

scope

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Fashion Design Process
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What fuels your design ideas?

Designing and making garments and accessories for clients, who have difficulty finding and purchasing clothing which makes them feel comfortable and is enjoyable to wear, fuels my practice. Most of the made-to-measure products I produce are informed by the wearer's individual needs and wishes, clients are usually able to inform me of what does not work well for them relating to clothing, and often they have suggestions of possible solutions.

Who are the practitioners who you feel have influenced your design processes, mentors, teachers, colleagues, designers, and writers.

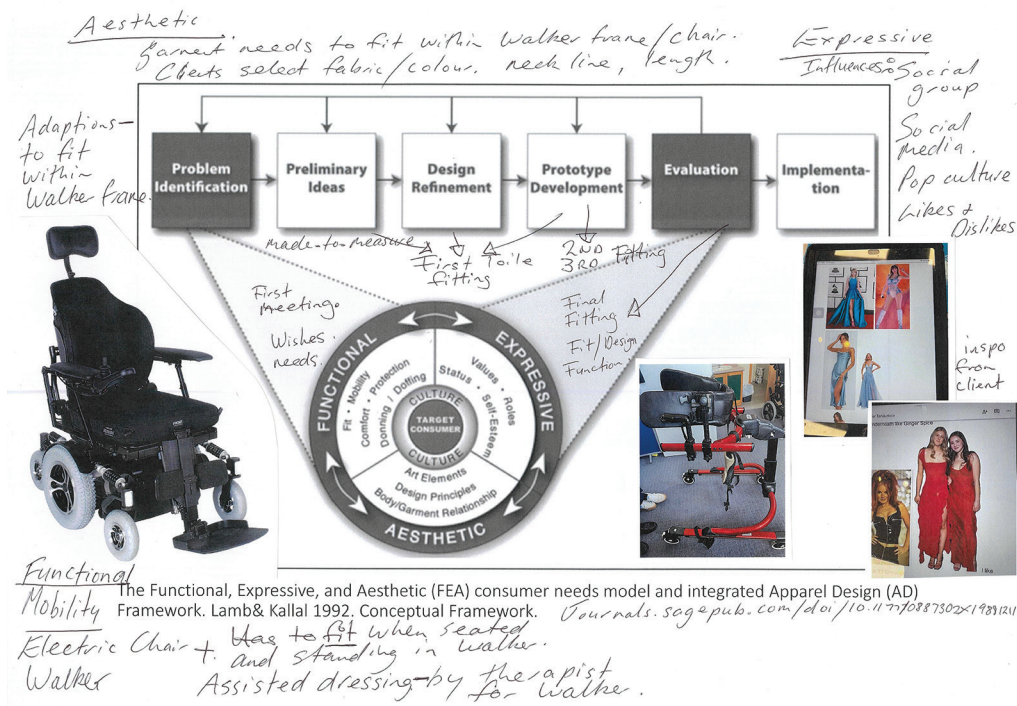
In the field of adaptive clothing there are two academics who have inspired and informed my design practice, Susan Watkins and Grace Jun. Watkins' first textbook, *Clothing: The Portable Environment*, published in 1984 is considered to have had a major influence in establishing functional apparel design as an area of academic study. Jun practices and teaches design processes inclusive of disability. Jun recently published a book *Fashion, Disability, and Co-design: A Human-Centred Design Approach* (2024), which outlines design and practical making techniques, with the aim of teaching and informing the production of garments and accessories that help increase social inclusion for people with disabilities. Both Watkins and Jun place emphasis on the users' needs and the importance and value of their input into the design of functional aspects of clothing.

Lecturing in fashion within the School of Design at Otago Polytechnic continuously feeds how I think about and approach designing, I have and continue to be influenced and learn from colleagues and students. I also appreciate the value of a multi-disciplinary design environment, study in occupational therapy has also helped build my approach of working toward gaining best understanding and empathy of my client's needs and wishes.

How do you describe the rangahau|research that you do as part of your design process?

When working with a client my design process is user centred, informed by a framework published by apparel design educators Lamb and Kallal in 1992. The FEA Consumer Needs Model assesses the users' needs and wants which informs the identification of the creative problem and design criteria. Functional, Expressive and Aesthetic (FEA) user needs are integrated with an apparel design framework; the key to this model is that it assists in resolving design problems in an inclusive manner, whether functional or fashion orientated, so that the design best meets the needs of the intended user.

Most often the research I undertake when working with a client is in the form of creative problem solving. Mainly the issues I need to consider when designing are adaptive, working out solutions that often don't exist in mainstream apparel, such as the placement and size of garment openings, the most appropriate types of fastening to close and secure an opening, placement and reduction in seams, working inclusion of medical and assistive tools around and into garments.





What is most meaningful stage of designing for you and what happens at that moment?

The most meaningful and enjoyable stage of working with a client is when the garment 'works' when the problem is solved or at least is less of an issue – when the client is happy and more comfortable in their clothes.

What 2D / 3D methods or techniques do you use to explore ideas?

I work with both 2 and 3 dimensional methods, where acceptable snapshot photography is employed to record details discussed during initial consultations with clients, to record what is and isn't working with their clothing. Desk-top research is then often a starting point to better understand assistive tools and/or medical devices which are needing to inform or be included in the design. Sketching and toiling of prototypes is then employed to communicate and fit possible solutions to the client. During fittings of toiles, I mark the fabric with the required alterations to best meet the clients' requirements, these markings are then taken back to patterns – additional research may be required before the adaptations are included in the following toile. This process continues up until the stage of constructing the final garment or accessory. I will leave toiles with clients to enable a longer period of wear testing to take place, if necessary, before final adaptive design solutions are confirmed.

How do you select or adapt your environment to best suit your modes of designing?

Initially, I normally meet a client in their home or work environment to discuss their needs and wishes, often they are accompanied by their communities and networks; family, friends, occupational, health and/or educational supports. At these meetings I gain an understanding of identified problems and possible solutions. I work on preliminary design sketches and gain feedback from the client; this is either through face-to-face meetings or exchange of digital files. The prototyping/ toiling process is either undertaken in my home workroom or in the production studio at work, Otago Polytechnic. When I make at work, colleagues and students at times offer feedback and guidance. Toile and final garment fitting usually happen in my client's environment.

What role does working with others and collaboration have in your designing?

Working with others in a collaborative way is an integral part of a user centred design process, this is an aspect of work that I particularly value and enjoy. I am always learning and gaining understanding of how powerful lived experiences are in informing better design.

As tangata whenua or tangata Tiriti, how do you practice in our Aotearoa New Zealand framework; how is this reflected in your work?

Working with clients during a made-to-measure process enables the building of relationships through collaboration, the sharing of knowledge, experiences and ideas, I relate this type of codesign engagement to Te Aranga Māori Design Principle, Whanaungatanga: which provides people with a sense of belonging.

Do you have sources of inspiration that you always revisit?

Disability and fashion networks, publications focusing on design with and for disabled, user-centred design practices across varied disciplines. I enjoy following a number of fashion influencers with disabilities.

Tania Allan Ross is a Principal Lecturer in Fashion within the School of Design at Otago Polytechnic. Tania holds a Master of Design Enterprise and a Post Graduate Certificate in Adaptive Design (Occupational Therapy), her research includes adaptive fashion, co-design and inclusive apparel specifically addressing sensory integration.