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Anupama Pasricha
St. Catherine University, apasricha@stkate.edu

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The Power Suit: Sustainable and Stylish, an Empowering Eco-pioneer

Anupama Pasricha, St. Catherine University, U.S.A

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“When did the skirt suit fall out of favor?” asks V. Friedman in her New York Times article (2015, p. 28). As the designers are bringing the skirt suit back, I want it in sustainable materials. There is a growing trend toward socially and environmentally responsible consumption and sustainable fashion (Lundblad & Davies, 2016). Sustainable Power Skirt Suit is an eco-pioneer as well as a visual representation of empowerment, and style. This Power Suit concept and design emerged from a personal goal to stay on a sustainability continuum and create a trailblazer, a timeless ready-to-wear summer professional suit. One can find this aesthetic in ready-to-wear but not the soul of sustainability as woven in this ensemble.

The target market of this suit are diverse women who value individuality, the environment, and well-being. Consumers or organic apparel correlate it with well-being for themselves, organic industry, and the environment (Hustvedt & Dickson, 2009). A study by Hwang, Lee, & Diddi (2015) reported that Generation Y females have significantly higher levels of moral obligation and attitudes towards purchasing apparel products made of organic and recycled materials as well as fair-trade label. To meet the consumer need for ecofriendly products, several eco-labeling standards have emerged (Almeida, 2015). These standards empower consumers to shop with trust. Global Organic Standard (GOTS) is one of the stringent standards accepted globally, this skirt suit is made from light blue GOTS certified 100% organic cotton chambray and underlined by white GOTS certified 100% organic cotton cambric. The underlining is used to support the fabric and to avoid the use of fusible interfacing except for the facing and upper collar. I have lined the suit with charmeuse made from 70% hemp and 30% silk. The materials were chosen based on Material Sustainability Index (MSI) scores (Sustainable Apparel Coalition, n.d), preferred fibers (Textile Exchange, n.d), and personal preference of sustainable choices.

The key design elements provide this elevated suit ensemble with a balance of conformity and individuality. The jacket has detachable *ikat* epaulets; historically, epaulet represented office, power, and rank. The jacket also has exposed dart inlays and hand-embroidered saddle stitch on the pocket welts to add uniqueness. The saddle stitch in red repeats the red *ikat* motif on the blue epaulet and adds both functionality by holding the pocket welts and aesthetics by providing a contrast to the fabric. The skirt front has an overlay of a self-lined asymmetrical layer, in which the waist darts are transposed into three slightly curved pleats going from left at the waist to the right side. This layer serves functionality by eliminating the need of underlining, and as a design element delivering a fashion edge to the wearer. The back of the skirt is underlined and repeats

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the exposed dart inlay design aesthetic. The play of these design elements and garment parts create the desired effect. The silhouette has a balance of shape and roominess to accommodate a variety of body types within the same size range. Further, the jacket and the skirt can be worn together as a suit, or as separates. In the attached image, this suit is styled with a blouse and scarf made from repurposed old sari fabric.

I am thrilled to see progress and change in use of sustainable practices through the entire supply chain in the apparel industry by designers as well as brands. Maintaining my role as a design educator, through this Power Suit, I strive to encourage students and the industry to continue on the path of sustainability. This design contributes to the sustainable product selection in the market and strengthens the belief that every garment can be made using sustainable practices from raw materials to retail.

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Front View



Back View



Side View



Front curved pleat detail