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Fashion & Textiles

# HOW TO CREATE YOUR FINAL COLLECTION

MARK ATKINSON

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# **HOW TO CREATE YOUR FINAL COLLECTION**

**A FASHION STUDENT'S HANDBOOK**

**MARK ATKINSON**

**LAURENCE KING PUBLISHING**



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Tsolo Munkh

Back cover: Concept board of Meccano  
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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this book is to assist fashion design students to produce a womenswear capsule collection. This exercise usually takes place during the final year of a fashion design course and is referred to as the degree or final collection. This book provides a step-by-step approach to designing such a collection and is intended to accompany students throughout the process.

Students may also consult this book in the years prior to graduation in order to gain a better understanding of the key skills they will need to acquire to complete their course successfully. This will help put into context the projects and exercises they will have to complete before their final collection.

Finally, this book should prove helpful to anyone interested in the design of a fashion collection, as the processes followed by students and professional designers are very similar. The book is in fact illustrated throughout by work from both student designers and professional designers.



# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Designing a successful fashion collection requires many different skills. These can be broadly categorized as creative, technical and commercial. Each is developed and cultivated in a different way: a commercial approach requires knowledge of the markets, technical skills improve with practice, and creativity relies on inspiration. The emphasis of this book, however, is the *process* of designing a collection rather than an attempt to address each set of skills in detail.

One of the skills that sets good designers apart is the ability to reflect upon and assess their own creation. Good knowledge of the industry will help you, as you work through every step of the design process, to evaluate your work in this wider context and be prepared to judge when it is not satisfactory.

The notion that the design of a collection, a creative process, can be formalized may be surprising. There is certainly no magic formula. It is possible, however, to break down this process into coherent stages. Your own path may turn out to be slightly different from the ideal route described in this book, and the terms used may vary, but the issues raised and the structure suggested should help you to get a sense of the design process and guide you as it unfolds. This book provides signposts to a journey that is very much a personal one.

Case studies of final collections designed by fashion students from around the world are included at the end of the book and on the accompanying CD-Rom. These case studies illustrate the different stages of the process described in the book, showing a diversity of individual approaches to fashion design, and images of the case study collections are also featured in the chapters.

Each chapter in *How to Create Your Final Collection* explores one step of the design process. Chapters 1 and 2 highlight the context in which designers work – a necessary consideration to deliver a collection that is viable and timely in its design. They highlight different questions that should be considered before refining the collection brief given to you – namely, understanding the market, choosing a season and analysing fashion trends.

Chapter 3, Creative Research, describes the explorative stage, where you research and select one or two themes that will inspire and influence your collection. Evocative material collated on a **theme board** will help you keep in mind those chosen influences during the next stages.

In Chapter 4, Development and Sampling, you will encounter the experimental, playful stage where you generate and test ideas for different aspects of garment design, such as colour range, material, print, surface embellishment, silhouette, **style line** or construction. This work may also help you to formulate the idea of your collection as a *concept*, usually in the form of a **concept board** with text added that explains what your collection is trying to achieve, and a **mood board** that shows how you intend to do so. The concept acts as a guide and maintains the coherence of a collection.

Chapter 5 brings together the different ideas and elements of design retained after development and sampling to produce garment designs. Range planning organizes these garments into a coherent collection and optimizes each completed outfit. Chapter 6 looks at the all-important presentation and styling of your collection for both your submission to the jury and for the catwalk.

Finally, Chapter 7 explains how to include your final collection in your portfolio and suggests ways in which you can extend its use through the development of diffusion lines, enabling you to target your portfolio successfully to potential employers.



*A dramatic finale for the students of Istituto Marangoni showing at the London Graduate Fashion Week in June 2011.*



Market Research  
Chapter 1

Trend Forecasting  
Chapter 2

**PERSONAL BRIEF**

Creative Research  
Chapter 3

**THEME**

Development and Sampling  
Chapter 4

**CONCEPT**

Garment Design and Range Planning  
Chapter 5

**COLLECTION**

Styling  
Chapter 6

**PRESENTATION**

Diffusion and Further Work  
Chapter 7

**PORTFOLIO**

# YOUR FINAL COLLECTION

Your degree collection is a major project that will call upon all the skills and abilities you have acquired so far. At the same time it offers great freedom of creative expression and is likely to be the most rewarding experience of your course. You will understandably be feeling both nervous and excited. At the risk of compounding these feelings, you must also recognize that this final stage of your training is a springboard for your career. Consider carefully the implications of the many choices you are about to make. Recognize what your final collection can do for you and engineer this project to serve your own purposes.

## WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A DEGREE AND A COMMERCIAL COLLECTION?

The project of the final collection is intentionally very similar to that of designing a commercial collection. However, degree and commercial collections are different in two aspects: the nature of the brief and the size of the collection.

Your final collection is a requirement of your curriculum, and as such will be sanctioned by your teaching institution, while a commercial collection can only be validated by the market. Your brief for this project is probably relatively open-ended.

This brief specifies the size of the final collection, which will be significantly smaller than that of most commercial designers. The breadth of a collection allows the emergence of a style through the sequence of outfits, their differences and similarities. While the garments must stand by themselves, each making a statement,

they must also contribute to the overall spirit of the collection. This balance is especially difficult to achieve in a final collection where you must express a broad and innovative vision usually within just four to eight outfits. Each outfit must demonstrate sympathy with the others without being too similar. Together they must exhibit as wide a range of skills as possible.

## DEVELOP YOUR STYLE AND YOUR SKILLS

Academia offers a safe environment in which to experiment, and the brief of the final collection gives you artistic licence. This opportunity is unlikely to present itself again in a professional environment, where commercial constraints are always present. Use this freedom to further your own ideas on fashion. Final collections often see the emergence of a personal style and the crystallization of a creative identity.

Your teaching institution also offers resources and technical expertise. At this point you should have an idea of the area of fashion in which you would like to work. The final collection could help you to confirm this – think of it as a dress rehearsal. This practice may also enable you to complete the skill set necessary to succeed in your chosen field. Assess which skills you already have and identify those you need to perfect within the time frame, to ensure that you will be able to produce it to the industry standard. If, for example, you wish to design a lingerie collection you may need to master a number of special techniques such as corsetry, contour wear, lace and surface embellishment, and have access and know-how to operate cover-stitch machinery. Check your department can provide the resources and training you require to succeed.



*Line-up from Verena Zeller's collection. (See case study on page 158)*



## YOUR COLLECTION AND YOUR PORTFOLIO

Your final collection should be useful beyond your degree, not least because it will probably represent the most significant body of work you will have produced by the time you enter the job market. Thus you need to consider how it will fit into your portfolio given the professional direction you would like to pursue. When seeking employment, you must demonstrate that you possess the skills and knowledge required by the position. Your portfolio must show you will be able to contribute to the team you are applying to join by illustrating not only your creativity but also your understanding of the company, its products and target market. Include your final collection in your portfolio *only* if it is relevant to the position you seek. If not, one possibility is to adapt your work by designing a specific **diffusion line** inspired by your final collection. Showing them side by side will demonstrate your creativity as well as your aptitude for designing for different markets. It is a good way to extend the life and use of your final collection.

On the other hand you may consider using your final collection to establish yourself as an independent designer. Sometimes top-end independent boutiques, such as Browns in London (who bought Galliano's 1984 degree collection) or Colette in Paris, will support a freshly graduated student by retailing and promoting their final collection. To successfully launch your label you must not only design an exciting collection, but also establish a viable house style, balancing commerciality with a strong image. This can only be achieved through a thorough understanding of your market.



*Line-up from the collection of Kai Ryosuke (See case study on CD).*

## HOW DOES YOUR INSTITUTION GRADE THE FINAL COLLECTION?

In all likelihood the work involved in developing your final collection will be subject to continuous assessment. There may also be a final assessment involving a jury that could include external academics as well as industry specialists. Methods and criteria for evaluation will vary with each institution. Overall, however, your approach, your development and the execution of your final collection will be assessed, as well as your verbal and visual communication.

Most of the time an explicit and detailed list of assessment criteria and their respective weighting is provided with the project brief, and any further information can be obtained from the course leader. It is your responsibility to understand how your work will be graded, paying attention to both assessment criteria and process.

Continuous assessment allows for *you* to develop a sense of your performance and to adjust your work through the year.

Although jury and final assessment may seem more unpredictable, teaching institutions strive to produce objective and reliable evaluation of student work and provide the jury with well-defined grading criteria. Your grade should not be influenced by a subjective appreciation of what you may be capable of; only the work you produce and submit will be assessed. You should also confirm if external assistance with the production of your collection is allowed. Students from the previous year are a good source of feedback on any practical issues specific to your institution, and you should review their collections in the light of the grade they achieved.

The relative weight of each assessment criterion should help you to manage your time effectively. While designing and producing your collection you will easily lose sight of the conditions you must fulfil to achieve the best grade so, as you familiarize yourself with the assessment process, take notes for future reference. Review those notes regularly to ensure you are on track.

Identify your areas of strength and weakness and be realistic about what you can achieve with the resources available to you. For example, if quality of make ranks prominently in the grading and you intend to include leather in your collection, do you have the skills and machinery necessary to produce garments to a high enough quality? Whenever industry specialists are part of a jury they bring expertise to evaluate the viability of the collections in the real world; their main concern is always the suitability of your collection for its chosen market both commercially and technically. You must ensure that you can design and produce it to this standard.

Assessment usually relies on the documentation and presentation of your development work and eventually on the garments produced for your collection. Each chapter in this book will guide you as to what might be expected for each stage of

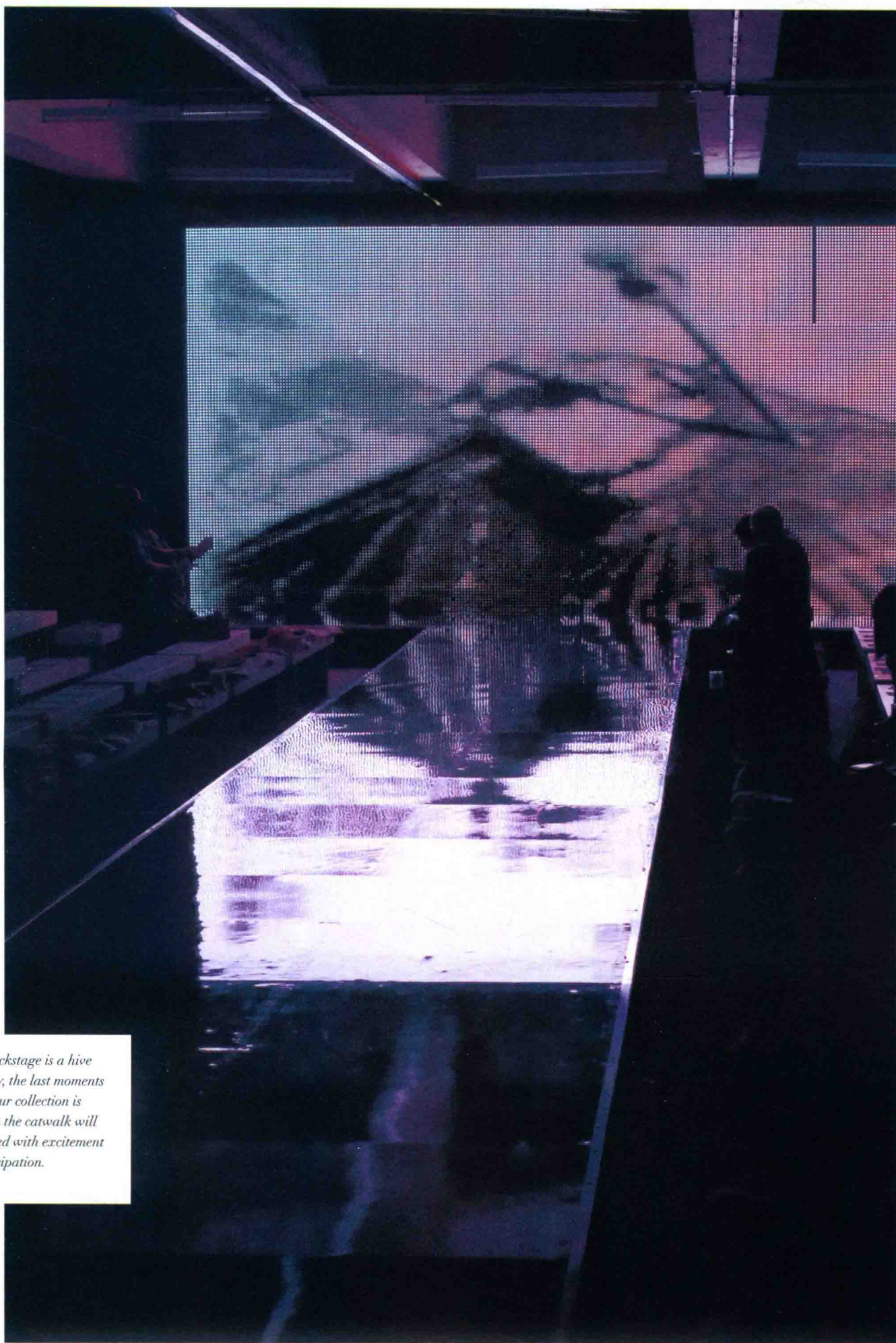
the process. Overall you should demonstrate very clearly your ownership of the garments and designs presented, and explain the journey you have travelled. Historical and recent trends can be rich and effective sources of inspiration, but simply copying such designs is not acceptable. Within academia plagiarism can lead to suspension or expulsion. Tensions will also arise within a class if students feel their work has been used by others. The originality of your design should be demonstrated by research and development work, presenting a clear evolution from inspiration to finished garment.

### Wrapping Up

The brief for the final collection is usually open-ended, so even if your institution does not require you to do so, you will find it helpful to refine it by writing your own personal one. The brief is a reference and a guideline and it focuses the mind on what is to be achieved. By tightening the scope of the original brief you will ensure that your work will fulfil the aims and objectives set by your educational establishment and those you have identified for yourself. The simplest and most effective way to do this is to choose a market, a season, and to select inspiration and influences. The next two chapters will outline the information necessary to make those decisions. Carefully consider these chapters and complement them with your own in-depth research before you contemplate rewriting the brief. Note that in the commercial world designers do not have the luxury of selecting market and season before they start the design process. For them, these are not negotiable constraints.

Your training so far has probably been focused on skills and creativity and less concerned with the commercial reality of fashion. Your final collection is a transition between the comfort of academia and the reality of the work environment. In the real world you will design for a market. When your portfolio is reviewed, you will be asked the target market of your work, so it is imperative to research and understand your clientele.





*While backstage is a hive of activity, the last moments before your collection is shown on the catwalk will be charged with excitement and anticipation.*