loops and covered buttons, zipper). The technical precision of the resultant ensemble was possible only because it began with this exactly on-grain, perfectly-printed cotton woven. The (horizontal/vertical) bands were consistently the same dimension and meet at 90 degree angles. Box pleats created back interest on both the jacket and skirt of the dress. The jacket's sleeves can be worn in either long or short versions to adapt to climate differences.

Design Contribution and Innovation

This ensemble is a tribute to Ghana, Africa, from the client who has been there to serve in the development of a business college. Not only was the textile created there, the ensemble in which it is expressed will be worn to a business meeting where the American and Ghanaian counterparts will be reunited. It is a visual expression of cultural appreciation and understanding, allying with the opinion of earlier scholarship (Hamilton & Hamilton, 1989). Certainly an American wearing clothing made from African fabric would communicate cross-cultural appreciation; how much more so this ensemble made from the very fabric gifted to her in their previous encounter (Slepian et al., 2015). This colorful printed yardage provided both the designer and client with an opportunity to learn more about and contribute to this complex world in which we live (Bye, 2010).

Bye, E. (2010). A direction for clothing and textile design research. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 28(3): 205 - 217.

Hamilton, J. A. & Hamilton, J. W. (1989). Dress as a reflection and sustainer of social reality: A cross-cultural perspective. *Clothing and Textile Research Journal*, 7(2): 16-22.

Slepian, M. L., Ferber, S. N., Gold, J. M., & Rutchick, A. M. (2015). The cognitive consequences of formal clothing. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 6(6): 662-668.

