

## CHAPTER III

### PRINCIPLES OF CLOTHING DESIGN

**Clothing Our Bodies.**—Recall for a moment some of the impressions received when looking at pictures. Have you never turned from one with a sense of discord and confusion, and from another, with a feeling of harmony and rest? In the first instance, perhaps, the picture presented a confusion of line, disorderly arrangement, or inharmonious use of color, but in the second, color, line and arrangement appealed to your sense, as a harmonious whole, hence your feeling of pleasure. Some one has said, "One need not handle brush and paint to give expression to artistic feeling." There is significance in this statement when applied to the mode of clothing our bodies. We are constantly making pictures of ourselves, which either do, or do not, react in a felicitous manner upon ourselves and others.

Each of us has a standard by which she judges of the beauty and harmony of the clothing she wears. Whether or not her standard measures up to an artistic ideal, depends upon her interest in, or indifference to beauty in dress; upon her appreciation of those things which make for harmony in clothing,—color, form, line, and texture; or upon her ignorance of the principles of art as applied to clothing, or her complacency regarding such matters. As principles of design are understood there will result more correct modes of clothing. To point out some of these principles, and suggest methods of application, with suggestions for further study, is the most that can be done in the space available in this book.

We should not think of our clothing merely as a covering for the body, to be constructed upon lines dictated by some passing whim of fashion, but study rather to suit the covering to the form beneath, and that not alone in line, but color and texture as well. The creative genius of the great designers may not be ours, but to none is denied the power of expression, and that in terms of one's highest appreciation. We can approach the same artistic ideals, become familiar with the same principles of design, study the same artistic forms in sculpture and painting, and the modes of draping these

forms which have found favor in the successive periods of the world's history. Appreciation should then give expression to better ideals, both for ourselves and others. In clothing design, we cannot dissociate color, form, line, and texture. Color will be treated more fully in a later chapter. We shall at present confine ourselves to the consideration of form, line, and texture.

### FORM

**Contour.**—The human form is, from the artist's point of view, the most beautiful form. An artistic conception of an ideal womanly form is a figure seven and one-half or eight heads high (the head from just below the crown to the chin being the unit of measurement), with long neck, shoulders that slope slightly, a high chest and straight back, an easy carriage and grace of movement. The contour of such a form is made up of gently rounding, reversed curves, which melt into each other, forming beautiful lines. The slight inward curve at the waist, called the Greek curve and found in examples of Greek sculpture, is considered the most beautiful line of the body. There are no straight lines to be found in the contour.

**Structure.**—It is not sufficient for the purpose of design, that form be studied in contour alone. Just as the builder understands the foundation of the building in relation to its superstructure, so must the designer understand the structure of the form in order to drape it in accord with the principles of design. The artist recognizes a structural division of the form into two great masses, the torso or trunk, and limbs. The structural parts of the body, the points of support and articulation, must be kept in mind: the points of support are the shoulders and hips; the points of articulation are the neck, elbows, wrists, knees, and ankles.

**Line in Relation to Structure.**—No lines in contradiction to, or at variance with, the contour of the form, should appear in well-ordered clothing design. All divisions of the garment, whether by seam or decoration, should be made in relation to structural parts and areas. Parts of garments should be supported at structural points. Decoration should be placed at points of support or articulation.

**Line in Relation to Design.**—The use of a line is to direct the attention to some point of interest. In all good designs are found two kinds of line, straight and curved. The interchange of



these, or predominance of one over the other, depends upon the feeling of the designer. Straight lines are severe; they lend dignity and strength; curved lines express life and joy, and give variety in design; the finest curves, however, approach straight lines. Unity is expressed in the flow of lines growing out of each other; in lines of radiation, in an arrangement of parallel lines which emphasize each other; and by repetition of the lines of contour in other parts of the design. The use of horizontal and vertical lines in combination rivets the attention and changes the appeal to the artistic sense. The whole problem of design, then, is to make a harmonious arrangement of lines and shapes (or masses) in accordance with the principles of rhythmic unity, variety, and balance.

**Texture** affects design. Treatment of line that would render one fabric charming, would utterly fail with another. Soft, pliable stuffs are a joy to the designer because they lend themselves to such varied treatment, while stiff, harsh fabrics necessitate severity of line. Dull or lustrous surfaces affect design inasmuch as they absorb or reflect light. Weave in fabric, whether fine or coarse, plain or twilled; and pattern in weave, or pattern produced by color, greatly affect design. Plain weaves place almost no limitations, but a design planned for plain material and used for twilled material, may produce a displeasing effect by bringing the lines of the twill entirely at variance. Pattern in weave affects the division of areas, and limits decoration. Pattern produced by the use of color in printing, or the interlacing of vari-colored threads (as in figures, stripes, and **plaids**), **affects** design by reason of the size, the position, the up and down, or the right and left placing of figure or line, and requires careful manipulation in order to avoid pitfalls of error (Figs. 6, 7 and 8).

**Occasion** influences design. Garments should reflect the spirit of the occasion and the wearer. Free use of broken lines and curves, repetition of pattern in design, and oft-repeated decoration bespeak festive occasions and joyous emotions; severity of lines, restraint of curves and absence of decoration may suggest formal occasion and serious emotions.

Feeling for texture and line is developed through the study of textiles, the free and untrammelled use of fabrics and experimentation with them in draping, and through the study of the best forms in sculpture and painting. Comparative study of historic

costume opens up a world of inspiration and suggestion for the creation of individual modes. One may not have immediate access to museum or library, but there are always to be had excellent prints of both ancient and modern sculpture, painting, and historic costume.

**Individuality in Clothing.**—Someone has said that “The delicate human eye, with common sense behind it, is the best dress critic a woman can have.” With an accepted ideal of form, and principles of design in mind, one may set about establishing correct modes of clothing for oneself. A person should first of all study, courageously and critically, her silhouette in the reflection of a triple mirror; she must note the strong and weak lines in her contour, her height and breadth, the proportion and balance of the masses, and her coloring. Then she may choose her materials and build up her design. She is not limited as to choice of shapes, or decoration. All the galleries of the world are open to her. Her garments should carry some note of the wearer’s own individuality, something which enhances the charm of the wearer, but does not call attention to the garment itself.

It may be helpful to become familiar with proportionate divisions of the normal figure, which are as follows:

Figure .....	7½–8 heads high;
1st head .....	Just below crown of head to chin;
2d and 3d heads.....	Chin to waist line;
4th head .....	Waist line to end of torso;
5th head .....	Torso to half way down thigh;
6th head .....	Half way down thigh to center of knee;
7th head .....	Center of knee to near ankle;
7½–8th heads .....	Near ankle to foot.

### *Proportionate Lengths*

Inside instep (center of foot) to top of knee-cap, equals center of knee-cap to hip bone.

End of torso to end of breast bone, equals from below the crown of head to shoulder, or one-sixth of body.

Arm (wrist to elbow), equals 1½ heads.

Neck, equals ½ head.

A general idea of these proportions may aid in judging one’s own limitations of form.

The following suggestions as to choice of fabric and design for



diametrically opposite types of figure may also be found helpful. Intermediate types are not so difficult to clothe. Tall women, if slender, appear taller than they are, while short women, if stout, appear shorter than they are. Our endeavor then must be to counteract one optical illusion by the substitution of another. The tall woman should adopt some mode that will increase her breadth, and so appear to decrease her height; likewise the short woman must adopt lines that seem to add to her height and decrease her breadth. Slender figures need full skirts made of materials which seem to give roundness to the figure. Loose, full draperies, flounces and horizontal trimmings suggest breadth. If the figure is very tall, do not accentuate height by the use of many long lines; introduce horizontal lines. If the length of the body is out of proportion to the length of the legs, *i.e.*, too short, lower the waist line of the gown so that this defect is concealed; if the reverse, raise the waist line in the gown to make a good design. Full, loose blouses are becoming to tall, slender figures. Fluffiness, rather than severity, should be sought after. The displeasing effect of very sloping shoulders may be overcome by horizontal lines brought high upon the waist and extending across the shoulder (Fig. 27, A.D. 1854). Plaids of striking color and broken up into large areas are admissible only on slender figures.

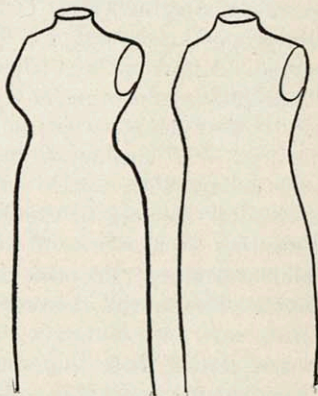


FIG. 22.—Silhouettes of stout figure.

It is more difficult to design clothing for the short, stout woman; she needs always to make every effort to suggest height and slenderness. Keeping in mind the fact that the curves which more nearly approach straight lines are the more beautiful, she should strive to achieve the silhouette to the right of Fig. 22, and avoid that to the left. Her garments should be of loose, easy fit, admitting freedom in breathing and ease of movement. Unbroken lines from shoulder to foot add height. When desirable to have garment in two parts, let the lower part run well up under the upper, so that it may appear to be supported by the shoulders. Diagonal lines from shoulder to waist, thence carried throughout the

length of the skirt in a diagonal tuck, or in deep straight plaits in front, suggest height. Appearance of slenderness may be achieved in the back by having the waist of loose fit, hanging in straight line from shoulder-blade to below the waist. Great care must be exercised in designing skirts. For the stout figure full circular skirts give too much suggestion of roundness, but the introduction of a rather straight panel effect in the front, of broad well-pressed forward turning plaits, and keeping the flare of the skirt back of the full part of the hips and below the fullest part of the back, make the circular skirt possible to the stout figure, if the design of the upper garment be well chosen. If the skirt design be broken up into gores, the proportionate width of panels and gores must be carefully observed. A narrow front panel on a stout figure accentuates its width. Sometimes seams over the hips break up the design too much, especially if there be a pattern in the material. The short, stout woman must avoid all true horizontal lines in her design. Yokes, deep turn-over collars with square corners, girdles that circle the waist in horizontal fashion, or confine the material closely, and bands of trimming at the foot of a skirt (especially when of contrasting color or texture), decrease the height of the figure as much as their depth. The fabrics chosen should be such that neither bulk, weave, finish, color, nor design, will add to her proportions. Thick, loosely woven cloths, those that are rigid in weave, and those with high gloss, are to be avoided. Soft clinging, low-luster fabrics tend to reduce the proportions. Figured materials are apt to increase size, unless in self-tones. Stripes should be chosen most carefully as to color and balance. Plaids are inadmissible for the stout figure.

All decoration should have some function, or at least appear to, even if it be only for the sake of variety in design, *i.e.*, a row of buttons on the front of a gown, which may or may not be used for fastening, but without which the whole mass would be unattractive. Neck lines should conform to the contour of the face and mode of dressing the hair. All parts of garments should be supported at structural points; to illustrate, sleeves should be set so as to appear to be supported by the shoulder (a principle often sadly set aside).

The principles of design may be very finely executed in the selection and construction of undergarments. The fabric of which the garment is to be made should be of the first consideration in planning the design; then the use to which it must be put, that a



simple treatment or one with more decorative element may be carried out. The cut or line of the garment is of the utmost importance, because it bears close relation to the outer garments. As few seams as are compatible with good fitting need be used in its construction. No lines, whether in the body of the garment itself, or introduced in the decoration, should contradict the lines of a sheer outer garment. Fastenings should be carefully planned, and if colored ribbons are desired only those of the most delicate tints should be used. The whole should bespeak simplicity and orderliness of arrangement.

#### PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN ILLUSTRATED BY HISTORIC COSTUMES

The two-fold aim of clothing design is to express the beauty of the human form and make the garment a work of art, independently of the form on which it is worn. The first ideal is based on the structure of the body for the lines of the design, and the articulation of forms for the subordinate parts. The Greek costume shown in Fig. 23 illustrates this. The two large divisions of the garment cover the torso and the limbs and hang from the natural supports, the shoulder and the hips. The great charm of the Greek drapery is in its subtle suggestion of the contours of the body. Ancient Japanese art furnishes examples of design on its own account as the aim of the costume. Much rhythmic beauty of line and mass pattern is found in the old Japanese print (see frontispiece). It has an exquisite evolution of flowing lines and subtle variety in the relation of the masses. These two illustrations make clear the two ideals which may inspire a design. We believe the first offers a greater possibility for beauty in dress, but we ought to be able to recognize good design from the other angle.

Lines may be said to be only the edges of masses. Composition should have both straight and curved lines, the former giving unity, the latter variety. Fig. 24, the archaic Greek dress, shows an interesting combination of straight and curved lines. Straight lines convey a feeling of power, dignity, stability, calmness, nobility. Curves are the life and joy of an arrangement. Restrained curves are always beautiful; curves may be used with freedom on clothing to be worn on occasions of gaiety. Simplicity in masses is an element of good design. All decorative detail must be kept subordinate, and should be consistent in feeling with the idea of the whole.

In the outlines of the costumes, in Figs. 25, 26, and 27, the point of view of the application of clothing design to the human form is



FIG. 23.—Greek costume.



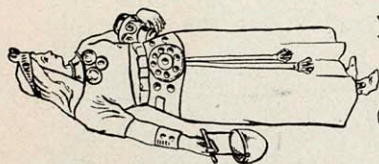
FIG. 24.—Archaic Greek costume.

Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City

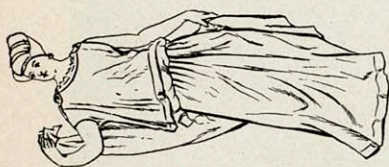
found in all the designs from the earliest time to about the sixteenth century. Then there was adopted a decorative structural contour (1500–1700 A.D., Fig. 26) which lasted until the early 1800's, when the classical Empire became the fashion. After this there was a return to the preceding type, which held its own up to about 1870, when there was a change, and a long period of inadequate attempts



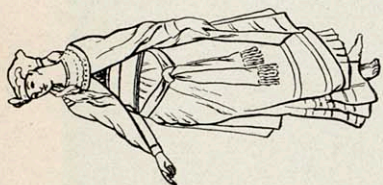
toward a silhouette ensued, 1870-1900. Within the last few years we achieved an approach to a contour of rational beauty, but this may be short-lived for, according to present commercial standards, fashion must be ever changing. In the clothing of the woman of the Bronze Age (Fig. 25), we find simple basic elements of structure, with consistent ornaments worn at natural articulations. The simple lines of the garment are combined with a strong, simple, decorative detail. The Egyptian costume in Fig. 25, in a more elaborate way, repeats the structure of the body, and shows unity of line, while variety is given in the cape-like arrangement and the lines of the girdle. How many centuries has the Greek drapery held first place in the realm of beauty! In the Greek costumes (Figs. 23 and 25), the lines perfectly echo the grace of the body, while simplicity predominates in the straight lines, giving a sense of nobility. The costume of 1000, Fig. 25, is typical of several centuries, for fashions did not change in hundreds of years then as they do in a few weeks to-day. The general contour, which has an obvious relation to the body, is good, and the design depends upon the long simple lines to give it dignity. The inner sleeve and the girdle furnish the variety. The costume of 1100, Fig. 25, does not differ structurally from that of 1000 except in the sleeves. The beautiful calm lines of the mantle add to the beauty of the whole. The structural outline of the year 1240 is much the same as that of 1339 (see Fig. 25), but there is a new element in the design, the chasuble or jacket effect conforms to the line of the torso and the curves give variety. The stately gown of 1339, Fig. 25, introduced more features of design, in contrast of line in a horizontal support of the mantle and a rhythmic movement in the curves. Unity is emphasized by the long mass of the front and the outline of the mantle. Fig. 25, 1370, shows a beautiful feeling for structural form and more imagination in the decorative detail. The shape of the neck and the bottom of the overgarment repeat each other, while the design on the hips lends variety. In 1440, Fig. 26, a new structural mass is seen—the division at the bust line, the horizontal line at the knees, repeated at the belt, is good, while the pointed waist is echoed in the tall henin. The example of 1500, Fig. 26, belongs to the class of costume that has an artificial or decorative structural basis. The upper part follows the body, but the skirt has no relation to human form. There is unity in the character of the masses of the sleeves and the skirt and collar, with the point of the



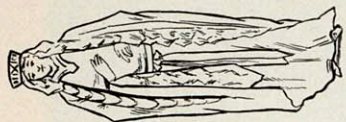
Bronze Age



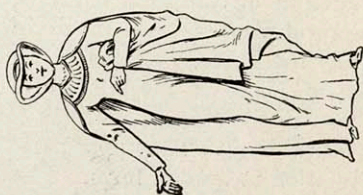
Grecian



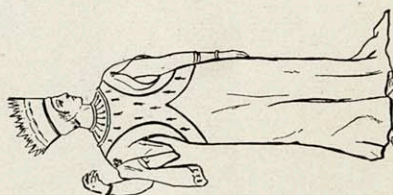
Egyptian



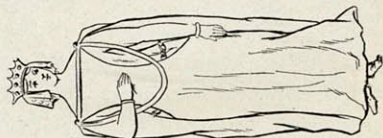
A.D. 1000



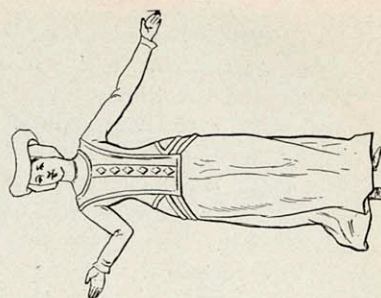
A.D. 1100



A.D. 1240

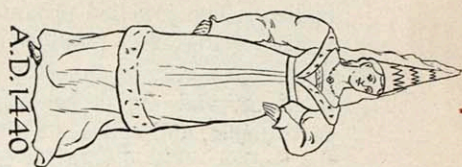


A.D. 1339

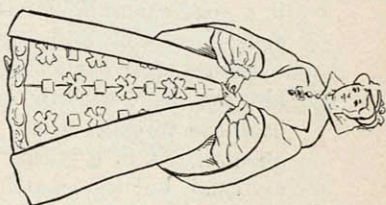


A.D. 1370

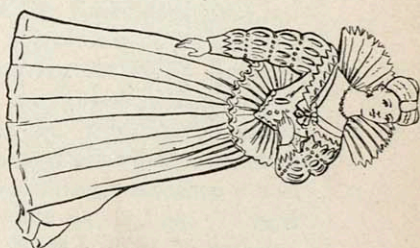




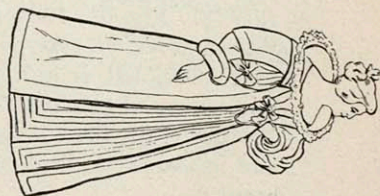
A.D. 1440



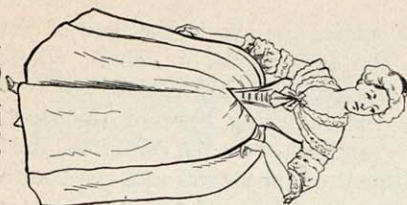
A.D. 1500



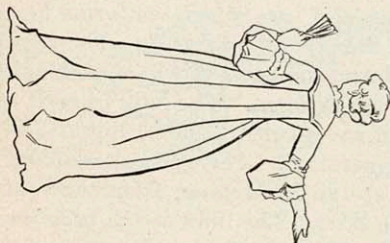
A.D. 1600



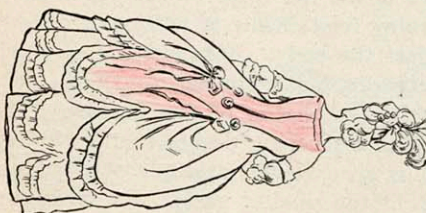
A.D. 1600



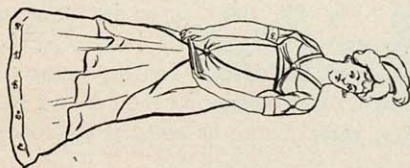
A.D. 1700



A.D. 1700



A.D. 1700

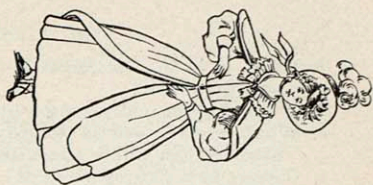


A.D. 1800

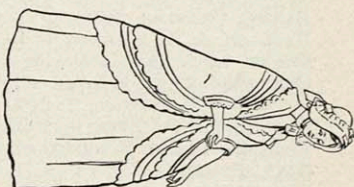
FIG. 26.—Principles of design illustrated by outlines of historic costumes.

bodice. The jewelled ornament carries the eye to the face of the wearer. Fig. 26, 1600, shows the farthingale, or wheel, effect. Here the result is almost pure design. The big masses are harmonious, and are decorated by the radiating lines of the skirt, farthingale, and collar. Unity is established by the center point of the bodice. The decorative treatment of the sleeves and the bodice is in harmony with the whole. The shoulders and face appear as a center of interest. The second costume (1600) is not quite so varied but has greater simplicity. The long lines of the front give dignity. Note how the curves seem to grow out of each other. Fig. 26, 1700, is a good example of radial unity and line, which conforms to the general contour, with variety in the decorative details. The second costume, 1700, has a structural form, the parts of which harmonize, also the sleeve with the body of the garment. The long lines at the back are very beautiful. The third costume (1700), Fig. 26, is a good design in a period of exaggeration. The general contour is artificial, but the smaller parts are all in keeping, from the round neck to the ruffled scallops of the skirt. The lines of the back seem to suggest the form slightly. The Empire costume, Fig. 26, of the first quarter of 1800, changes again the form of the big masses. The smaller parts have a charming relationship of unity and variety, the long lines cling and suggest the body. The costume of 1831, in Fig. 27, is a reversion to the artificial silhouette. In the subordinate parts we see unity in the shapes of the masses. The wrap worn in 1846, Fig. 27, has a pleasing design in the rhythm of the curves. Fig. 27, 1854, is an excellent example of rhythmic arrangement by the repetition of the smaller parts. Its variety of line is consistent with the occasion for which the dress was designed. Fig. 27, 1866, shows unity in the big masses and radial lines. The costume of 1879, Fig. 27, is an attempt to return to the natural silhouette, but what a failure! The garment is an example of very poor design, without unity in line or mass, and much unrelated in variety. Fig. 27, 1887, has a perfectly arbitrary silhouette, and is without even decorative unity. Fig. 27, 1900, is an improvement over 1887, but is still not successful. The lines have a certain uniformity of character that are not beautiful. In the costume of 1909, Fig. 27, there is a good structural feeling in the general form and in the parts; through unity, variety, and balance, it approaches beauty.

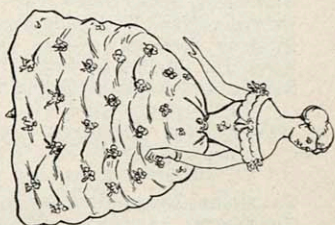




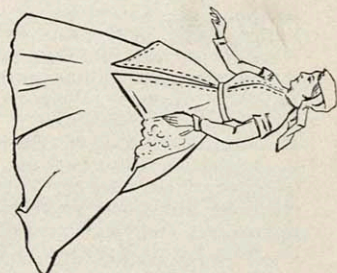
A.D. 1831



A.D. 1846



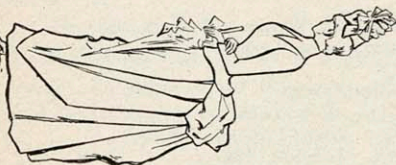
A.D. 1854



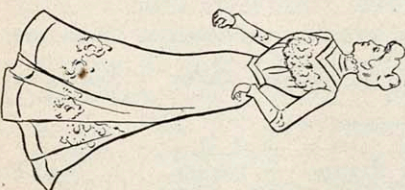
A.D. 1866



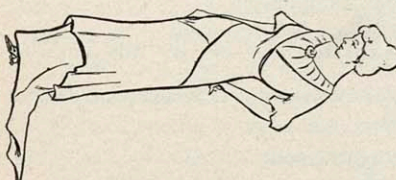
A.D. 1879



A.D. 1887



A.D. 1900



A.D. 1909

FIG. 27.—Principles of design illustrated by outlines of historic costumes.

## SUGGESTIVE QUESTIONS

1. What is it that is important to study in order to learn how to clothe ourselves well?
2. What do you understand by (1) form, (2) line, (3) texture?
3. What relation should design bear to physical structure? Name several other things which affect design.
4. Choose two figures from the groups in Figs. 26, 27, and 28, that are pleasing to you and tell why they are pleasing to you and wherein they are examples of good design.

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