

African Inspired Bridal Shower Dress

Chimbindi Felisia¹, Mangwiro Kudzai², Dandira Tarirai³, Gwisai Josline⁴

¹Lecturer Chinhoyi University of Technology. Email: felisiachimbindi5814@gmail.com

²Fashion Designer

³Lecturer Chinhoyi University of Technology

⁴Lecturer Chinhoyi University of Technology

Abstract

The study sought to design, construct and exhibit a collection of bridal shower dress emphasizing the roles played by a traditional African vaShona wife, inspired by kitchen utensils and artifacts used in the kitchen. Ethnographic methods were used to as the aim of the research was to give cultural interpretations on roles played by traditional vaShona wife and utensils used to cook food. Participant observations and interviews were used to assess the level of acceptance and appreciation of designs of bridal shower dress designs and come up with improvement. Findings revealed that bridal shower wear inspired by traditional kitchen utensils and artifacts is highly accepted. The youths appreciated the intergenerational transfer of culture and traditions. It was recommended that designers may incorporate cultural features on wedding gowns for brides and on grooms' wear to depict cultural beliefs and values. Further research is required on groom's wear to depict cultural values among the various cultural groups in Zimbabwe that include Shangani, Nda, Ndebele and others.

Keywords: Bridal shower, dress, bride, exhibition

Background

Bridal shower custom originated in the 1890s and is a ceremony mostly carried out by the females just before a couples' wedding. Bridal shower is a modern day replacement of the bridal dowry which was given by the bride's family in the past. Traditionally the function is attended by bride's female friends and family members. Currently, it is attended by a mixed group of people comprising friends, work mates, close relatives and many others. Food and drinks are served as people enjoy some party games and winning some prizes.

The aim of a bridal shower is to endow the bride with the necessary qualities and material belongings she needs to be an appropriate wife to the man she is marrying. Bradford & Sherry (2013) state that themes of speeches at the function emphasize traditional gender roles for a wife which are, family cook, home maker and sexual partner. This study extends from the concept of assigning bridal shower function speeches' meanings to house chores to the nature of dress worn by the bride to be, which should aid in enforcing the woman's traditional roles and current gender roles. The inspiration for designing appropriate dress for the bride to be on a bridal shower function is derived from the African traditional kitchen utensils and some food items such as hari, pfuko, duri, huni, ngoma and pumpkin respectively. Many customs have developed in different regions and social groups but the basic concept of emphasizing traditional gender roles has remained relatively unchanged for generations. Sociologist Beth Montemurro and Lewis

Inspiration

The exhibitors utilized the Shona culture of Zimbabwe specifically the traditional cooking utensils and artifacts used in the kitchen. The researchers designed bridal shower dresses using African printed materials with prints that resemble the African woman's way of living. kitchen utensils such as three legged pots, clay pots, wooden cooking sticks, pestle and mortar, calabash gourd, domestic and wild animal prints as well as patterns used by Africans to decorate their homes. The researchers used a wide range of traditional kitchen utensils and artifacts in coming up with an inspiration board presented in figure 1 next.

The relevance of the traditional cooking utensils and artifacts

The clothes were trendy, carry an African message as well as a feel of being an African woman. African beads, motifs, and trimmings that are being produced also inspired the researchers in coming up with a trendy collection of bridal shower dress.

The first cooking utensils were made from clay. Utensils such as clay pots and clay plates were magnificently finished to reflect the roles played by an African house wife. Embellishment designs for such items were matched with their huts. Some of these utensils were made from wood and these are wooden plates, pestle and mortar. It is critical for the current and future generations to be exposed to such knowledge so that they can develop an appreciation of the dress designs with inspiration from traditional utensils for example the mortar shaped dress. The use of fashion designs inspired by traditional cooking utensils and other artifacts used long ago currently perpetuate dress culture to the new millennium generation.

The designers specialized in bridal wear for bridal shower party and were inspired to launch their interesting collection of fashion garments with the intention of fostering Zimbabwean bridal showers at the same time emphasizing the significance of Zimbabwean designs and identity. The clothes designs are trendy and they assist in instilling roles played by an African traditional house wife, as well as a feeling of being an African woman (identity).

Importance of documenting this event

The designers noted that fashion exhibitions are becoming popular in Zimbabwe and abroad. Most of these fashion exhibitions are presenting very interesting designs for diversified occasions and consumers. Such exhibitions encompass children's wear, men's wear and ladies wear dinner and parties. The exhibitors' intention was to launch the 'bridal shower dress' inspired by kitchen utensils and artifacts. The dress is the first of its kind for a bridal shower since most dress designs for this event were derived from wedding gown features. The vaShona culture is perpetuated through emphasis of gender roles for a house wife such as family cook, home manager and sex partner. The dress also reflect the nature of traditional cooking utensils and artifacts used in the home. This also helps newly married women to appreciate cultural norms and values in shaping their families' image.

Aim

To develop bridal shower dress inspired by traditional kitchen utensils and artifacts.

Objectives

To design and construct bridal shower dress inspired by traditional kitchen utensils and artifacts.

To showcase a collection of bridal shower dress that communicates roles of the Zimbabwean vaShona wife.

Justification of the exhibition

The researchers believed it was a platform to showcase the Zimbabwean Shona culture and the roles played by a vaShona wife in the home. This was necessary due to the fact that there are no recognized designers who have showcased this clothing collection in Zimbabwe. The exhibition acted as a platform for the exhibitors to launch, market and sell the (bridal shower dress inspired by traditional kitchen utensils and artifacts) collection. The exhibition inform the entire society on the relevance of culture and symbolizing who the vaShona people are at any given platform such as bridal shower ceremonies. It offers clothing manufacturers, consumers and other fashion designers a foresight that traditional kitchen utensils and artifacts features in dressing can be fashionable. The collection contributes to the economy since the unique designs were accepted and purchased by a reasonable number of customers. Since the exhibition show was attended by people from various places countrywide including academics, fashion designers, model, fashion retailers, students in tertiary education, the newly married women, a huge number of orders were placed and the exhibitors are processing them. Documentation of this event contributes to literature bank in the field of fashion design and also forms a basis for other studies in the area.

Ethics in curatorship

Ethics entails guidelines to safeguard against rapacity of commerce which address how best the curators' and viewers' interests can be protected (Kunsthalle, 2015). In mounting the exhibition the curators observed the right procedures in curatorship such as seeking permission to launch the exhibition from the local authorities (council, gallery management), trustworthiness and respecting human rights in the exhibition process. The National Association for Museum Exhibitions presides on all exhibitions carried out within the nation through a statement that outlines standards of responsibility exhibitors should value "Dieter Roelstraete". The International Council of Museums (ICOM) code of ethics and McClusky (2011) state that exhibitions should be ethical. Accordingly, the curator's job is an ethical one shaped by multiple commitments towards the institution, the artworks and the public. The ethical responsibilities faced by exhibition organizers are obvious and are often overlooked (Gazi, 2014). In this exhibition the curators presented their collection in an ethical manner by strictly abiding to the expected ethical procedures.

Methodology

The researchers used ethnographic methods, a qualitative approach (CIRT, 2012) that allows cultural interpretations through bridal shower dress. The researchers employed participant observation to get deeper insight of models' and audiences' appreciation of the bridal shower dress with inspiration from traditional home ware. The method permitted generation of new

design ideas and understanding of vaShona culture in relation to wife roles in the home. This afforded the designers and curators room to interact with designing tools, traditional tools, and artifacts in the development of bridal shower dress. From various sources of inspiration (pictures of traditional household tools and materials and artifacts in figure 1), a wide range of designs were formulated. Interview guides were designed to get bridal wear clients' perceptions of the designs, suggestions on fabrics to use, preferences on colors of garments and perceived views about roles of wives in the home. The gathered information was analyzed and developed into final prototypes that were show cased for public consumption at the Gweru museum in Zimbabwe.

The target population for the study comprised 20 to 30 years old women in the Midlands region. A sample of 50 female respondents aged 20 to 30 years was engaged to respond to interview questions. Twenty models were selected to showcase the designed bridal shower dresses. Various views were collected from comments made by models and viewers through participant observation. Through observation, the researchers interpreted models and viewers' body language, facial expressions and their comments. Data was also collected from history books and online sources on Zimbabwean vaShona wife roles, culture and tradition as well as fashion development literature. There was intertwining and corroboration of the cultural beliefs and tradition among the researchers and the subjects.

The work plan for the exhibition encompassed coming up with inspiration board and designing bridal shower dresses inspired by vaShona cultural kitchen utensils and artifacts depicting traditional vaShona wife roles. The inspiration board comprised of items as presented in figure 1. Sponsorship was sought from well-wishers around the country. A budget and calendar was prepared to keep track and enhance progress of the project. The designs were converted to prototypes step by step with continuous evaluation of the products until they were ready for exhibition. The step by step construction of exhibits involved drafting patterns, purchasing fabrics, trims, sewing the products and fitting models.

The exhibitors adopted Gweru Museum as an appropriate venue for showcasing the collection. Gweru Museum has been selected because it is surrounded by vaShona people, is accessible to a variety of potential consumers and it promotes Art. The exhibition was advertised through posters, banners, flyers and invitation cards which were pitched at strategic points for attracting viewers a month before the exhibition week. Invitation cards were sent to special guests by post a month before the exhibition week for them to plan ahead for the event. The exhibitors targeted a minimum of one hundred viewers for the exhibition week.

The curators utilized both participatory and interactive layout of exhibits to permit viewers interaction with both the exhibitors and exhibits. The layout also allowed viewers to critique the exhibits.

Risk Management

Risk management refers to identification, assessment, and prioritization of emergencies followed by coordinated and economical utilization to reduce, monitor and control unforeseeable situations. In this exhibition, a first aid kit was made ready for healthy safety of participants. The venue was manned by professional security officers. Lighting was consistently availed by use of a generator during electricity power cuts.

Designing process

This section highlights how the researchers worked with different elements of design to come up with the designs for bridal shower dress collection. That is from design sketches to prototypes.

Cezzar (2017) and ZURB (2018) define designing as a specification of an object, manifested by an agent, intended to accomplish goals in a particular environment.

The designers used a design process that had eight stages namely, problem identification, the brief, research, solutions, selecting best solutions, prototype development, fitting prototypes, evaluation and amendments. The diagram below provides procedures followed by the designers to come up with the project artifacts.

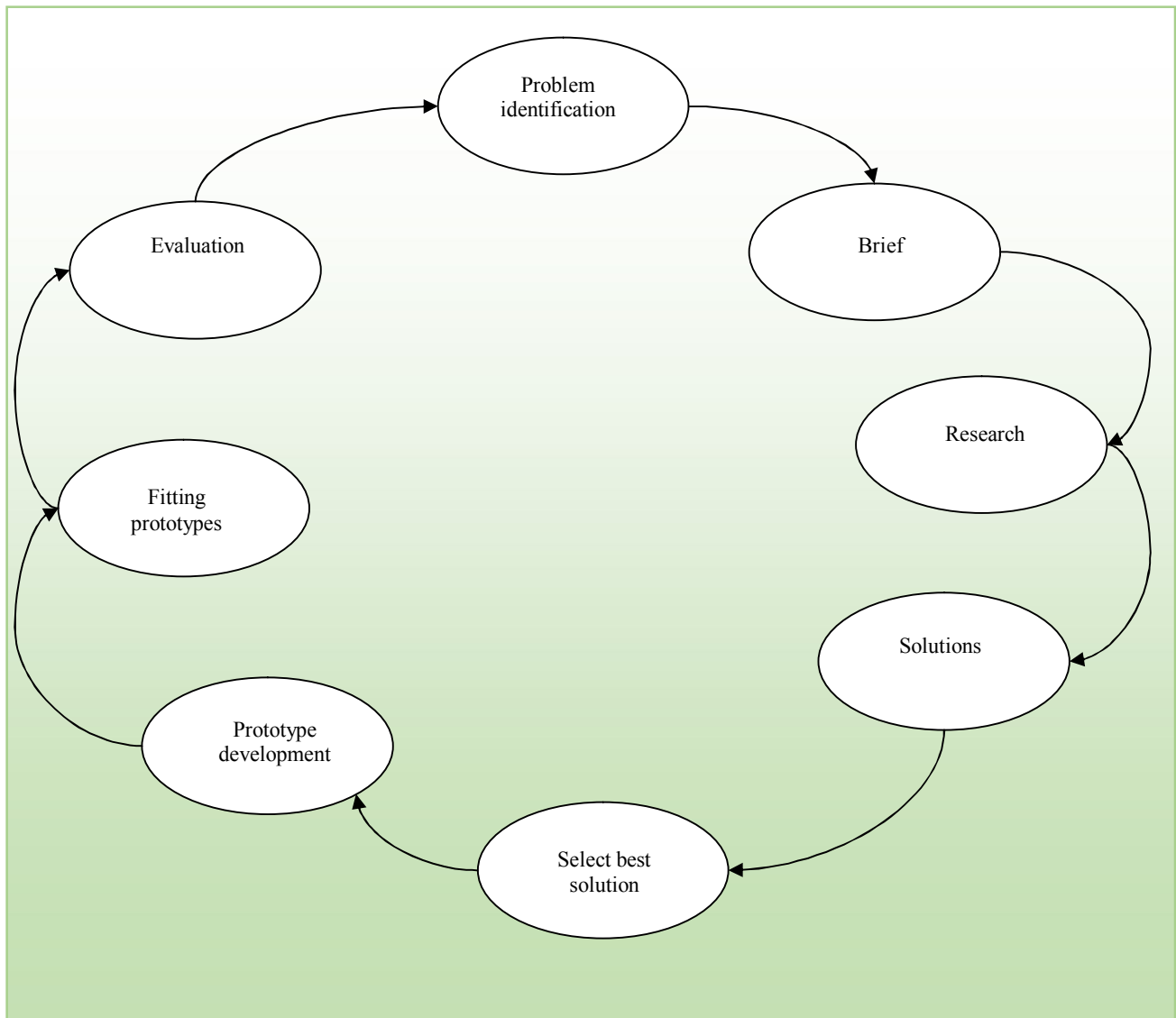


Figure 2 Design process used by the designers

Problem identification

The researchers observed that the dress worn by bride to be on a bridal shower ceremony is derived from the western culture with designs similar to wedding gowns. Some brides put on casual dress on their bridal shower events. The researchers noted that the dress used for the function is divorced from the role of a house wife. Besides that, the designers observed that the dress is more inclined to the western culture. In Zimbabwe there is no bridal shower dress code and that no attention has been given to this particular event by existing clothing industries, hence women tend to imitate the western dress style. Therefore, the designers designed bridal shower dress inspired by traditional kitchen utensils and artifacts used by vaShona wife in order to keep the traditional elements and culture alive and make the young generation appreciate the roles of an African woman.

The brief

The main objective was to design and make African inspired bridal shower dress inspired by traditional kitchen utensils and artifacts.

Research

Research involves investigating similar design solutions in the field and related topics (Freach, 2011; Cresswell, 2014). It is a process of searching out new facts. Research shows that Zimbabwe did not have bridal shower wear that has an African feel to represent African vaShona culture. For instance the Chinese, Koreans and Nigerians, only to mention a few, can be noticed by the way they dress that they are from Asia. Even at parties or at other events, their dressing identified themselves with their culture.

The Zimbabwean ethnic wear was only seen during traditional dancing presentations at airports, tourist resort places and at schools. Traditional wear was also seen on the entertainment segment where artists like Chioniso, Mbira Dzenharira and Albert Nyathi would wear ethnic wear that blended with the kind of songs they were singing. Although, South Africa have been colonized, they showcase their culture particularly on marriage ceremonies. The brides put on traditional dress that is extra ordinary, making it easier to identify them with their culture and also at bridal showers they showcase culture through dressing. The researchers went into the field to seek consumers' opinions on designing bridal shower dress inspired by traditional kitchen utensils from women and got positive responses. The researchers also went around to find out if there were manufacturing companies specializing in the same area but could not get any.

Solutions

The researchers incorporated elements of a good design that included color, mostly the browns, creams and also leaf green. The researchers did not run away from purity also which is why they used white color on some of the garments. Fabrics with the ethnic features were combined to attain better aesthetic view of the collection prototypes. The ethnic features include prints of traditional utensils and artifacts. The designers developed designs that tell a story about an African house wife, emphasizing the African woman's silhouette, outlook of her home as well as the kitchen which makes an African family home valuable. The designers managed to design 40 garments.

Select best solution

The designers considered the suitability of color, fabrics and line basing on African woman's silhouette which has pronounced hipline and narrow waistline.

Color

Color is the first element to which consumers react to and it directs nature of garments to come up with. For instance dress, skirt, blouse or trousers, and purpose of garment. In this case the designers used ethnic tones that bring an African feel in the collection.

Fabrics

Fabrics are the designer's artistic medium in that fashion design is essentially sculpture. The designers mostly used tie and dyes, java and printed materials with prints showing artifacts like clay pots. The texture of the fabrics used ranges from soft to rough texture. For fabrics that are transparent and irritating to skin contact, the designers made use of lining. The designer chose fabrics that do not run and shrink easily for garments to maintain original shape and color.

Line

Line refers to the direction of visual interest on a garment created by construction details such as pleats, gathers, trims and tucks. Lines create mood and feelings. Straight lines suggest upright and majestic figures and because of the curvy figure of African women, the designer used pleats on one of the dresses particularly for the stout women so that they can appear slimmer. The reason being that many women trim their figures prior to their wedding to represent fashion models. Therefore, the designers designed dress that take care of such slim figures. The designers used a lot of gathers in their designs to accommodate the fuller African women figures particularly at the hip line. It would not look appealing if that part of her body is wrapped in tight fitting clothes because vaShona traditionally believe that tight fitting clothes attract men and tempt them. On the other hand, slim women were catered for by use of gathers so that they can camouflage their slimness. Dresses with gathers concentrated on the fuller part of the figure enhanced the pear shaped African women silhouette which is mostly desired by vaShona men. The pear shaped silhouette makes the bride to be appear sexy.

Prototype development

At this stage, the designers developed the chosen dress design solutions basing on current fashion trends and resources available.

Fitting prototypes

The designers tested the solutions that were made by trying them on models. The researchers asked for models' views and comments on the designs. Fitting of the garments was done at this stage to achieve good fitness of the garments.

Evaluation and amendments

The researchers analyzed the dress designs, material used, colors and prints used. The analysis was based on the models comments and recommendations though adhering to design brief. Minimal alterations were done to make the garments effectively fit the models. Most of the designs were unique and fashionable.

From the models and viewers' views it is recommended that textile industries in Zimbabwe should produce fabrics with an ethnic feel that incorporate designs from traditional utensils used by various cultural groups. This would enhance appreciation of cultural norms and values by the young generation.

The designers incorporated the principles and elements of design and came up with various designs of bridal shower dress designs which were exhibited at the Gweru Museum gallery. Some of the designs are presented next in figures 3 - 10.



Figure 3: Tie and dye fabric was used for this design basing on green color as a sign of life since most food stuffs are obtained from green leaf crops. VaShona people believe that a wife brings life to the groom's family by being a family cook and sex partner. This emphasizes the wife's role in the traditional VaShona home, 'family cook.'



Figure 4: The front and back views of the dress designs represent firewood that is mostly used by vaShona women in preparing meals for the family. Tie and die fabric with an uneven texture was used to represent the firewood surfaces.



Figure 5: The design was inspired by tswana a traditional kitchen utensil used for storing cereals such as millet, sorghum, rappoko etc.



Figure 6: The design represent a hut which is part of an African woman's place, where the woman carries out cooking duties in the home.



Figure 7: The designers were inspired by the three legged pot which is very cultural and important for vaShona traditional kitchen symbolizing a wife as a home cook



Figure 8: The design is an imitation of a Zambia, a wraparound cloth worn mostly by vaShona African women when they perform their house chores. White corduroy was used to make the dress more casual and white for purity



Figure 9: The designers were inspired by winnowing kitchen utensil to come up with this design. Winnowing utensil is used to prepare grains such as sorghum, millet, rappoko (zviyo), for milling.



Figure 10: The designers were inspired by pfuko which is an African pot used to store African beer. The beer was prepared by women.

REFERENCES

- Cabera, S. (2012). *In African cultures, it is Evans 1990*. <http://www.dexknows.com>
- Cezzar, J. (2017). What is graphic design? *The AIGA Guide to Careers in Graphic and Communication design*. Online website: <https://www.aiga.org>
- CIRT (2012). Basic Research designs. Grand Canyon University, Arizona. <https://cirt.gcu.edu>
- Freach, J. (2011). The Art of design research (and why it matters). *The Atlantic Daily*. <http://www.theatlantic.com>
- Gardner, R. (1988). Focus on Fashion and Fabrics. *College press Private Limited*
- Kylachristine (2016). A bridal shower Charleston Dress and a few extras. *Arts Crafts and hobbies, family and friends*.
- Lewis, C. (2014). *Death of the bridal shower: Why the girly wedding ritual is over*.
- New Jersey Bride* (2018). <http://www.newjerseybride.com/contact-us/>
- Scott, I. and Koutroulis, H. (1990). Exploring textiles. *Longman Cheshire Private Limited*: Melbourne
- Stone, J. (1994). Textile and clothing extension specialists. *Lowa State University*. <http://everthing2.com.kitchen/party>
- V. & A. (2015). *Wedding dress 1775-2014*. <http://www.vam.ac.uk/weddingDresses/#WeddingDresses>.
- ZURB Word. (2018). *Design process*. <https://zurb.com>