

## **Custom vs Industrial Design Room Procedures: Do They have anything in Common?**

**By Laurel Hoffmann**

It took several years of working in the industry before I began to see any relationship between custom and industrial design room methods of clothing production. Today, years later, I see far more similarities than differences in the two industries, and am often amazed that they are viewed by many as having almost nothing in common.

Before I begin I wish to point out the relationship of the woman sewing at home as I see it, with the production of clothing in the industry:

*Manufactured* used to mean *made by hand*. Today it usually means *made on a large scale*. But because clothing production is low-level technology, because clothing factories tend to be small compared to factories in other industries, and because much of the work in the factories is labor intensive hands-on, the seamstress who is making one-of-a-kind garments at home, whether for herself, her family, or for customers, could also be considered to be manufacturing garments. Many people may argue with me, but from my point of view, what she is doing just isn't that much different from what happens in the industry.

Now let's discuss *custom* and *industrial design room* procedures and why they might be considered to be more alike than different:

Both custom and industrial design room productions involve resolving unknowns. Whether sewing for oneself in the home, or putting together a line of clothing for a targeted market, the same basic planning and thinking is involved. While the industrial design room procedures may be somewhat more sophisticated, with textile representatives bringing in fabrics for consideration, sketches being assembled and swatched on concept boards, and meetings being held to determine the direction the line will take this season, most PACC members' involvement with their customers parallels the above, just on a smaller scale.

In both situations this process involves many decisions including determining what to make, what fabrics, trims and closures wot use, how seam allowances will be finished, whether the garment will be lined, etc.

The goal in both cases is to design, draft, and sew a highly desirable garment for a particular customer. In the industry the garget market is defined by a

particular (typical) customer with a particular lifestyle and body type. The company's fit model tends to be typical of this customer, but sometimes the owner's wife or other family member represents the targeted market, as was the case with the Pearl Nipon line designed in Philadelphia.

The top personnel in industrial design rooms also make custom clothing for individual customers such as state queens, TV shows, etc. This custom clothing is made in the industrial design room, not in the factory.

Some manufacturers offer a line of extremely high-end clothing. All garments sold from that line are generally made in the industrial design room. What is produced is exquisite, offered to and made exclusively for the preferred customers of the upscale stores who may have bought exclusive rights to the garment or line. This type of clothing can also be made in the home because as a rule the more expensive the garment, the less machinery needed to make it, one of the reasons industrial design rooms often contain minimal machinery.

As with PACC members' dealings with customers, first the garment is ordered/sold, then it is made. Although there may be several garments made from the pattern, until an industrial design room garment style has sold, it is essentially one garment and usually exists in the sample size only.

After the orders come in its pattern is checked and given a final test with cutting and sewing a *pattern check* (a sample garment made to test/check the pattern that will be kept with the pattern in the factory and used to demonstrate to the operators how the work is to be done.) then it is graded into the various sized for mass-production on the factory line.

Industrial design room personnel usually have considerable hand sewing and other fashion skills. The best are able to produce highly desirable clothing for any market, including custom. They may have high-end custom experience as well, and may have trained in Europe, or have been trained by mentors who studied there. Knowledge of industrial skills is essential to industrial design room personnel because most of what is produced in industrial design rooms must be capable of mass-production.