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THE INNER MIND OF A FASHION DESIGNER

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The journey of a collection, big or small, for any designer is full of ups and downs as well as blood, sweat and tears over late nights, early mornings and brutally long days. Some days go swimmingly and some feel like an all-out crisis. However, it is the determination and passion for the art of creation that pull a designer through the mazes and pridefully onto the runway with a grand and final presentation. The following is the step by step process of this journey I experienced during the creation of L’esprit D’ Aventure, my senior collection for the Southern Illinois University Carbondale Fashion Design Program.
**Introduction**

A typical day for a designer starts early and ends very late. It is not uncommon to wake up in the middle of the night to jot down a quick design you dreamed of in your sleep. We begin the day getting into the lab and preparing for the long day ahead. For most people, this often begins with a cup of coffee or tea but for designers it also includes getting out the necessary materials such as reference books for patternmaking and draping, needles, thread, pinking shears, snips, scissors, a tape measure and countless other small accessories. We are also sure to get out the various rulers we need, and the fabric called “fashion-fabric” that will be used for the final look. Drawing tools for sketching and rendering also are very useful to have around. However, in the midst of all of these materials are our most important tools; a sewing machine, our hands and our minds.

Our mind is part of what makes everything possible. The knowledge of how garments work together, as well as how fabrics work together, and what can and cannot be made is crucial. It also holds the creativity that brings our ideas to life. It fuels inspiration. A skilled artist can find inspiration in the most mundane of surroundings because, “*Fashion is not something that exists in dresses only. Fashion is in the sky, in the street, fashion has to do with ideas, the way we live, what is happening*” — *Coco Chanel*¹(stylecaster.com). We get design inspiration from the world around us in music, stories, dreams, experiences and many other forms of art. I have been struck with inspiration for an entire 7-piece collection just by seeing a woman’s shoes as she

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¹ Footnote Quote One: Coco Chanel is one of the most recognized and established brands. With her determination for tradition, she truly is a noteworthy individual.
walked by on the street! We are also inspired by the present, the past and the future. The passion to create something extraordinary can come from quite literally anything.

As a senior design student, I was required to come up with an 8-piece line yet was so inspired I designed a 12-piece collection. We have free reign to design as we please and I ran with that. My senior showcase, “L’esprit D’ Aventure”, is a 12-look clothing line displaying my mindset, inspiration, skills and ambition. Like Pharrell Williams has said, “Fashion has to reflect who you are, what you feel at the moment, and where you’re going”2 (stylecaster.com). The line was inspired by my study abroad trip over the summer of 2017. I studied in Grenoble, Marseilles, and Paris, France as well as Geneva, Switzerland. It truly is about the spirit of adventure. I had never been that far from home—especially not alone. I was amazed with the history, architecture, art, street style and lifestyle there. Incorporating all the places and monuments I visited, my colors of black, white, silver and pops of purple and pink came through. I cannot help but feel extremely proud and accomplished.

In order to start the process of creating a collection, after inspiration, we begin with designing and rendering. I started by trying to personify all of the incredible things I saw during my studies. I made quick, short, pencil sketches to capture the overflow of ideas I had filling my mind of all of the ensembles I wished to create. I narrowed those sketches to 12 pieces that were strong, cohesive and worthy of being brought to life. I continued by rendering each idea which is when a designer sits down to fully draw out each and every complete look for their line. Each look is perfected in color and proportion as other ideas continue to flow. Each designer does things differently. Many draw a design they love and then try to find the fabric to match.

2 Footnote Quote Two: Usually celebrities simply slap their name on product and call themselves designers rather than truly understand the industry—which in all honesty is kind of insulting—but occasionally they come up with a thought that applies well to the mentality of fashion designing.
I, however, let the fabric speak to me. I will render, only in pencil, each line of a garment until the style lines are what I want them to be.

The next task is to source models and fabric. As previously stated, fabric speaks to me. I walk into the fabric store with an open mind and my renderings. Carefully sampling each fabric, I walk up and down each and every aisle to find exactly what fits my vision to become my creation. Sometimes this can take months! As with renderings, I pull countless fabrics that call to me as possibilities and narrow them down to what will truly work and be the strongest for the design. My mind often leans toward textures and the colors black and blue. Once the fabric is chosen, a designer measures out how much will be necessary for each garment. This can be difficult if a designer does not have any particular body style or model preference in mind.

It is the designer’s job to scout models for their collection. If a designer does not have an agency to pull models from, it is not uncommon to have to sit in various high-traffic locations such as malls, campuses, etc. and wait for hours at a time to find the perfect model that fits your design and fabric choice. It is up to the designer to go out onto campus and the surrounding community in order to source their models. With all of the back to school activities that occur at the beginning of school on campus, there are great opportunities to meet lots of people in one place that could possibly work for a line. Normally, I already have my designs in mind when looking for models. I typically people watch for a long period of time at busy events, approaching people as they catch my eye for a particular outfit from my collection.

Once models are selected and agree to perform, it is time to get down to business. Now comes the struggle of managing the schedules of different models to fit into the designer’s schedule to hold fittings. In my case, I was able to find 10 models which made for quite a bit of
juggling of schedules. The first fitting is more of an introduction period where the full requirements of the fashion show are discussed as well as initial measurements taken. This is so the designer knows the general fit and size of a model in order to move forward into the first stages of a garment’s creation.

**Beginning the Designing Process**

“Fashion is very important. It is life-enhancing and, like everything that gives pleasure, it is worth doing well.” — *Vivienne Westwood* (stylecaster.com).

**Prototypes, Construction and Slopers**

Based off of the bust, waist and hips of a model, a designer can work off of a standard model size—sizes 2-16 and up—and build off of it to cater to the garment’s model. This is done by selecting the standard size based on the model’s largest measurement. The designer moves forward by creating what’s known as a “sloper” which is a prototype creation of the look, before any actual design changes or elements have been made. This assures that the clothes will fit properly and that the outfits will be catered to the models’ bodies. The sloper is usually made from muslin, a lower quality, cheap cotton and often looks like a very basic ensemble.

Once the sloper is perfected, the designer moves on to draping and flat patterning. Draping is when the designer goes straight to a mannequin and works the fashion fabric with the human form. While still in muslin or knit, depending on the fashion fabric chosen to design with,

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3 Footnote Quote Three: Vivienne is absolutely correct. If one enjoys designing, their passion will flow through and make all of their hard work worth it.
the designer manipulates it on a mannequin until the ultimate design is achieved and perfected. Depending on the decisiveness of the designer, this can take quite some time to perfect.

Another option for prototype construction is flat patterning. This uses the model’s exact measurements to create the pattern pieces for the garment. Here, too, the designer can make alterations to style lines to fit perfectly to a figure. In the draping and flat pattern stage, the elements of each design are added into the pattern pieces. Our clothes go together like big 3-dimensional puzzles. A rather simple example of design pattern alterations would include hem length, pant style, a type of neckline (V-neck, boat-neck, queen Anne neckline, etc.) or even sleeve styles.

Once the muslin sloper is complete with all pattern and design elements included, the designer disassembles the sloper to use its perfected pieces as the individual puzzle pieces of the final look. Insert the time-consuming portion of creating a garment: garment construction and fittings. This is where juggling many models’ schedules into your own becomes tricky. Construction is simply assembling the various pieces of the garment puzzle into an actual functioning piece of attire. This often takes a long time, especially with rather complex designs, while assuring it is all done properly. Next come fittings. A model stands in her respective runway look while the designer nips and tucks and pokes and prods at the garment until it fits perfectly to the specific model’s body. Here we adjust darts, seamlines, lengths, necklines, fit, lay and overall style.

Once all of the fittings are complete, it is time to finish a garment. This means finishing hems, cutting threads, hard pressing, surging, embellishing and more. The designer continues to accessorize the piece in order to complete the look as well as designing the hair and make-up of
each model for the day of the fashion show. It all sounds simple, but it involves serious time management, dedication, late nights, skills and passion to pour your heart into your creations. It is not unusual for one garment to take up to 80 hours or more to create. Multiply that by how many models you have and add in the time it took to come up with the designs, renderings, finding fabrics, scouting models, styling, and completing each and every look.

I did this process for 10 out of my 12 rendered designs. In order to complete my senior showcase, I devoted well over 1,000 hours to bring my experiences, inspiration and ambition to life. This is an expensive and time-consuming industry, but the feeling a designer gets seeing their designs strutting down the runway is indescribable and makes it all worth it. “Pure, intense emotions. It’s not about design. It’s about feelings” — Alber Elbaz⁴ (stylecaster.com). My 10 looks included inspiration from Marseille, France, the Lock Bridge in Paris, LVMH Louis Vuitton Headquarters, the Musee Du Louvre, the Champs Elysee in Paris, the River Seine, Lake Geneva, the Swiss United Nations, Paris itself, and the Reformation Wall in Switzerland.

Making Tough Cuts

I had two designs which were not brought to life due to finances and time restraints that started my collection: Switzerland and the Catacombs. The catacombs of France are under the city in Paris and house thousands of deceased citizens from hundreds of years. It is said that as technology increases, we may even be able to find Napoleon’s skeleton among the thousands of bodies buried there. The reason they are buried here is due to the illnesses that occurred throughout history that killed sometimes thousands of citizens. There was no room in the

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⁴ Footnote Quotes Four: Designers don’t just design to make pretty things. It is because life around them has touched them so deeply they feel compelled to bring forth their greatest work.
graveyards due to high death counts. Priests blessed the underground tunnels and buried people there. This I’m sure seems like a rather odd idea to be inspired by, but “I think there is beauty in everything. What ‘normal’ people would perceive as ugly, I can usually see something of beauty in it”—Alexander McQueen⁵ (stylecaster.com). I wanted to make a clean look with alternating patterns to showcase this fascinating part of French history. This pant and short-sleeved shirt ensemble would play into the chaos of having so many dead resting there. However, I wanted the look to be conservative and respectful to pay homage to those who rest in the Catacombs.

The Switzerland design I had planned is a short-sleeved pencil skirt dress with a sequin overlay. I used the same sequin fabric in another look in my line to provide more cohesion. Switzerland is a very expensive, historical and classy country. I wanted to create something fashionable yet fun to represent this appropriately. The look was sleek yet funky with the sequins and, to this designer’s eye, represented Switzerland perfectly.

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⁵ Footnote Quote Five: I find this Alexander McQueen statement to be so relatable. I love finding hidden treasure in neglected or denied objects. I see the beauty in everything around me, especially in what most others find repulsive.
The Senior Collection, its Challenges, and Everything in Between

My first design that walked the runway was “Marseille”. I was inspired by the gorgeous city of Marseille. It is right off of the Mediterranean Sea in the south of France. This was where I had mussels, whelks and octopus for the first time. They were all so delicious! Here I also saw Napoleon’s castle, Notre Dame and so much more. The culture of the area was amazing. I was there the same weekend as a major rugby match and the town was buzzing with lovely and lively people. I wanted a look that was sophisticated yet still fun and light.
I designed a peplum, long sleeve, jewel neck top with laser cut faux leather, a nude underlay and back separating zipper. It was paired with a just-above-the-knee pencil skirt made of an organza overlay with a black underlay. The gray organza had circles of decorative stitching for added detail. This was completed with a silver-metallic mini purse with a circle bangle wristlet and drop-ball earrings as well as black pumps with mesh tie detailing. The peplum provides movement while the laser cut fabric created structure and the gray organza brings lightness. The peplum was inspired by the waves of the sea along the coastline. This look went together with only a few hiccups. I had to make several adjustments to the level of the peplum. It seemed like every time I attached it and the model tried it on, it was either too high or too low. I
would mark what needed to be changed for the next fitting, but then it would be too high or too low from the previous fix. This was frustrating, but that was really the only issue, so I suppose I should be thankful for that.

The second runway look was “Lock Bridge”. The look was inspired by the bridges in Paris where couples in love make wishes together for happiness and “lock it in place” on the chain fence of the bridges. Thousands upon thousands of locks cover these bridges and are sprinkled in creative places all around the area. It is something truly amazing to encounter.
The ensemble is a cocktail length, black dress with a silver netting overlay and a white base and purple cheetah print sequin sash overlay detail. It is paired with white boots and an elegant circle purse. I chose the sequin fabric to resemble the thousands of locks on the bridge. I overlaid the black dress with a silver netting to bring forth the chain link fencing on the bridge as well as to incorporate some of the metals found on the bridge’s locks. Figuring out the pattern for the sequin shawl was a hurdle. I knew exactly what I wanted it to look like, but actually manipulating the fabric to accomplish that was a matter of pattern manipulation, draping, and trial and error. A minor complication of the overlay was figuring how to finish the edges. I had
not worked with sequin before—for a good reason—and had to learn how to finish the fabric properly.

Following “Lock Bridge” on the runway is “Louis Vuitton”. While abroad I visited the LVMH Louis Vuitton Headquarters. It was stunning! The building is actually built to look like a ship and has an art museum inside. I was truly inspired by all of the motion represented in the construction of the building. It was a very avant-garde shape with various sail shapes, curves and bends. The rigid, stiff, and metallic texture of the building inspired my fabric choice while the actual shape of the building inspired the structural lines of my ensemble.
My design includes a cropped laser cut top with a tear drop dip center front and a silver metallic skirt with circular stitch pattern detailing. The skirt also has triangle embellishments on the hips made from the same fabric but using the opposite or “wrong” side of it. The main hurdles with this look were the front darts in the skirt, the hemline of the top and working the scalloped hem of the skirt. The patterns for the look were relatively simple, yet the alterations were troublesome. Every time I moved the front darts in the skirt, they wouldn’t match up to the darts in the top. When I moved the darts again in either garment, they again wouldn’t match. Finally, I had to forgo the skirt darts all together which resulted in an even better fit for the model and aided in the final image of the look.
The fourth look to walk the catwalk was the “Musee Du Louvre”. During my trip abroad to achieve my marketing minor, I visited the Musee Du Louvre in Paris, France. It is one of the world’s most renowned museums for art. The building is most easily recognized by its entrance which is the shape of a massive pyramid made entirely of glass with dozens upon dozens of different panes. This is primarily where my inspiration for the fourth look came from.
The original plan was to have open cut-outs in the back of the top as well as in the front of the legs in the pants. These were going to be enhanced with a lattice-like material which reminded me of the glass panes in the museum. In the end however, I decided to leave the base fabric behind the lattice style fabric because the stronger contrast of the black and white compared to the contrast of white to the model’s skin-tone made it stand out more. The biggest struggles I encountered while creating this look were in the pants and front closure. The front closure was all about placement of the two front embellishments so that they were high enough to keep the garment fully closed yet low enough that the model could still slide the top over her
head to put it on. The pants were also an issue. Fittings happened several times to make the perfect fit in the rear of the pants given that the model was tiny yet curvy. I had to adjust the back panels of the pants to make extra room. In addition, the model had one hip that was higher than the other. This caused many fitting trials and errors, especially with trying to make the hem and lattice panels even. I was beyond determined to be sure to get the lattice fabric on the pants. It was true to my design. With all the humps I crossed over with this look I was so very happy to see it finally completed and walking down the runway.

4 Photo Credit Leigha C. Yeager
Moving on to the next ensemble, “Champs Elysee”, we see a pant and top look. The outfit all together was inspired not only by the elegance of the Arche De Triumph, but also by the hustle, bustle, and street fashion I saw walking up and down the Champs Elysee, Paris’ most famous hub for shopping and eating. Everyone on the strip was so fashionable, confident, and dressed in their best day wear. In agreeance with Yves Saint Laurent, “I have always believed that fashion was not only to make women more beautiful, but also to reassure them, give them confidence” — YSL⁶ (stylecaster.com). It was truly inspiring being in such an environment.

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⁶ Footnote Quote Six: Just as YSL said, it’s all about confidence. It is amazing what a little encouragement can confidence can do for a nervous model or designer ready to be on the runway.
While in Europe I noticed that the paper-bag style waists on pants were in style. I wanted to be sure to include this in my line to be on trend while also making trends. Considering I had never done this style of pant before, there were some learning curves. I had to slash and spread the waistline to account for the specific design. It was a process of trial and error like many fittings can be. The top was also a challenge. It seemed like every time I changed a seamline, everything would go wrong. I also wanted to make the top more interesting with multiple straps and a metal link in the back holding the y-strap together. The pops of pink and purple brought a happy sense of light to the look.
A great day for inspiration was our trip down the River Seine through Paris. It was mesmerizing to see all of the amazing buildings and colors. The movement of the water was so beautiful and calming. I wanted to replicate the vertical lines I saw in all of the artwork and architecture as well as the Eiffel Tower. This look was one of the quickest ones to come together.
I loved it!

Given the material I chose to work with, there was not really a pattern or sloper I could use. This is where draping came into play. I basically had to take the existing fabric and work with it on a mannequin similarly shaped to my model until it looked like what I had envisioned. There was a lot of trial and error as well as process of elimination to reach the final outcome. The struggle of it, however, was figuring out the double layer under the bust of the model as well as inserting the godet panel in the back. A godet—originating in 19th Century France—is a piece of fabric shaped like a triangle while often rounded at the hem. It is inserted inside a seam to provide more fullness to the area. The most time-consuming aspect of it all was not only the
godet but also the circle appliqué detailing around the top of the bustline. After much effort and careful work, it came together beautifully, full of movement and flow. It was like a black and white mini river walking down the runway picking up light perfectly.
Following “River Seine” on the runway was “Lake Geneva”. Visiting Lake Geneva in Geneve, Switzerland was stunning. Seeing the famous fountain in the center of it and how incredibly high it shot was very eye catching. I wanted to incorporate that into the look in some way. Hence, I chose the fabric for this look due to the high-end, wealthy lifestyle that is Geneve, Switzerland.
This was a silver ensemble with embellished pants and crop top. While the embellishment on the pants was much simpler to work through and drape in order to represent the moving waves and fountain in the lake, the outfit itself was a walking rollercoaster. After spending an unnecessary amount of time trying to decide which side of the fabric to use, I ran into the issue of not really having enough fabric to make the entire garment. With the help of my fellow classmates, patience and lots of working with the material, I was able to barely scrape by with enough material to make the entire garment. An unexpected surprise of this shortage meant having to change the orientation of the fabric throughout the look. The nap, or direction of the fabric, for the pants was vertical as well as with the bodice of the top. The bust of the top was made of the same fabric but at a horizontal nap. It ended up looking really grand. Fitting issues
The next look, “United Nations”, was one of my favorites. It was another very
time-consuming look, seeing as I had to make the fabric for the garment myself. Just as the
United Nations represents many nations, I wanted my piece to represent many textures and colors woven together as one. Each separate panel alone is like a single flag of a nation; together they make one entity just as together my fabric strips make one fabric.

I started with five separate types of fabric which I cut into even strips, cut those into three pieces each, and then worked with the pieces until I found a pattern I liked. Once the pattern was established, I sewed all of the pieces in the right order end to end, then sewed them in a zig-zag pattern side to side until they looked like one large piece of fabric. From this I chose to make the pants in line with the vertical strips and the top horizontally. To construct the pants, I was able to manipulate a standard panel to make the wide-leg pants I envisioned by cutting and slashing. The top was another part of my line that I had to drape into creation. The struggles I encountered with
this runway look were a tight waistband, the closure on the top and making sure the straps fit properly. The closure on the top had to be a four-inch zipper, inserted upside-down, that also separated. Once that was in place, arranging the straps in an intricate way that the model could still slip over her head was an interesting undertaking. However, the entire ensemble was so amazing when finished.

Another favorite of mine, “Paris”, was a lot of fun to make. I was inspired by the vertical lines and silhouette of the Eiffel Tower as well as the texture found within it. Seeing it stand so beautifully in the sky, especially twinkling in lights at midnight, was so eye-catching. I
incorporated the vertical triangle silhouette within my look with a floor-length skirt and trained mock-neck top.

Just as I did in the “United Nations” look, I made my own fabric for the skirt of the ensemble. I used 6 different fabrics cut into various widths and lengths that I then sewed all together to create one large fabric. It was that fabric creation that I used to make the skirt because it reminded me of the different levels of the Eiffel Tower. Using a basic sloper, I slashed and spread the bottom, and then lined up the nap of the pre-made fabric to cut and construct the skirt. Draping also came into play regarding the top of the look. I wanted to turn the back of the bodice into a long train panel that would give the look more drama. A mock turtle-neck and shoulder seam embellishments, which I made out of the same fabric, completed the look. There were few bumps while making this look come together which included a lining to be sure that the garment
was not see-through, the closure of the bodice and working to make the train out of one solid piece.

The final and most dramatic look for the runway was “Reformation Wall”. This was inspired by the Reformation Wall in Geneva, Switzerland. The gentlemen made of stone there were cast in billowing robes that draped beautifully. Even being made of stone, there was so much motion in the garments. I wanted to be sure and choose a fabric for my piece that was detailed and textured for cohesion, yet still very drape-y. I also wanted to mimic the hood that the statues were wearing in my look.
The construction process required work with basic slopers, various manipulations, as well as draping the hood for the bodice. The struggles that came with the construction of this look were figuring out the gathering on the sleeves, finding a proper closure in the back that worked with the hood, and creating the hood in a way that it billowed behind the model. I originally wanted to have an illusion opening in the back—a section where the fabric is seemingly see-through yet the skin is still covered—but with time crunches and overall aesthetic of the
garments, I decided to go without. It ended up looking much better and higher-end this way.

With tailored pants and an overlaying paper-bag style parted skirt with green and silver detailing, the whole look came together in a rather dramatic and climactic way. I was so proud watching this ensemble walking down the runway with the gathered skirt-belt billowing along with the oversized hood.
Show Day

After well over 800 hours constructing and doing fittings, over 100 hours designing, rendering and illustrating, and several hours scouting models all over campus and mixing runway music, it was finally time for the show! The Fashion Design and Merchandising Program hosts a fashion show annually in the Student Center Ballroom D each year on Thursday near the end of April at 6pm. We have a closed rehearsal the night before to work out all of the choreography in preparation for the big day. The show is always in order of youngest students to oldest given that it is based on the Senior Showcase. We start the day at noon and all of the designers and models file in to prepare for the show. We always expect our day to be about sixteen hours or more, from getting up in the morning to finishing up and celebrating at night.
As models file in, so do the John A. Logan Cosmetology students. We partner with them each year to do hair and makeup for the show. Seniors get first call on Cosmo students and as they finish with senior designers’ models they then move to lower classmen designers’ models. After hair and makeup, we hold a dress rehearsal. Models get dressed in their show garments and prepare for a run-through of the show with lights, music and wardrobe. Once this is completed, and if there is time, a second run will take place. After this, models are to change out of show clothing and can then go back to the John A. students for finishing touches on hair and makeup as well as touch-ups.

Meanwhile, designers are usually running every which way working on final touches, fixing any mishaps and trying to keep their heads on straight with all of the chaos that comes with the day of the show. Problems, such as a button popping off or a tear in someone’s tights, are not uncommon. Worrisome accidents include a zipper breaking, a stain on a garment or, even worse, an irreparable tear. That is when creativity and quick fixes really come into play to save the day. Many times, you’ll see a designer near tears from the stress and final preparations. This is when all of us design students work together to help each other out and bolster each other’s spirits.
Conclusion

Looking back now that the show is done, and all of my hard design efforts have come to an end for my college career, I am so incredibly proud with the work I have done. I am happy to have gone above and beyond my expectations over the course of my studies. I have learned and experienced more than I ever anticipated. It is truly easy to comprehend now that, “The joy of dressing is an art” – John Galliano⁷ (stylecaster.com). When I first started in the Fashion Design and Merchandising Program, I knew only how to sew off of a pre-made pattern from the store. After working and learning everything I could, I can now complete the entire design process start to finish. I can imagine, render, source, cut, construct, fit and style an entire look from scratch.

⁷ Footnote Quote Seven: Every person has their own idea of art. Little do we realize, however, that art is in everything—paintings, nature, clothing, even math.
Being so truly blessed to have traveled to such an inspiring place as Europe is something I am utterly thankful for. It inspired what will now always be my “closing statement” for the Design Program in FDM at SIU Carbondale. I also learned just how much the other specializations benefit from the design classes and vice versa. Taking all three specializations, Journalism and Marketing minors, as well as an Event Planning certification has made me a well-rounded and educated individual in various aspects of the fashion industry. Yet, I am still ready to learn more and look forward to learning in the field as I begin my career.

Thank you

For all of the hard work a student designer puts in, they cannot go without thanking their instructors. They are the ones who teach a designer everything they know. They are the ones to devote more time than anyone else to help sculpt the next generation of designers. They know
not everyone goes out and becomes famous, but everyone “makes it big” in their own way. It is important that each designer do this humbly, respectfully, and with the ultimate gratitude for their mentors. I personally would love to thank each of my teachers and family members for helping mold me into the person, designer and overall creative being I am today. Thank you.
References

