



RECONSTRUCTION DESIGN TECHNIQUE

CREATED BY REDRESS



Mary Ma's reconstructed outfit on the catwalk at 'Redress on the Runway'.

WHAT IS IT?

Reconstruction is a form of up-cycling and is the process of making new clothes from waste formed of previously worn garments or preformed finished clothing products. This process involves first deconstructing garments and then reconstructing the waste materials into new designs.

WHY DO IT?

Today, we consume about 400 percent more clothes than we did two decades ago.¹ As fashion consumption rises, so does waste. Many of the clothes entering landfill are still in good quality and represent valuable materials. In the UK alone, an estimated £140 million worth of used clothes enter landfill every year.²

When textiles are wasted so too are the resources, both natural and human labour resources, which were invested and imbedded into the textiles. By reconstructing garments you can prolong the textile's lifecycle, slow down unnecessary textile production, reduce landfill pressure and reduce the demand for natural resources.

HOW DO I DO IT?

1 FIRST DECIDE

Reconstruction is often incorrectly considered to be an exclusive design approach, since the designs are often not easily reproducible owing to the variable supply of working materials. However, this depends on what type of reconstructed garments you wish to create; for example exclusive reconstructed couture or a more casual reconstructed T-shirt. So, first things first, decide if you want to make a reproducible design, like reconstructing T-shirts or jeans into ready to wear garments, or exclusive designs, like reconstructing unique pieces, which requires more labour and time.



Reconstructed secondhand clothes of Cecilia Yau, Johanna Ho, Dorian Ho, Bonita Cheung, Kanchan Panjabi and Yuen Man Tse, sourced from Hong Kong's used clothing bins, which were later retailed at Harvey Nichols in Hong Kong to raise funds for Redress.

Yuri Man, Redress Design Award Hong Kong 2011 finalist, deconstructed a secondhand dress, a pencil skirt, a lace jacket and several bras to create this reconstructed outfit.



Image credit: Sakina M'sa

French designer, Sakina M'sa reconstructs street workers' old blue uniforms into 'new' and modern-looking reconstructed garments.



Iraqi designer, Reem Alasadi reconstructed turn-of-the-century vintage corsets and ballet clothing to create this beautiful, modern-day ballerina reconstructed dress.



Image credit: Dreamandawake

Swedish brand, Dreamandawake collect secondhand dresses from around the world, which they redesign and transform into unique reconstructed garments.

2 THEN SOURCE

Your choice of textiles will greatly impact the design you are able to make. Start by sourcing your materials, so look for clothing samples, unsold clothing waste or secondhand clothing. To find your waste source, look in yours and your friends' closets, secondhand stores, sample rooms or even online. Remember that one man's trash is another man's treasure.

EXPERT'S TIP

— Kate Jones, Creative Consultant, Miele —

Look for good quality textiles and let quality be your guide here. Don't be afraid of the odd stain or hole as these can be washed away and repaired. Remember, no one wants to wear smelly and stained garments, even if they are reconstructed, so make sure you wash them well before you redesign them.



Image credit: Fake Natoo

Zhang Na of Fake Natoo sourced secondhand clothes from her friends and used colour blocking to create eye catching designs.



Jimmy Ku, Redress Design Award Hong Kong 2012 finalist, deconstructed a secondhand sweater, a denim shirt and skirt sourced from Friends of the Earth Hong Kong's used clothing bins to create this reconstructed outfit.



Image credit: Victor Fraile @ Studio East

German designer and Redress Design Award 2013 winner, Karen Jessen created this reconstructed collection by reconstructing unwanted secondhand jeans and production surplus T-shirts.



Hong Kong designer, Dorian Ho created this reconstructed couture piece using unwanted previous season textile swatches from his design studio.



Hong Kong designer, Otto Tang for brand Lu Lu Cheung deconstructed ten faulty garments from the brand's previous collections to create this 'new' reconstructed couture outfit.

3 NOW DESIGN

Look closely at the garments' features. Let these inspire you. Ask yourself: What is the garment's best feature? How can I get the most out of it? Can certain details be reused? Can I create a new textile from it? Just because the original garment was a T-shirt does not mean it can't end up as a couture gown!

EXPERT'S TIP

— Liora Lassalle, Fashion Designer —

Detailing and frills are great ways to use all the small pieces of a secondhand garment and turn them into something new and interesting.



Image credit: Liora Lassalle

Liora Lassalle reconstructed unwanted high-visibility, reflective jackets used by workmen. She used the workers' jackets' most unique features, such as reflective strips, to create fashion-forward garments.



Janko Lam, Redress Design Award Hong Kong 2011 winner, shredded Esprit's unwanted T-shirt samples to create this reconstructed dress.



Chinese designer and Redress Design Award 2013 finalist, Xinyan Dai created this reconstructed denim couture dress by reconstructing unwanted secondhand jeans.



Image credit: Burning Torch

US brand, Burning Torch creates reconstructed pieces by recycling various elements of unwanted garments and accessories into 'new' reconstructed pieces. This dress was made by reconstructing vintage lingerie.



Image credit: Model Bonnie Chen, Styling Denise Ho and Photography Raul Docasar

Taiwanese designer and Redress Design Award 2013 finalist, Tsung-Chin Chiang deconstructed two discarded suit jackets into this reconstructed dress, which she made during The Redress Forum Designer Challenge with Miele.

4 FINALLY... MAKE!

Start deconstructing, shredding, quilting, patchworking and draping. Your imagination is the only limit. Importantly, make sure you have a good quality and tidy finish as no one wants their 'new' garment to look like a hand-me-down!

EXPERT'S TIP

— Claire Dawson, Retail Product Manager, TRAUD —

Textiles can be quilted to make them stronger and more durable.



Image credit: Junky Styling

Junky Styling are pioneers in reconstruction and are known for deconstructing and re-cutting secondhand clothes to transform used clothes into new outfits.

Chen Qin Zi, Redress People's Award China 2012 winner, shredded dresses and skirts, sourced from a secondhand market in Shanghai, to create this reconstructed dress.



Image credit: Beautiful Soul

British brand, Beautiful Soul reconstructs vintage kimonos, from their large collection dating back to the 1940s, into 'new' bespoke reconstructed garments.



Image credit: Model Bonnie Chen, Styling Denise Ho and Photography Raul Docasar

Hong Kong designer and Redress Design Award 2013 finalist, Alex Law deconstructed three discarded woollen tops to create this reconstructed outfit, which he made during The Redress Forum Designer Challenge with Miele.

GARY HARVEY

ON RECONSTRUCTION DESIGN

Designer and Fashion Director of 125 Magazine



Image credit: Gary Harvey

“Reconstruction is about creating something new and desirable from something old and unwanted.”

After 20 years working in the fashion industry, I’ve seen the amount of textiles and clothing waste first-hand and my sustainable fashion collections are a reaction to this. Mass consumerist culture and fast fashion have changed our relationship with clothing. Fashion has become a fast moving consumer good that is ‘in one season and out the next’ and as a result we consume 60 percent more clothes today than we did 10 years ago. Gone are the days of previous generations who learnt to cherish, respect, repair and recycle their clothing. Instead, vast amounts of good quality clothing are sent to landfill every day.

Reconstruction is the process where designers can reconstruct old and unwanted clothing to make something new and desirable. The environmental benefits of reconstruction are immense. When you consider the Earth’s limited supply of natural resources, we simply cannot sustain our current rates of consumption as at some point resources will run out. Therefore, at some point recycling and reconstruction will not be an elective choice - they will become a necessity.



Image credit: Gary Harvey

Gary Harvey's reconstructed gown made using various reconstructed vintage dresses, which was worn by sustainable fashion icon and celebrity Livia Firth at the Oscars.

MY TOP TIPS TO RECONSTRUCTION DESIGN

1. Style and fashion should inform your decision making
2. Select garments that work and hang well together
3. Make sure your colours complement each other
4. Use a good pattern or consider draping directly onto the body
5. Use quality construction techniques to ensure a good finish

My primary goal as a fashion designer is to amaze and inspire people with my collections by making each silhouette and design unique. The fundamental art of reconstruction is selecting interesting items and creating unique combinations that add value. My cutting and construction techniques are inspired by vintage couture and each component is hand selected. I carefully combine individual garments and vintage textiles, which I drape and re-sew together to create one harmonious piece from multiple different garments.

My secondary message as a fashion designer is about the politics of garment waste and recycling. Everything I use in my dresses is 100 percent recycled. The success of my collections has been overwhelming. I've been invited to show my collections at fashion weeks around the world, including London, New York, Los Angeles, Paris and Berlin. My dresses have been exhibited in some of the world's best museums, including The Victoria and Albert Museum and the Museum of Modern Art.

CASE STUDY

MILCH

MILCH is an Austrian based sustainable fashion brand, established by Cloed Priscilla Baumgartner in 1998, which takes both environmental and social aspects into consideration throughout their garment's entire production chain. MILCH uses natural fabrics from secondhand clothes and all of their garments are hand-sewn under fair working conditions in Vienna, Austria.



Image credit: Milch

Why is sustainable design important to you? How did you get into it?

I used to live in a tiny village where teenagers couldn't find any appropriate clothes. So, I started to sew my own clothes and to source raw materials, I took whatever I could find, like discarded and used textiles. This is how I discovered the miracle of reconstruction.

What does reconstruction mean to you?

Reconstruction makes me happy! To me, an old garment is like a frame and I feel totally free to reconstruct every detail that already exists within this frame. I like to have a limited frame; it helps my creativity to explode. I never learned how to do patterns, so I am very thankful for every button, pocket and zipper that I can reuse in my reconstructions.

How do you apply the reconstruction design technique in your collections?

At MILCH we reconstruct classic male suits and shirts into 'new' women's garments through a transforming process that turns classic men's fashion into women's trouser-style dresses, skirts and jackets. This is a clever and purposeful confusion between the sexes!

Which reconstruction design are you most proud of and why?

I'm most proud of my key look, which is one dress made from one pair of men's trousers. Years ago, I tried to figure out how I could make one dress using one pair of men's trousers. My first steps were done by trial and error and because I am not a professional patternmaker nor seamstress, I had no idea about all the 'laws' of sewing. My first five prototypes were featured in an art exhibition with the prominent title 'Errors'! But finally, trial and error paid off and I successfully designed my key look.

To get good results and quick prototyping, I learned to rearrange old clothes, or to turn them upside down or inside out, to utilise what is already there, like pockets and details, to give old details a new purpose.



Image credit: Milch

What do you find most challenging about reconstruction?

It was initially challenging not having a professional patternmaking or design experience, but creativity and perseverance, and a lot of trial and error, overcame this.

What do you find most rewarding about reconstruction?

I love it when my customers have that moment of realisation and they become aware of the garment's former life. My garments tell stories! They are eye-openers and they are missionaries for a more respectful way of living.

What is your best resource?

Every time I'm in the mood to create a new style, I first walk down the big street market nearby my studio. There, I see tonnes of secondhand clothes, made from bad textiles from which the toxic clouds are emerging. I then live out my self-made promise: I think about every design I want to make six times before I produce one single piece. This 6:1 promise sounds like a plan for slowing down!

What is your top tip to the reconstruction design technique?

Get lots of the same type of material and then try to find out the secret of it. Deconstruct every single part, count the pieces and then learn to love them! Touch it, smell it, sing for it and even dance with it! Really try to appreciate the wisdom of our ancestors, the seamstresses, patternmakers, weavers and knitters. If you understand the raw material in its deconstructed form, you will create a wonderful new garment.

CASE STUDY

PHEE NG, SWEE YEE

Phee Ng, Swee Yee, Singapore's rising star and our Redress Design Award 2013 (formerly the EcoChic Design Award) finalist, combines her sensitivity about high clothing consumption and its ugly shadow of clothing waste with her design ability. The result is reconstructed clothes that talk more of the future than their past.



Image credit: Victor Fraile @ Studio East

Why is sustainable design important to you? How did you get into it?

As the world spends more and more money on buying clothes, it is inevitable that clothing waste will increase as well. As such, I think it is very important for us to understand the concept of sustainable fashion, much like the well-known 'Reduce, Re-use and Recycle' campaign.

Having seen the amount of clothing waste generated by people around me, I feel that if such waste can be re-designed in another manner, that these discarded clothes can be given a new lease of life. Therefore, as a designer I feel there is a need for my reconstruction design ability in order to provide another option for consumers to divert unwanted clothing away from landfill. This is the one reason that got me into sustainable fashion.

What does reconstruction mean to you?

To me, reconstruction means injecting a new lease of life into something that others see as useless. A lot of materials can be reconstructed, whether they are from a traditional fashion medium or are unconventional materials from other industries. It just takes an adventurous mind to make some thoughtful designs happen.

How do you apply the reconstruction design technique in your collections?

I firstly use secondhand garments and then I deconstruct them into smaller parts before piecing them together to create a 'new' outfit or I use the parts for detailing. I have even used bra padding for shoulder pads in the past, demonstrating that everything can be used for reconstruction!

Which reconstruction design are you most proud of and why?

This garment was made from a used secondhand shirt and a few pairs of different coloured jeans, which I strategically dismantled and then re-pieced together. I folded the smaller pieces of fabrics into triangles to add detailing to the garment.



Image credit: Victor Fraile @ Studio East

What do you find most challenging about reconstruction?

The thing that I find most challenging is the limited resources that I have, in terms of textile waste. Therefore I often have to spend a lot of time trying to match different materials and textiles so that I have enough materials for my garment's design. Plus every piece of reconstructed garment is different, so trying to match them is a real difficulty.

What do you find most rewarding about reconstruction?

Seeing those previously deemed 'useless' or 'out-dated' garments becoming a totally new collection is the most rewarding accomplishment to me.

How/where do you learn more about sustainable design?

My best resources are the Internet, social media and websites, such as Etsy, which is one of my preferred avenues to learn about sustainable design techniques.

What is your top tip to the reconstruction design technique?

You have to be bold and experimental.

LEARN MORE

WATCH THIS...

Redress Design Award Reconstruction Tutorial

YouTube youtu.be/YDkO52LG-U8

Youku v.youku.com/v_show/id_XNTQ3MzlwMzg0.html

Redress Design Award China Reconstruction Tutorial with Zhang Na

YouTube youtu.be/K-Mkf7IJFuc

Youku v.youku.com/v_show/id_XMzk3MzE5ODcy.html

The Redress Forum: Designer Challenge with Miele

YouTube www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqtclz_r0-M

Youku v.youku.com/v_show/id_XNjY1NDIwNzk2.html

READ THIS...

A Practical Guide to Sustainable Fashion by Alison Gwilt

Commentary and Critique – Design for Recycling

www.ecofashiontalk.com/2014/01/commentary-and-critique-design-for-recycling

Cradle To Cradle: Remaking The Way We Make Things by Michael Braungart

Design Is The Problem: The Future Of Design Must Be Sustainable by Nathan Shedroff

Eco-Chic: The Fashion Paradox by Sandy Black

Eco Fashion by Sass Brown and Geoffrey B. Small

Fashion & Sustainability: Design for Change by Kate Fletcher and Lynda Grose

Reducing Waste by Re-using Textiles by Rachel Gray, WRAP 2012

www.wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/RWM%202012%20Rachel%20Gray%20Reducing%20waste%20by%20re-using%20textiles.pdf

Remake It: Clothes: The Essential Guide to Resourceful Fashion: With over 500 tricks, tips and inspirational designs by Henrietta Thompson

Shaping Sustainable Fashion: Changing The Way We Make And Use Clothes by Alison Gwilt and Timo Rissanen

Sustainable Fashion And Textiles: Design Journeys by Kate Fletcher

Sustainable Fashion: Past, Present and Future by Gordon K. Farley, Jennifer Farley, Colleen Hill

The Sustainable Fashion Handbook by Sandy Black

BE INSPIRED BY...

- Beautiful Soul** | www.beautiful-soul.co.uk
Benu Berlin | www.benu-berlin.com
Burning Torch | www.burningtorchinc.com
Comme des Garçons | www.comme-des-garcons.com
Daniel Kroh | www.danielkroh.com
Dr.noki | www.drnoki.com
Dreamandawake | www.dreamandawake.com
Elena Garcia | www.elenagarciastudio.com
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Liz Alig | www.lizalig.com
Lu Flux | www.luflux.com
Milch | www.milch.tm
Re;code | www.re-code.co.kr
Robert Cary-Williams | www.vogue.co.uk/brand/robert-cary-williams
Sakina M'sa | www.sakinamsa.com
Schmidt Takahashi | www.schmidttakahashi.de
REEM by Reem Alasadi | www.facebook.com/REEM-by-Reem-Alasadi-133334103408378
The Reformation | www.thereformation.com
The Yesterdayskin | www.the-yesterdayskin.com
Walter Raes | www.walterworks.co.uk

LEARN THE LANGUAGE...

Closed loop design is to keep products, components, and materials flowing continuously within the system, where these values are captured and continue to circulate.

Clothing banks are garment recycling collection stations in the community, placed by a charitable or commercial organisation, where consumers can recycle their used clothing.

Clothing samples are part-finished or finished clothing samples from the design and production of clothing.

Cradle-to-cradle is a closed loop design process that is free of waste. When a product is no longer useful, it becomes material for another product.

Cut-and-sew waste are textile scraps generated during garment manufacturing. It is often considered waste and is discarded due to its uneven and small formats.

Down-cycling is the recycling of something into a material with a lower value or quality than the original item.

Lifecycle is the journey a product makes from the extraction of its raw materials, through production and usage, all the way through to its disposal or recycling.

Post-consumer waste is waste collected after the consumer has disposed of it.

Pre-consumer waste is made up of manufacturing waste that has not reached the consumer.

Reconstruction is a form of up-cycling and is the process of making new clothes from waste formed of previously worn garments or preformed finished clothing products. This process involves first deconstructing garments and then reconstructing the waste materials into new designs.

Recyclable describes a material that can be reused by turning it into a new usable material or product.

Recycled is when a waste material or product has been reused and turned into a new usable material or product.

Reduce, reuse, recycle are the so-called 3Rs that classify waste management, according to their order of importance. Reduce consumption and usage, reuse items again where possible and recycle materials at the end of their lives.

Secondhand is a product that is acquired after it has been used by someone else.

Secondhand clothing is any clothing or fashion accessories that have been owned and then discarded by consumers (both used and unused).

Secondhand textiles are any finished non-clothing textiles (such as curtains, bedding etc) that have been owned and then discarded by consumers (both used and unused).

Supply chain refers to the steps and resources involved in the production of a product from raw materials extraction, all the way through to transporting it to the consumer.

Sustainability is a lasting system and process that meets the current population's needs while preserving for the future.

Sustainable fashion is clothing that is produced with consideration to the environment and social impacts throughout its lifespan.

Sustainable textiles are textiles produced with minimal environmental impact.

Textile recycling is reusing or reprocessing used clothing, fibrous material and/or textile scraps from the manufacturing process.

Textile waste is the textile by-product of the manufacturing of garments, fabrics, yarns or fibres that are deemed unusable for its original purpose by the owner.

Unsold clothing waste is clothing (finished or unfinished) that has not been sold.

Up-cycling is the transformation of a waste material into a product of equal or higher quality.

FOOTNOTES

¹The True Cost (2015), Environmental Impact | truecostmovie.com/learn-more/environmental-impact/

²The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) (2012), Valuing our clothes
www.wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/VoC%20FINAL%20online%202012%2007%2011.pdf