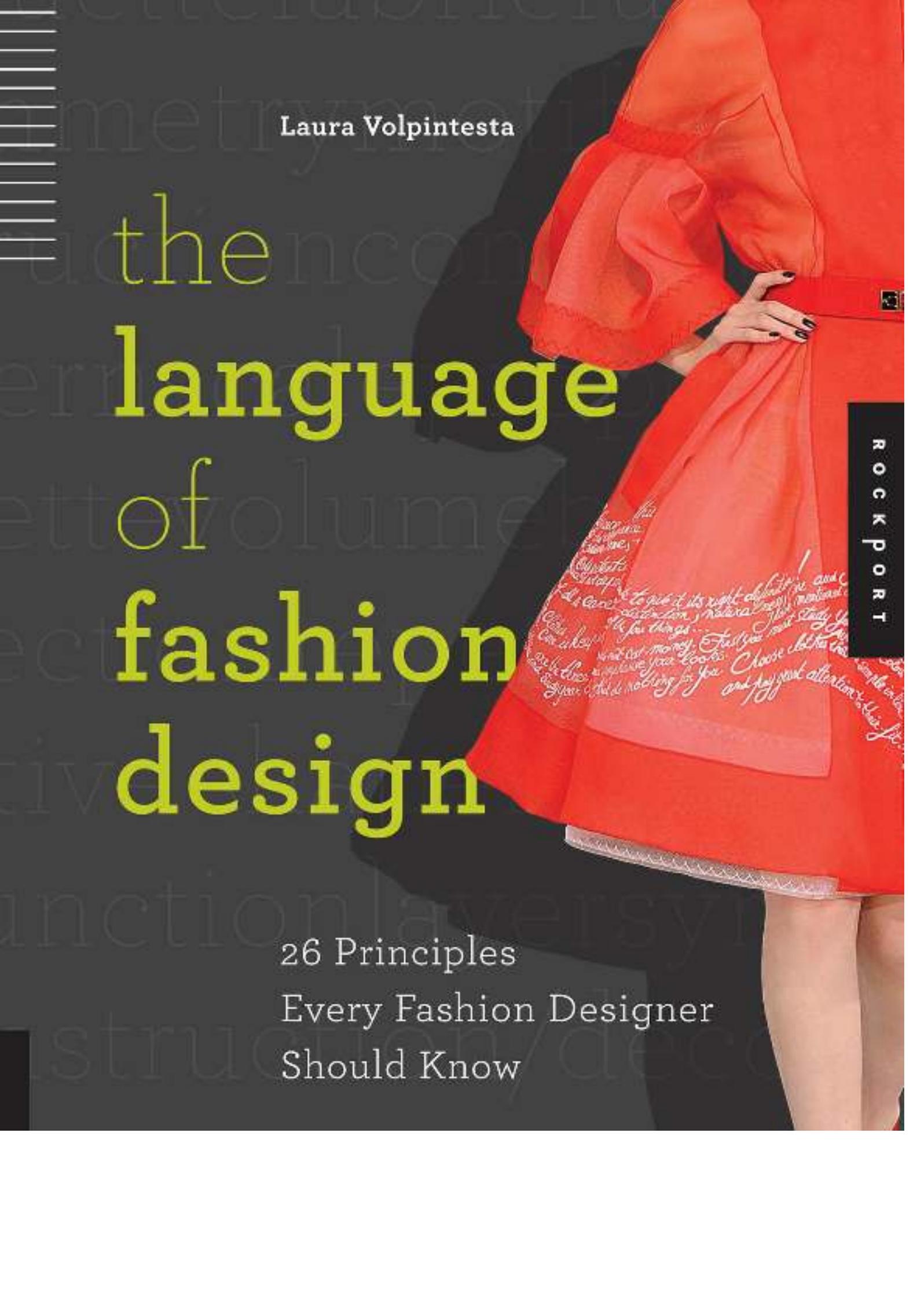Laura Volpintesta

the
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26 Principles
Every Fashion Designer
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contents

lan·guage \ˈlaŋ-gwij,\ *n*
1 a: the words, their pronunciation, and the methods of combining them used and understood by a community
2 b: form or manner of verbal expression; *specif*: style

The Language of Fashion Design takes its form in twenty-six chapters or principles, imitating the standard alphabet. Like the alphabet, this book aims to arm the reader with the building blocks to create new combinations from these twenty-six elements. While several of these elements are occurring simultaneously in any particular design featured herein, like characters in a word, use each chapter principle as a lens through which to view that particular principle while analyzing and observing it in action, for a firsthand experience.

    The captions beneath each image function as pointers, guiding the viewer to see how the element works within it. As a student, designer, and a teacher, what has always amazed me in the visual arts is the rite of passage that occurs every time I am giving or given "new eyes." Having been on both sides of this experience, I am delighted by the power that comes when a new vision is bestowed, and the student is able to see things (undercurrents, elements, energies) that they simply were not aware of before. Having learned three languages and having taught English as a second language as well, I can attest that the experience is no different in the visual arts, a language like any other.

Language has always been a marvelous key that unlocks doors, worlds, and minds. The mind connects with others that speak a language in a way that comes from sharing culture and experience through knowledge and memories. This book communicates the verbal, visual, analytical language of fashion by using fabric, construction, text, and imagery to define its elements.

Verbal and written language certainly have their limits: Words have perhaps always been an overly simple, yet culturally revered, way to express facts, feelings, and ideas. In selecting twenty-six elements here, it was a challenge to edit and select the dominant design principles. I chose the words that come up constantly in my teaching and design practice. But when those simple words are exemplified, what they speak about is unattainable in definitions; there is so much more in this book than words. Each design tells a story and carries a soul, as expressed through fashion design's aesthetics, technical aspects, emotions, values, and ideas communicated in a concept, presentation, or way of doing business. Words communicate, and behind the words there is a voice, and a receptor. As in all visual arts, the final ingredient to completing the experience is the viewer, with their own analysis, interpretation, and emotional response to the item's communication.

While researching thousands and thousands of images for this book, along with hundreds of biographies, it became obvious that there could not be a totally objective book about fashion. My personal experience as a human, student, and teacher, along with my particular generation and formative years in relation in time to fashion history, were inextricable from the task. No matter how hard I tried, I had to choose my values to have an angle. What came to the fore were the following:

1. To reflect the range of styles that my students have brought to me over the past fifteen years, and thus represent a range of voices to appeal to each of the major categories of interest, from soft, elegant formalwear to hard-edged streetwear, from frilly to geometric and everything in between. Each look or line reminded me of the enthusiastic students I've had the honor of working with. Hopefully, there is something in here for all design perspectives.

2. To dig into the current era and really pull out what is new, exciting, and relevant with my well-trained eye. I realized that the designers I grew up adoring have already been featured in all of the books and magazines I grew up studying so

intensely. This book should be relevant now and for years to come, not steeped in the past. As Isabel Toledo says: "Fashion is time." This book should be about now.

3. To feature a wide range of designers and countries, to stay away from megatrends and represent a wider range of voices, ages, and references. I wanted to represent well-known designers but balance that with fantastic, lesser-known voices who are doing great work globally and inspire the reader to learn more about them. It was fascinating to learn about so many new designers and markets in fashion weeks happening all over the globe, every day, and follow their stories. There is so much more out there than we can even imagine!

4. To focus on womenswear and healthy, life-affirming design images and businesses in a challenging era. I selected models to represent the full global range of nationalities that make up the fashion world, its design and production, representative of my students and our planet, while featuring designers who represent a healthy body image on their runways.

5.   To include nondigital illustrations to maintain the interest and art of hand-drawn garment sketches alive, inspiring readers to create their own art.

6.   To make sure that the biographies discuss philosophies, processes, business models, sustainability, and philanthropy, as current as possible to keep them relevant to designers working today and going forward; representing practical realities, as well as visionary and inspirational voices. Good womenswear design speaks to and improves women's lifestyles.

What was really a delightful surprise in my research was to find that so many designers go straight to the word *language*, especially when advising new designers to "develop their own language" based on trial and error in the design process. This can happen on the mannequin with scissors and pins, on paper with pencil, in the selection of fabrics, in marketing, business model, production methods, or how available resources are used to tell a story. This book can't do that part for you. But it is chock-full of images and stories of those who have, and through following their visual and written stories, I hope it will encourage you to take this vocabulary forward to refine your own unique language of fashion.

col·or \ kuhl-er \ *n*

1: the quality of an object or substance with respect to light reflected by the object, usually determined visually by measurement of hue, saturation, and brightness of the reflected light.

1
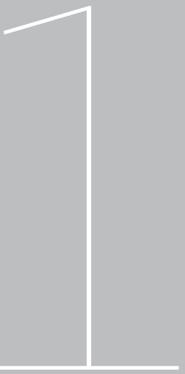
Color, despite a dry dictionary description, is very difficult to separate from emotion. We can discuss its theory and properties, but in the end what it conveys to us is emotional not technical. From the bleakest wash of gray sky to a flag emblazoned

with contrasting brights, from colors found in nature to the latest synthetic capabilities of color production, its fashionable value is found primarily in our emotional response to it. Designer Isabel Toledo sums it up well when she says she is not visual and that her use of color is entirely emotional.

The appearance of a color is always, in fact, affected by the colors it is viewed with. We experience colors relatively. For example, colors directly opposite one another on the wheel are called complementary colors. They naturally intensify each other. Red appears more red near green, orange appears more

Stained glass adornments pull the colors of the spectrum out of their source: pure, white light. Sculptural pieces with metal embellishments are the Georgia-born designer's trademark.

DAVID KOMA,
London, UK

Agatha Ruiz de la Prada

MADRID

"An utter declaration of intentions, the forms interact with their inhabitants, they generate new spaces between the body and the garment, between the individual and the environment, awakening sensations and concerns among observers and the observed; provoking, amazing and even fascinating but utterly incapable of leaving one indifferent. Garments for thinking and feeling." —Agatha Ruiz de la Prada on her designs

De la Prada's sense of emotional color and style is original, invigorating, and full of life season after season, as is her creativity in exploring shapes and themes in unconventional, whimsical ways that remind us how constrained the fashion design industry has become in comparison. She does not follow trends yet is always relevant and innovative, a touchstone for excellence in design.

With an immediately recognizable style, she has collaborated with countless iconic brands and associations in her totally unique voice on everything from bicycles to bedding, the holiday street lighting for the city of Madrid, building façades, murals, interiors, and public art for major cities. She designed a chemical-free dress for Greenpeace, as well as a dress for Minnie Mouse's eightieth birthday celebration.

In addition to de la Prada's sense of structure and timeless, trend-resistant color, she has a unique way of using and reinterpreting trademark motifs of hearts, stars, moons, candy, dinosaurs, umbrellas, and flowers (among others) in a graphic, playful, feminine riot. Her runways are also boldly self-designed.

She aims to provoke and amaze, describing her designs as "contemporary, abstract, pop, surreal, happy, and above all, positive." Her mission is "optimism through art and design." She began as part of the moda Madrileña scene, an expressive, hedonistic cultural movement in 1980s Spain marking the lifting of taboos after the death of the Franco regime. Pedro Almodóvar was also part of this scene.

While sometimes labeled "childlike" in her aesthetic, this should never be confused with simplicity without sophistication. Her work is childlike only in its undiluted enthusiasm and directness. The "retrospective" link on her website relentlessly offers up mind-boggling architectural and dressmaking techniques combined with expert, emotional journeys in color, totally rethought garment constructions and deconstructions that truly revive one's interest in garment design. Her designs seem to be in a public service of aesthetics, delight, and curiosity.

She uses pop and industrial fabrics, fine natural fibers, and nontraditional materials like cardboard, straw, vinyl, and wire. Many kinds of silk are used, raw, triple organza, gazar, satin, and raw silk coated with transparent sequins, to name a few.

Observing de la Prada's work, one sees a great sense of spirit and a fresh, sincere approach to fashion.

Color basics: the color wheel. Technically, all colors come from white. The visual effect of spinning the color wheel, amazingly, is white. The center triangle contains the three primary hues of red, yellow, and blue. (These colors are the basis for mixing all other colors.) Each primary, when combined with its neighbor, will produce the secondary round of hues: orange, violet, and green. The outer ring includes the tertiary colors ("the colors between the colors": red-orange, yellow-orange, yellow-green, and blue-green).

orange near blue, and so on. With this knowledge, a designer can manipulate our perceptions of colors, playing their intensity up or down. A split complementary color theme takes a color and works it with the two colors adjacent to its complement. Interestingly, a color pigment mixed with its complement will lose its brightness, eventually resulting in a dull, neutral, muddy color.

Colors that appear to move toward the viewer or relate to fire and warmth (red, orange, yellow) are referred to as warm colors, and colors that recede in the field of view or relate to cold (blue, green, violet) are called cool. Likewise, white expands and

Saturated, undiluted hues of pure color in contrasting geometric and flowing, abstract patterns against a black ground juxtapose stable and flowing motifs in a striking color story, straight off the wheel, on a reflective base fabric.

HERNAN ZAJAR,
Bogotá, Colombia

Emotive yet careful piecing of solid and patterned fabrics in pure hues, pastels, and black highlights craftsmanship, the art of printed fabric, and the unique story that a selection of colors/prints can tell when combined, while the generous helping of pieces and fabrics rebels against mass production's often bland practicality.

LINO VILLAVENTURA,
Fortaleza/São Paulo, Brazil

FIRSTVIEW.COM

comes forward visually while black recedes and shrinks. Colors mixed with white or black can have similar effects. (This is a feeling, not a fact, when looking at a flat surface, of course. In this way, color can create illusions of form.) A designer can use these effects to enhance the garment's shape and even to create illusions that mask or emphasize parts of the body or look.

A color mixed with any degree of white results in tints or pastels. Colors mixed with gray are called *tones*. Any color mixed with any quantity of black is called a *shade*.

When two colors mix to create a third color, placing this third color between them creates an illusion of transparency and overlapping color layers. When fabrics are woven with the warp yarns in one color and the weft yarns in another, or cross-dyed, the resulting fabric is iridescent as the colors blend and separate visually when the fabric moves.

Emotionally, colors can have a hard edge or a soft appeal. They can say "talk to me" or "I'm hiding." They also often have time periods and cultures attached to them, as every era and place has its own inherent universe of color. Technology, production methods, and materials always have an impact on fashion color. Planned obsoletion in the industrial era makes design colors

A street fashion blogger captures this ensemble highlighting the effect that complementary colors have on each other, as red and green vibrate in contrast to one another.

AMRIT JAIN,
Delhi, India

COURTESY OF AMRIT JAIN

Croquis book, in gouache and pencil, explores a color-blocked theme that uses transparency, both actual (layering sheer fabric color over color) and illusory (blocking pairs of opaque colors and using a third color to create the illusion of transparency).

PAULINA VIRGEN,
Calexico, CA, USA

identifiable by their time, and then changes the color trends so that past colors appear outdated and disposable, driving consumers back to the store.

With this in mind, avoiding trends is the most sustainable method of color use, as is using sustainable methods to print and dye fabrics. Fashion colors rely on the properties of natural and synthetic fibers, skins, proteins, and filaments, as well as natural and chemical dye technologies, which also impact water supply and air quality through their production and life cycle of maintenance and disposal. In this way, color can address ethical concerns in sustainable fashion.

Each look in this group is completely monochromatic silk with a play of transparency against opacity. Most of the colors here are subdued by mixing with shades of gray. Notice the range of values in the collection.

NATALIA DOLENKO,
Kiev, Ukraine/London, UK

Inspiration boards featuring fabric swatches and magazine tears show balanced interplay of warm and cool tones, in solid and patterned surfaces.

LAURA VOLPINTESTA,
New York, NY, USA

shape \ sheyp \ *n*
1: the quality of a distinct object or body in having an external surface or outline of specific form or figure. **2:** this quality as found in some individual object or body form. Something seen in outline, as in silhouette.

2

Fashion is a form of sculpture. Amazingly, it works with a medium weight (fabric) that is basically two-dimensional, to create three-dimensional silhouettes and shapes, whether on the garment's surface, in the shaping of its components, and/or

This dress pieced from semi-sheer and lightweight nude and cream tones reveals the shape of each pattern piece, carefully formed to create this silhouette and follow the body's contours. Seams are curved, and subtle color differences in exquisite fabrics emphasize the design and craftsmanship of each panel.

FRANCISCO COSTA, FOR CALVIN KLEIN,
Minas, Brazil/New York, NY, USA

Sonia Rykiel's ribbed, heathered knit sculpts the body softly and comfortably into a tailored suit shape for a woman's needs. The front has slight shaping into the waist seam, but the silhouette is really defined in back by a peplum waist and vertical seaming releasing into swaying flares below **the derriere. A warm roll of functional collar builds the shape beautifully.**

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