# PART 1

# THE COMMERCIAL DESIGNER

# CHAPTER 1

# The Designer's Role within Product Development and Manufacture

The title "Fashion Designer" includes not only those who work at couture level, but also those involved in mass production at all price levels of the market. The well known named designers who design at couture level are of course in the minority; their garments are produced in small numbers in workrooms. Many of these designers will also be involved in creating diffusion ranges which although still exclusive will be more widely available and therefore will be considered to be mass produced. The vast majority of designers are involved in the creation of designs at all the other levels of the market: for the many high street stores, labels and other outlets. These garments are produced in even greater number.

All designers, including those operating at couture level, should understand the market, and the consumer, be aware of sizing, quality and costs relating to fabrics, trimmings and production. In addition those designing for the mass market need to be aware of catwalk trends and be able to adapt them for the high street. This book is aimed at the majority of designers creating styles at all levels of mass production.

The role of the designer may vary significantly depending on the requirements of the company but may operate thus: the designer is employed by the company producing the garments and will work closely with the buyer and merchandising team from the retail company from whom the merchandise will ultimately be sold, and as such is closely linked with the sales team. Both the buyer and the designer will be researching the same fashion forecasting sites and other sources of inspiration in order to put together a range of garments. Trends will be identified and utilised to suit the target market of that particular company. The buyer will often give the designer a brief which defines the types of garment which are to be included in the range and this will be influenced by previous seasons' sales.

In addition to researching key trends including garment shapes, colours and fabrics the designer should also have an awareness of market trends and competitors. A design pack is often produced to feed through to the product development team. This – and other types of visual communication – has become increasingly important as manufacturing is likely to be taking place in an overseas location and the product development team may be UK based or they too may be based overseas. It is the product developer's role to interpret and develop designs.

The buyer may initially select designs from an image. Then samples will be produced – this may take place in the UK or in the country where large scale production is to take place. Very detailed specifications are necessary to ensure that samples are correctly produced and to avoid costly mistakes. These include technical sketches, size charts, making details, fabric details and production details.

The role can vary depending on the level of the market, but also between companies. How the designer fits into the process of producing garments will depend on company size. In larger companies the designer will work in conjunction with a product development team whereas in a smaller company the role can encompass at least some of the product development role. The designer may produce the first pattern for the garment but often there is a pattern cutter who will perform this task. The designer manages the range construction to ensure that the samples are produced in line with the original concept. In some cases it is

expected that the design of the fabric print is included in the remit. Multi-skilling has become increasingly important.

The designer cannot ignore the technical aspects of garment production even if there are others who are responsible for these areas. Many production problems can be avoided if these factors are taken into account during the design process.

## GARMENT TECHNOLOGY

Technology has been defined as a technical method of achieving a practical purpose, but its original Greek root meaning is the systematic treatment of an art. This latter meaning is apt for the clothing industry because garment design is a goal oriented art form which requires technology to convert it into a finished product.

Clothing technology is a broad based subject because it combines a number of individual technologies, with each making a specialised contribution to the production of clothing. For the designer and pattern cutter, these technologies can be divided into two groups:

(1) Need to know: These are the technologies which are directly related to the work of designers and pattern cutters, and it is imperative that they have a practical understanding of the essentials of each particular subject.
(2) Good to know: This group covers the other technologies which are part of a modern clothing factory but are not of direct concern for designing and pattern cutting. However, the senior members of the design team should have some understanding of these technologies because it will improve their orientation within the working environment.

## FOR THE DESIGNER AND PATTERN CUTTER

All clothing factories have a specific technological capability which has been built around the production of a particular category of garments. The levels of technology vary from factory to factory, even between those producing the same garment at similar time standards. Irrespective of the levels of operation, it is essential that the designer and pattern cutter both work according to the given framework and when possible, exploit it to its fullest extent.

With regard to the applications of technology, for the designer it is mainly a question of what the factory can do and knowing the extent of the permissible variations. The pattern cutter also has to know what the factory can do, but also to know how it is done and what is required to do it. These factors have to be incorporated into the garment pattern, plus all the standard technological processes which the average garment undergoes during making up.

Where does the interaction of the designer and pattern cutter with the factory's technology start? It starts with both of them learning and understanding the factory's technological resources and capabilities. This is vital for a full and efficient involvement on their part. It is inefficient to invest time in developing a design and pattern and then discovering that the factory is not equipped to perform one or more of the operations required.

Whether the company is prepared to invest in a new item of machinery or equipment is a commercial decision based on whether the acquisition will have a restricted use during one season only or whether it has a range of other possible applications. If the item is going to be limited to an unknown number of garments during one season only, it is back to the drawing board for the designer and pattern cutter.

The sample room is usually equipped with machinery which covers regular operations only, because it is costly to have high-tech machines which are only used occasionally in the sample room. When there are new samples which require operations beyond the scope of the sample room machinery, these operations should be performed in the factory and not "mocked up" in the sample section. The factory is where the garments will be produced and special operations should be validated there. It is important that the sample room produces garments which incorporate the relevant technology, and this means working closely with the factory. It is possible to improvise many special operations in the sample room with time and skilled labour, but this is not the situation in the factory. So the people responsible have to ensure that sample garments can be mass produced by utilising as much as possible of the available technology.