

## **The stages of the knitwear design process**

Knitwear designers always look out for sources of inspiration. These sources of inspiration play important and significant roles throughout the design process.

### **1. Sources of inspiration for knitwear design**

They use a variety of objects as a source of inspiration, and use them for a range of purposes. Anything visual can be a source of inspiration for a design, from a Missoni garment to a plate of baked beans, from a spider web to dried leaf, from a colorful bug to a jar of coffee beans.

Different sources of inspiration can be combined in one garment: a designer garment, a Rajasthani ornament, a piece of tree bark. While any kind of objects might be used for the purpose of designing a single design, a single source of inspiration can be used in different ways to develop a range of garments.

#### **1.1 Source Hunting.**

Finding and selecting sources of inspiration for individual designs is neither clearly separated from researching the context of fashion, nor limited to any particular time.

The knitwear designers constantly look out for objects that inspire them, for example visiting art galleries, pulling images out of magazines watching fashion shows and attending yarn exhibitions etc.

The list of sources can be exhaustive but today we discuss a few of the sources which are used by many renowned Fashion Knitwear Designers.

##### **1.1a. Garments.**

Designers look at competitors' products, as well as their own past designs from recent collections or ancient archives of the company they work for.

Looking at the garments from market leaders gives the designers an understanding of fashion development and new technical features.

Features of garments or even entire garments can be used to form new designs. Designers often look for elements in other designs that would allow them to realize a new idea.

##### **1.1b. Fashion Photographs.**

Designers study fashion photographs of catwalk shows in magazines. They study fashion magazines, such as Vogue or Elle, pulling out images of everything that takes their fancy as inspiration for specific designs or as images to encapsulate a particular mood.

##### **1c. Artifacts, and their images.**

Knitwear designers look for decorative patterns, such as repeat patterns, ornaments, and motifs, in objects such as tiles and mosaics. Typically they pick out parts of a non-knitted design and translate them into imagined or sketched pieces of knitwear. Other textiles can often be used as sources of inspiration for patterns. For instance embroideries, carpets and ties can be rich sources of ornamental patterns.

#### **1.1d. Nature, and its images.**

Many take their inspiration from nature. Designers are inspired by animals, plants and other natural objects, as well as natural phenomena such as thunderstorms or sunsets. Designers collect portable physical objects like leaves or shells.

They use photographs or work from memory. These are used in a similar way to other design objects with designers picking out elements and translating them into knitwear designs.

#### **1.1e. Yarns.**

As in other kinds of design, the materials designers plan to use exert a profound influence on the ideas they generate. Knitwear designers are attracted to the texture, the feel, the color and the overall appearance of a yarn.

According to designers a yarn often suggests a design to them, and they sometimes work specifically on designs to use yarns that they liked.

Designers are also able to put color schemes together without referring to objects or images.

They collect potential sources of inspiration in a systematic way. Designers keep these collections of sources visible or close at hand in their offices and workplaces to facilitate their use in generating ideas when designs are required.

### **1.2 Fashion Research.**

When they begin working on each new season, designers need to gain an understanding of what will be fashionable for this season. They need to learn the constraints of the fashion space by understanding what looks dated and what is not yet right for their market sector, as well as the key looks and features that define a particular fashion.

For their fashion research the Knitwear designers study catwalk fashion, read magazines and forecasting materials. They look for themes, colors and styles that are coming through, and pick up prevalent and novel features.

Fashion colors are determined by the forecasting companies comprising an international body of experts from various fields of design, who look at trends, pick up on likely themes, and assess new technical developments in dyes.

The greatest skill in a knitwear designer is to be able to spot trends and mentally translate them into garments.

As the new season approaches, designers' understanding of the range of options available to them in their market segment becomes progressively narrower and more clear.

## **2. The Process of designing**

### **2a. The Season**

It is necessary for the designer to identify the season for which the designs are to be made. The season varies from country to country. For example in India normally we have two seasons summer and winter whereas in the west designing is done for four seasons spring, summer, autumn and winter. A customer may further divide the season month wise or holidays. It is common in the west to get two different ranges developed for the winter season one for pre-Christmas and the other post-Christmas.

### **2b. Client Profile**

Before the designer starts the design process it is imperative for him or her to have a clear picture of the client profile. The design process has to be bifurcated in different themes for different client profiles. This information on clients' age group, buying power, the geographic and social background is passed on to the designer by the buyer. This enables the designer to create a Client profile board.

### **2c. Theme Selection.**

Once the designers have an initial understanding of the season and the client profile, they begin to work out their fashion themes. They work on different themes for a season, that they have identified during their research. A theme is typically expressed on a mood board, which comprises a display of pictures on a board, showing objects that the theme is derived from textures that inspire the knit structure and illustrations of garments and sometimes fabric swatches. The elements of a mood board often incorporate the actual forms and features designers plan to use in their new designs, as well as showing cultural references and expressing a mood to indicate the context of the designs.

### **2d. Yarn and Colour Selection.**

For each theme, the designers develop a color palette of colors from sources of inspiration related to the selected theme. For knitwear the appearance and feel of the yarn are crucial. The texture of the yarn must suit the theme. Designers may try to reuse yarns from past seasons in different colours because they understand their technical properties. At the same time, they try to introduce new and interesting yarns to keep the selection up-to-date with fashion and introduce interest in their collections.

### **2e. Design framework. ( Fashion Illustrations )**

For each theme, designers work out a plan for the types of garments that they want to produce within this theme, in terms of the shapes and pattern elements that they plan to design keeping their client profile in mind.

The design framework is the first synthesis of what designers have seen during their research with their own style and the needs of their target customers. The final design framework is negotiated between the designer and management or external buyers.

Designers work out what characteristics the new garments will have, considering what sorts of garments will sell separately and how they can be combined into coherent ranges. They begin by drawing out some ideas that they have and evaluating them.

Designers make systematic use of sources of inspiration in range planning. They bring sources of inspiration they have collected to meetings and use them as prompts for discussion of color schemes and features.

## **2f. Swatch Sampling.**

Swatches are pieces of fabric created independent of any shape keeping the selected textures in mind and play an important role in the knitwear design process as prototypes in the early versions for testing. Swatches are produced on the knitting machine during a large part of the design process.

Initial swatches test yarn properties and color combinations. Swatches are knitted for the design of color patterns, complex stitch structures, and entire garment pieces.

At the end of the swatch development, all the swatches are evaluated, and the design elements they embody are combined in garment designs. If more swatches are required they are created specifically for individual designs.

## **2g. Shape Design.**

The shape of the garment is often designed independently of the fabric. Many shapes remain fairly constant with small modifications over the years, especially in menswear and classic ladieswear collections.

However, the designers are on a constant lookout for shape details, such as necklines and pockets, which as a small modification to standard shapes, give the garment a new look. These shape details are mainly derived from garments designers studied during their fashion research process.

Plain fully-fashioned knitwear is reliant on the color, the material and the shape. At the top end of the fully-fashioned market, expensive materials are combined with subtly updated shapes.

## **2h. Garment Design.**

Garments are either designed as complete entities or made up of structures and motifs drawn from previously sampled swatches. For the former category, the overall inspiration is often taken from garments that the designers have seen and whose overall effect they wish to recreate.

Entire garments are often derived from sources of inspiration within a topic in the same way as swatches. Large-scale figurative designs especially are almost always derived

fairly closely from a figurative source of inspiration. Some garments are entirely based on other garments without the use of any other sources of inspiration.

## **2i. Detailed Design.**

The knitwear designers produce technical sketches, each comprising written description, values for a set of size dimensions, called measurements, and a single freehand sketch.

The designers use sophisticated CAD systems to create exact descriptions of the garment pieces as grid patterns of stitches, or in another symbolic representation, from which the knitting machine programs are compiled.

Finding or developing a structural description of a stitch structure to match conceptual designs from sources of inspiration.

A complete knitting machine program is needed before a swatch can be knitted or accurate computer simulation can be created, to show the true relationship between a knitted structure and the visual effects it creates.

## **2j. Prototyping.**

Programming the knitting machine, setting it up, knitting the panels, washing, finishing the knitted panels, stitching the knitted panels form the garment.

The process of surface ornamentation, final processing by cleaning and pressing completes the final prototype sample and hence completes the designing process.

After an internal selection, most manufacturers present their ranges to their buyers to obtain orders before going into production.