

Comfortable Elegance- Taking Cues from History

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Keywords: Comfort, Loungewear, Elegance, History

Purpose. The focus of this project was to research how modern apparel designs inspired by historical fashion can offer loungewear options that are as aesthetically pleasing as they are comfortable. This is important because too often today consumers forgo aesthetics for comfort. Others forgo comfort for aesthetics alone, but from a design perspective it does not need to be that way (Lamb, & Kallal, 1992). Historically, there have been options that are both attractive and comfortable (Vogue, 1931). Consumers want garments that combine comfort with fashion but choices are often limited. It is not uncommon for fashion designers, for example Bottega Veneta (Vogue, 2013), to use historic inspiration when developing design concepts. This project takes it one step further to use historical inspiration to inform both aesthetic and functional design outcomes. The goal of this project is to bring back the concept that elegance and comfort are not mutually exclusive.

Background. In the 1920s, a concept was introduced known as the “pyjama.” There were several varieties of the pyjama, and each had their place in separate spheres (Vogue, 1931, pp. 70, 71, 110). There was the type still common today, what Vogue referred to as “the original pyjama,” which was meant for sleeping. Then, there was the, “beach pyjama,” which was intended to be worn to the beach. The pyjama that inspired this design was the, “lounging pyjama,” which was intended for lounging around the house, and was even appropriate for receiving guests. Each of these garments brought comfort to glamour and fashion. The garments were fully practical, but also beautiful. Historical references provided information about ways to make lounging elegant today and provided the needed inspiration for this project.

Inspiration and Process. The blue and black brocade robe was inspired by the orientalism craze of the 1920s. During the 1910s and 1920s, fashion derived much inspiration from Egypt and Asia. Asian motifs were particularly common in loungewear, as robes and pyjama sets lent themselves well to the “oriental,” styles. The robe was a hard drape, and initial exploration included the use of an extremely starched muslin to achieve the crisp origami effect desired. First the muslin was draped using a half scale form, then the process was replicated in full scale to further develop the concept before translating it to the brocade selected for the project.

The pant and top were also inspired by Egyptomania and Egyptomania inspired loungewear of the time (Scarborough, Hunt-Hurst, 2014). The use of silk crepe was featured and recommended in Vogue (Vogue, 1931, p. 70) and was the perfect choice for the pyjama layer because it provided the needed stretch and softness that resulted in ultimate comfort. Various fabric samples were evaluated for comfort when placed next to the skin, and silk was chosen as the best natural fiber option for the pyjama. The gathered pant detail at center front was inspired by a detail on a vintage dress. The rest of the design was achieved

through improvisational drape. The muslin was gathered down the selvedge edge, and pinned until the right number of folds were acquired for the desired look. The gathers mimic the lines of the folds on the lower portion of the robe and help to create a cohesive ensemble. Simplicity was ideal for the top in contrast to the gathering of the pant, so the design followed the triangular motif from the robe and hugged the lines of the body for a flattering silhouette.

Design Outcomes: The origami inspired robe is sculpturally interesting, and the design and the fabric complement one another well. The robe modestly covers the body when worn over the pyjama so the ensemble is more suitable for daywear. The pyjama provides a comfortable, fitted layer next to the body and can easily be worn as sleepwear. Visual interest is created by pairing the hard drape of the robe with the soft drape of the pyjama and results in an overall glamorous yet comfortable appearance. The combination of the robe with the pyjama adds versatility and value to the ensemble.

Discussion and Future Research. The research suggests that it is possible to create a stylish and comfortable garment, as well as a modern workable garment using historical inspiration. Future apparel research will explore additional ways to combine elegance and comfort in garment design using historical inspiration. In addition, it is a goal to explore the educational benefits of encountering history through the experience of dress. Interaction with a familiar (historical) object connects apparel designers to history and has the potential to inspire design in new ways that are both aesthetically pleasing and functional. Historical garments represent a whole cache of inspiration, just waiting to be utilized. This research and specifically this ensemble reinforces the importance of historical garments in our field.

References

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