

The Museum at **FIT**

Elements and Principles of Fashion Design

“You can always spot a Cardin [design], he has great originality and yet his designs are usable and comfortable.” —Lauren Bacall



Every good designer needs to understand the basic elements and principles of design. In order to design clothes that are visually intriguing and stand out, fashion designers have been trained to consider four basic elements:

1. Shape and form
2. Line
3. Color
4. Texture

And five basic principles:

1. Proportion and scale
2. Balance
3. Unity (harmony)
4. Rhythm
5. Emphasis

The accompanying resource illustrates and defines these important fundamentals of design. With this as your guide, peek into The Museum at FIT's online collection (<http://fashionmuseum.fitnyc.edu/>), or explore your own closet at home to see how many principles and elements you can find!

Next, sketch or collage your own original design that draws on the featured elements and principles. Think like a fashion designer and let your creativity flow!

NOTES:

This activity was adapted from a lesson created for the exhibition *Lauren Bacall: The Look*.
(<https://exhibitions.fitnyc.edu/lauren-bacall/>)

Fashion icon Lauren Bacall had great personal style and wore fashions from a number of the greatest fashion houses of her time, including Pierre Cardin, Christian Dior, and Yves Saint Laurent.

Design Elements

The basic tools for creating art.

COLOR

Color is the first element to which viewers repond. Color adds excitement, mood and emotion to a design.

Color has three dimensions:

1. Hue is the name of the color: for example, this coat is pink.
2. Value is how light or dark the color is
3. Intensity is how bright or dull the color is

LINE

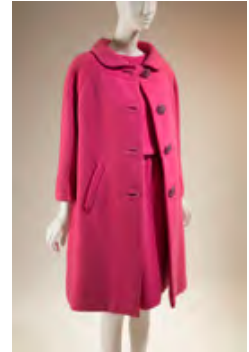
In fashion, line refers to the direction of visual interest in a garment created by construction details such as seams, openings, pleats, gathers, tucks, topstitching, and trims. Straight lines suggest crispness, such as that of tailored garments; curved lines imply fluidity.

SHAPE

Shape or silhouette, is used to describe the outline of the whole garment. Silhouette is viewed from a distance and is therefore garment. A silhouette should be related to the body structure, but some various

TEXTURE

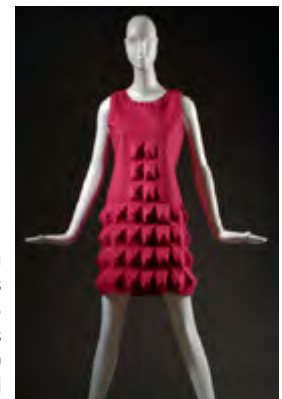
Texture refers to the surface interest of a fabric, created by the weave and by light touch-- how something feels, or looks like it would feel, when touched.



Norman Norell
Coat
1964
USA
Wool, rhinestones
Gift of Lauren Bacall



Norman Norell
Dress
1966
USA
Wool jersey
Gift of Lauren Bacall



Pierre Cardin
Dress
1968
Dress
Dynel (Cardine)
Gift Lauren Bacall



Traina-Norell
Dress and coat ensemble
c. 1956
USA
Camel cashmere, silk jersey,
sequins
Gift of Lauren Bacall

Design Principles

Guidelines for combining design elements.

BALANCE

Balance is the visual weight in design. Based on a central dividing line, Balance makes the right and left side of a garment appear to be equal. A garment must be balanced to be visually pleasing.

- **Symmetrical Balance: Symmetrical or Formal Balance** uses two identical objects on either side of the design, such as patch pockets of equal size.
- **Asymmetrical Balance: In Asymmetrical or Informal Balance** composition is different from one side of the garment to the other. Balance is achieved through visual impact.

PROPORTION

Proportion is the pleasing interrelationship between parts of a design. The various elements in the design should be scaled in size to fit its overall proportion.

EMPHASIS

Emphasis creates a center of interest in a garment. All other elements support it by echoing its design message. A focal point can emphasize the theme of the design.

Creation of a focal point can be achieved by color accents, significant shapes or details, lines coming together, groups of details, or contrast.

RHYTHM

Rhythm leads the eye from one part of a design to another part, creating movement through repetition of pattern or color.



Christian Dior
Evening dress and belt
1968
France
Silk jersey, ostrich feathers,
metal, silk organza, sequins,
beads
Gift of Lauren Bacall



Emanuel Ungaro
Pantsuit
1973
France
Silk damask
Gift of Lauren Bacall



Norman Norell
Pantsuit ensemble
c. 1968
USA
Silk satin
Gift of Lauren Bacall



Yves Saint Laurent
Tunic and shorts ensemble
1969
France
Silk organza, sequins, beads
Gift of Lauren Bacall