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A STUDY OF A SELECTED GROUP OF CUSTOM DESIGN FIRMS
WITHIN THE MICHIGAN APPAREL INDUSTRY

By — —

Helen Margaret Kilbourne

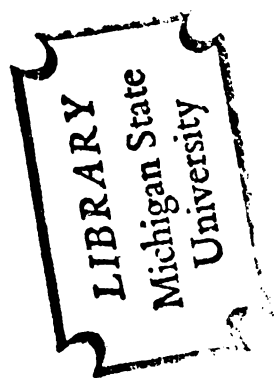
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ABSTRACT

A STUDY OF A SELECTED GROUP OF CUSTOM DESIGN FIRMS WITHIN THE MICHIGAN APPAREL INDUSTRY

by Helen Margaret Kilbourne

As part of the investigation of the Michigan apparel industry undertaken by the Textiles, Clothing and Related Arts Department of Michigan State University, this study concerns the custom design firms in the state. Owners of a group of selected custom design firms were interviewed regarding: structure and organization of the firms; methods of production, distribution, and advertising; training and experience of designers within the firms; types and prices of apparel produced; and finally, contributions of these organizations to the Michigan apparel industry.

The findings of this study indicated custom firms are small in both yearly money volume and number of employees. The majority of these designer-owned businesses have been established in the last ten years, and are in locations available to customers, and with suitable working space. The designers participate actively in all phases of their organizations, as design creators, production supervisors, and sometimes as fitters, cutters, or sewers. In the custom workrooms are highly skilled workers, many of whom have been



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trained in Europe. Fabrics are generally imported and obtained through New York suppliers. The Michigan custom firms seldom advertise, acquiring ample clientele through customer recommendations. The custom client selects garments by viewing the collection or by individual consultation with the designer.

Only one-half of the designers interviewed had received professional training, although most had prior experience in the apparel industry before setting up their own firms.

Customers' desires and fabrics were stated by the designers as significant inspirational sources. The selected group of designers designated the customer's figure, clothing needs, and personality as the chief influences on made-to-order garments. The designs are executed from a customer's individual pattern by sketching, draping, or patternmaking.

The custom firms produce a wide variety of apparel, priced from twenty-five dollars to several thousand dollars, depending upon firm, fabric, and design. Garments are produced in various size categories; some firms supply apparel for women with particular figure problems, while others deal more with women whose sizes fall in an average range but desire exclusive clothes.

The heads of the custom firms all stated their firms had grown since establishment but indicated little interest in becoming much larger. Reasons given were insufficiently

skilled labor and the desire to retain personal control over the organizations. The custom designers perceive their contribution to the Michigan apparel industry as: sources of exclusive clothing, arbiters of good taste, good public relations agents for Michigan, and artists raising the cultural level of the community and the state.

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Gratitude is expressed to Mrs. Stephanie Winkler and Miss Elaine Stauber for their skilled assistance in collecting the data. The writer is also indebted to the Michigan custom designers who so patiently and willingly gave their time and cooperation during the interviews. Acknowledgment is made to the Michigan State University Experiment Station for financial support.

Finally, the author remains deeply grateful for the continued encouragement expressed by the faculty, friends and especially her family throughout the preparation of this study.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	11
LIST OF TABLES.	v
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION.	1
Statement of the Problem.	1
Review of the Literature.	3
Definition of Terms	7
Importance of the Study	8
II. METHODOLOGY	10
Selection of the Method	10
Development of the Instrument	10
Selection and Description of the Custom Design Firms	12
Method of Presentation.	13
III. CUSTOM DESIGN FIRMS IN MICHIGAN	14
Structure and Organization.	14
Methods and Types of Production	21
Sources of Materials.	23
Advertising and Distribution.	24
Summary	26
IV. THE DESIGNER WITHIN THE CUSTOM DESIGN FIRM.	28
Training and Experience	28
Sources of Design Inspiration and Ideas.	30
Methods of Design	32
Summary	33

Chapter	Page
V. CUSTOM DESIGNED APPAREL IN MICHIGAN	35
Distinctive Characteristics of Custom Designed Apparel	35
Inclusion of Ready-to-Wear by Custom Design Firms	41
Summary	42
VI. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CUSTOM DESIGN FIRM IN MICHIGAN	44
Growth and Future of the Custom Design Firm in Michigan	44
Contributions of the Michigan Custom Design Firms	45
Summary	46
VII. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS	48
Summary	48
Recommendations	52
APPENDIX A. Interview Schedule	55
APPENDIX B. Letter of Introduction	62
APPENDIX C. List of Cooperating Firms.	64
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	66

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Years of Establishment of Selected Custom Design Firms in Michigan	15
2. Total Yearly Dollar Volume of Michigan Custom Firms by Number.	19
3. Number of Full Time and Part Time Employees by Number of Firms.	20
4. Production Methods as Indicated by Number of Firms	22
5. Number of Years of Professional Designing Experience of Designers as Employed by Other Firms and as Heads of Own Firms	29
6. Types and Range of Starting Price of Apparel Produced by Selected Custom Design Firms by Number of Firms Producing Apparel.	37

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Traditionally, custom design organizations have played an important role in the development of the fashion apparel industry within the United States. Custom design firms have not only been significant design originators, but also influential promoters of American-designed garments.

Contained within the framework of the custom houses are the "human resources" of the industry, whose jobs vary in type and in importance.¹ One particularly essential figure, as described by Arnold and White, is the designer.² During the early development of the industry in the United States, the designer played an insignificant role; however, since World War II the American designer has begun to occupy a position of increased importance. According to Warburton and Maxwell:

Each year the roster of native designers grows in numbers and prestige...more and more they are forming a strong nucleus of designing

¹Jeanette Jarnow and Beatrice Judelle, Inside the Fashion Business (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1965), p. vii.

²Pauline Arnold and Percival White, Clothes and Cloth (New York: Holiday House, 1961), p. 144.

genius as authentic as that of the Paris couture.³

The demise of the haute couture in Paris during the second World War challenged the American designer, who rose to a new level of design maturity. Increased appreciation and acceptance of the work of native designers by the American consumer resulted. Since then, though Paris has regained its position as a source of inspiration, the American designer continues to play an increasingly important role in the apparel industry in the United States.

The American fashion industry has had an impressive list of nationally known custom design firms. These include the houses of Jessie Franklin Turner, Elizabeth Hawes, Valentina, and Mainbocher, which have been called the "...American counterpart of the great French dressmaking houses."⁴ Although the number of such firms has dwindled, the names Mainbocher, Sophie Gimbel, and Ethel Frankau are still important in the fashion picture. Numerous small firms, though seldom achieving more than regional acclaim, operate active businesses. These firms dress private customers in the manner of the French couture.

As a segment of a larger investigation of the apparel industry in Michigan, this exploration is focused on the designers and the custom design houses within the state. Such a direction supports Griffin in her research

³Gertrude Warburton and Jane Maxwell, Fashion for a Living (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1939), p. 28.

⁴Ibid., p. 33

of selected regional markets, in which she suggests that "a study of the American designers; their biography, style and method of design would make a contribution much needed by the industry and college alike."⁵ This study is concerned with presenting a description of the custom designer and his place in the organization of the Michigan apparel industry. This description is achieved through an intensive examination of a selected group of custom design houses within the state.

Review of the Literature

While sufficient literature concerning the apparel industry exists, the publications are primarily of a general type rather than documented studies. Aside from some early books of some substance by Chambers,⁶ Crawford,⁷ and Nystrom,⁸ current volumes are designed for a young audience in search of career information. Other recent writings, such as those by Levin⁹ and Roscho,¹⁰ are aimed at the general reading

⁵Tira W. Griffin, "A Survey of Selected Regional Markets Producing Women's and Misses' Apparel" (unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Textiles, Clothing and Related Arts, Michigan State University, 1949), p. 240.

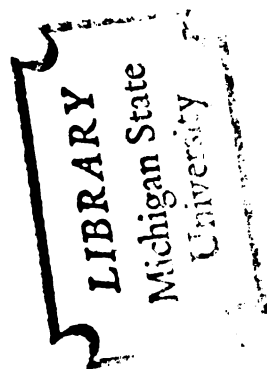
⁶Bernice G. Chambers, Fashion Fundamentals (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1947).

⁷M.D.C. Crawford, The Ways of Fashion (New York: Fairchild Publishing Company, 1948).

⁸Paul Nystrom, Economics of Fashion (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1928).

⁹Phyllis Lee Levin, The Wheels of Fashion (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1965).

¹⁰Bernard Roscho, The Rag Race (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, Inc., 1963).



public. Though these publications make little mention of the custom designer, they do discuss the role of the designer within the apparel industry. Warburton and Maxwell indicate their view of how designers function in the industry:

The whole fashion structure rests fundamentally on the often fragile shoulders of the designer.... For it is the designer who injects beauty and wit and elegance into fashion and lifts the whole affair into the realm of art-in-industry.¹¹

Studies have been made of the apparel industry, but these have concentrated principally upon the development and status of regional markets throughout the United States. Trends in the New York clothing industry were investigated by Drake and Glasser.¹² More recently, Hall investigated the factors behind the present decentralization of the New York market.¹³ Goodman's study of the California market discussed apparel manufacturing and marketing facilities in that area.¹⁴ The fashion apparel industry in Alabama was researched by Bourne,¹⁵ and trend developments in the St.

¹¹Warburton and Maxwell, op. cit., p. 28.

¹²Leonard A. Drake and Carrie Glasser, Trends in the New York Clothing Industry (New York: Institute of Public Administration, 1942).

¹³Max Hall (ed.), Made in New York (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959).

¹⁴Charles S. Goodman, "The Location of Fashion Industries with Special Reference to the California Apparel Market," Michigan Business Studies, Vol. X, No. 2 (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Press, 1959).

¹⁵Judith Mayton Bourne, "An Analysis of the Development of the Fashion Industry in Alabama, 1949-1962," (unpublished Master's thesis, Auburn University, 1962).

Louis dress industry were noted by Gross.¹⁶ Hersker explored the Florida industry and formulated general conclusions about the existing status and possibilities for further development in that state.¹⁷

The apparel industry of Texas has been the subject of several studies. Johnson delved into the rise of regional production centers, and specifically the development of the Dallas market.¹⁸ Gano had written an earlier study of Dallas,¹⁹ and recently Golly investigated the present status of that market center.²⁰ These studies, while informative as background for an investigation of the apparel industry, contained little information concerning the designer. Griffin discussed the possible value of a specialized study of American designers in her general research of numerous regional markets.²¹

¹⁶Blanche Gross, "The Awakening of an Industry. Recent Trends in the Dress Manufacturing Industry in St. Louis" (unpublished Master's thesis, School of Business, Columbia University, 1943).

¹⁷Barry Jay Hersker, "The Women's Apparel Manufacturing Industry in Florida" (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, The University of Florida, 1962).

¹⁸Elton Davis Johnson, "Women's Outerwear Industry in Texas" (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, The University of Texas, 1954).

¹⁹Lowell R. Gano, "The Women's and Misses' Apparel Industry in Dallas, Texas" (unpublished Master's thesis, Southern Methodist University, 1949).

²⁰Jeanne Marie Golly, "A Study of the Present Status of the Dallas Women's Apparel Market" (unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Textiles, Clothing and Related Arts, Michigan State University, 1966).

²¹Griffin, op. cit., p. 240.

A study of designers was initiated by Murray. Leading American and French designers were discussed in broad biographical terms. In this study, written in 1949, Murray expressed a belief that the fashion trend was swinging away from the custom designer. However, she stated:

The custom salon has not been completely abandoned because of its use as a laboratory, in which experiments in style can be worked out.... Consequently many fashion designers, while they may have expressed an active interest in ready-to-wear, have also continued to operate their custom houses as well.²²

Currently there is a revival of interest in custom designed apparel and the designers who create it. Optimism for the future of the custom house was shown in recent interviews of several New York custom designers. One said:

I think custom is the least passé of any of the fashion businesses. Made-to-order clothes have a great future because...women with money are looking for new exciting clothes....Custom is no longer snobbism.²³

The majority of publications concerning the apparel industry are of a general, descriptive nature. The documented studies of the apparel industry are those by such writers as Gross, Goodman, Hall, Griffin, and Golly, which examine various regional markets within the United States. An initial study of designers, completed in 1949 by Murray,

²²Maria Calabrese Murray, "The Development of French and American Designers Affecting Costume of American Women of the 20th Century" (unpublished Master's thesis, College of Home Economics, Syracuse University, 1949), p. 193.

²³June Weir, "Where is Custom Going?" Women's Wear Daily, April 27, 1966, p. 5.

was a broad discussion of the development of the French and American designers.

Definition of Terms

In the fashion apparel industry many common words require specific definitions, as they vary in meaning depending upon their context. The following definitions show the meaning of these terms as used in this study. Apparel refers to clothing of all sorts produced for sale either on a wholesale basis, in large quantities to retailers rather than to consumers,²⁴ or on a retail basis, for sale directly to a consumer in small or individual quantities.²⁵ Custom made apparel refers to clothing which is made to a customer's special order in a suitable color and texture, and cut and fitted to individual measurements.²⁶

Couture is a general term describing the French dressmaking house,²⁷ while a couturier or couturière is one who directs these establishments. The custom design house or firm is an organization which creates designs for the individual and sells directly to a customer.

²⁴Mary Brooks Picken, The Fashion Dictionary (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1957), p. 374.

²⁵Ibid., p. 274.

²⁶Ibid., p. 93.

²⁷Mary Brooks Picken and Dora Loues Miller, Dress-makers of France (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1956), p. xiv.

The designer is an individual who designs a line of apparel by means of sketches, creates in material, or uses both methods.²⁸ A custom designer is one who designs and creates for an individual client either through measurements or by consultation and fitting, while a dressmaker alters, fits, cuts, and sews garments for a customer.²⁹

For this study, the custom design organization is distinguished from the dressmaking organization by the following definitions: a custom design establishment is one whose major emphasis is on the creation of original designs which are sold individually to customers. A dressmaking establishment is one whose major emphasis is on restyling, alterations, and making garments from patterns for individual customers.

Importance of the Study

Few studies exploring the function of the designer in the apparel industry or the American custom house have been completed. This research, an investigation of a selected group of custom designers within the apparel industry in Michigan, is part of an extensive study of the Michigan apparel industry undertaken by the Textiles, Clothing and Related Arts Department of Michigan State University.

This study has a twofold purpose: to obtain information about the custom designer within the custom design firm, and to add to the existing knowledge of the Michigan apparel

²⁸Ibid., p. 96.

²⁹Ibid., p. 105.

industry. It is hoped this investigation will increase the background information upon which future studies of both the Michigan industry and the designer's role in the apparel industry might be based.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Selection of the Method

Following the pattern set by researchers of similar studies, the direct interview technique was chosen to gain information for this descriptive research. Undertaken as part of a larger investigation of the Michigan apparel industry and in recognition of a lack of available information about the production of apparel in the state, this study was organized initially as exploratory research to locate the custom design firms in Michigan, and finally as descriptive research to describe the characteristics of both the firms and the designer within the firm.

Development of the Instrument

On the basis of Golly's recommendation, a structured type of interview schedule was selected.¹ This type, rather than an open-ended schedule, would more effectively obtain information about the custom designer in Michigan. Interviews were considered preferable to mailed questionnaires,

¹Golly, op. cit., p. 111.

because of surety of response and the possibility that the availability of the interviewer would lead to more valid answers to the questions. In an attempt to increase reliability, the writer conducted all interviews with a fixed set of questions, maintaining similar circumstances as much as possible, and attempting to establish some degree of rapport with the respondents. In the schedule were areas for free responses, though most of the questions were structured to expedite tabulation and classification.

The interview schedule (see Appendix A) was divided into three parts: the first part sought to obtain information about the structure and organization of the custom design house, the second part was designed to gain insight into the role of the designer within the firm, and the final part asked for information concerning the designer's background, training, and experience, and his opinion of the contributions a custom design house makes to the Michigan apparel industry.

The tentative interview schedule, developed with questions asking for information about the structure of the custom design organizations, the designer's role and contributions to the industry, was submitted to the writer's colleagues. Refinements were made according to suggestions, until the interview questions requesting the desired information were felt to be clearly stated and arranged in a sequential order.

To further check the validity of the instrument and to gain experience in its administration, the interview

schedule was tested with two local dressmakers and two out-of-state designers. The instrument received further modification to ensure greater clarity and understanding on the part of the interviewee. Some items were rearranged and some combined for a more logical flow of information. The interviewer formulated a standardized procedure to use when administering the instrument and employed this method when conducting the interviews.

Selection and Description of the Custom Design Firms

An initial listing of custom design firms was obtained from persons knowledgeable in the Michigan apparel industry: the regional director of the Fashion Group, fashion editor of a Detroit newspaper, university administrators of Home Economics, city Chambers of Commerce, and fabric houses. Further names were obtained from Michigan Bell Telephone books, the Directory of Michigan Manufacturers, and the Detroit City Directory.

Using these sources, letters were sent out to all known dressmakers and custom design houses included in this list. Each, in turn, was asked to identify itself as either a dressmaking establishment or a custom design establishment on the basis of definitions which were provided (see Appendix B). Follow-up letters were sent to those who did not respond.

On the basis of 152 letters sent out, the responses of the 37 establishments indicated: ten custom houses, eight firms dealing with both custom and dressmaking orders,

and nineteen dressmakers. Fourteen firms were selected for study: nine of the custom group, and five indicating both custom designing and dressmaking. Not included in the selected group were three custom design firms which were located only after the interviews had been completed, and one firm which turned out to be a dressmaking establishment rather than a custom design house.

Method of Presentation

Since the design of this study was exploratory in nature, the preliminary preparation of the data consisted of coding from the structured interview schedule, and tabulating the information which had been gained from the thirteen firms selected for interviews. The presentation of the descriptive information concerning the custom design firms in Michigan was based upon these data.

CHAPTER III

CUSTOM DESIGN FIRMS IN MICHIGAN

The custom design firms of Michigan, although relatively small in number and in operational scope, are recognized as important elements within the apparel industry of the state. In order to determine the contributions of these firms to the Michigan apparel industry, the selected group of custom design establishments was examined as to structure and organization; methods and types of production, including sources of materials; distribution of products; and the advertising methods employed by the selected firms. Subsequent chapters will discuss the designer, his background, experience, and methods of work. Prices and seasonal qualities of the garments produced by these designers, and a description of their customers will furnish further information. A final consideration of the study will be the custom designer's perception of his own and his firm's contribution to the Michigan apparel industry.

Structure and Organization

An initial objective of the study was to define the structure and organization of the custom design firms in Michigan. Under consideration were the following factors: date of establishment, location and reasons for locational

preference, ownership and financing, and size of firms as judged by yearly volume and number of employees.

Date of establishment

Background information obtained from the thirteen custom design firms selected for this study indicated the two oldest firms had been established in the early 1920's and the late 1930's, when dressmaking flourished in the United States. In the last ten years, from 1955 to 1965, seven of the interviewed group began operation. Table 1 demonstrates that the greatest increase in the number of these firms took place during the last ten years.

Table 1. Years of establishment of selected custom design firms in Michigan

Years	Firms N
1921-1925	1
1926-1930	..
1931-1935	..
1936-1940	1
1941-1945	1
1946-1950	1
1951-1955	2
1956-1960	4
1961-1965	3
Total	13

Location and reasons for locational preference

Location of a firm is frequently a factor in the success of a business and a consideration of much importance.

Questions 15 through 22 on the interview schedule were concerned with the locations of this group of custom design houses. (see Appendix A). Ten of the firms interviewed were located in the eastern portion of Michigan, with the heaviest concentration around Detroit, while the other three were within a one hundred mile radius of this area. These locations become significant when compared with a statement made by Arnold Scassi, a noted New York custom designer:

"There are 12 cities in the United States where great fortunes have been made....And in these cities, there are women who want quality clothes."¹ He lists Detroit among these cities.

As a result of further inquiries, the respondents specified the factors they felt to be particularly important in the selection of a location. Eleven of the firms had been forced, because of growth, to relocate their establishments. Seven of the firms relocated to obtain better physical facilities, but their general location remained within the same area. Reasons for selection of new locations are shown below:

Reasons for Relocation:

	<u>Number of Mentions</u>
More spacious and suitable facilities	7
More convenient location	5
Better clientele	2
Move from downtown to suburbs	1

Eight of the establishments had been in their new locations three years or less; five firms, from five to

¹Weir, Women's Wear Daily, April 27, 1966, p. 5.

eighteen years. When the heads of the firms were asked the important factors concerning present location they responded as follows:

Factors Considered for Location:	<u>Number of Mentions</u>
Convenient for customers	11
Suitable space for workroom and showroom	5
Active business district	5
Away from other stores	2
Low rent	2

Two firms considered location of little importance. In their eyes, the custom shop was a "world of its own," completely divorced from outside environmental conditions. Three firms actually noted they purposely chose more isolated locations away from active business districts, to avoid wasting time with customers who were merely curious. However, not all of the establishments reacted similarly. Two of the firms located in smaller towns remarked that their situation had a disadvantage because of a lack of customer traffic past the shop. Most of the respondents agreed that a location should be convenient for the customer. The second most important factor concerning location was cited as suitability of physical facilities for workrooms and showrooms.

Ownership and financing

In the apparel industry incorporation has recently increased, although individual proprietorship or partnership

had been the prevailing practice for many years.² Questions posed regarding the ownership of the Michigan custom design firms revealed the majority of firms, nine of the thirteen, were owned by the designer. The four remaining firms were partnerships. Two of these firms were composed of two designers who were joint owners, while the other two were organized with one partner as the designer and one partner caring for the business aspects of the firm. Twelve of the thirteen firms within the group were self-financed; the remaining business was financed by a small business loan organization.

Size of the firm

Two methods were used for the measurement of firm size: yearly sales volume and the number of employees.³ Inquiry concerning dollar volume, question 48 of the interview schedule (see Appendix A), yielded the responses found in Table 2, page 19.

The majority of the firms responding to the question realized a volume of \$30,000 or more. According to yearly sales value, custom firms are smaller in size than the average ready-to-wear manufacturer, whose yearly volume averages around \$500,000.⁴

²Kurt Braun, Union-Management Co-Operation (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institute, 1947), p. 28.

³Arnold and White, op. cit., p. 6.

⁴Levin, op. cit., p. 6.

Table 2. Total yearly dollar volume of Michigan custom firms by number

Yearly Dollar Volume	Firms N
\$1,000-\$4,999	1
5,000- 9,999	..
10,000-14,999	1
15,000-19,999	..
20,000-29,999	..
30,000-49,999	2
Over 50,000	3
Total	7 ^a

^aSix firms preferred not to give this information, two because they had not been in business long enough.

Another size determinant is the number of workers which a firm employs. Solinger calls this "a more accurate measure [of size] than is dollar value...." because dollar value is relative to time.⁵ Even when compared with the ready-to-wear industry where 40 percent of the firms employ fewer than twenty workers, the custom houses are small operations.⁶ As shown in Table 3, four firms employ five or more workers, and the remaining establishments employ fewer

⁵Jacob Solinger, Apparel Manufacturing Analysis (New York: Textile Book Publishers, Inc., 1961), p. 12.

⁶Arnold and White, op. cit., p. 47.

than that number. Thus, according to both volume and number of employees, these firms are small operations.

Table 3. Number of full time and part time employees by number of firms

Full Time Employees N	Part Time Employees N	Firms N
15	0	1
10	0	2
5	0	1
2	3	1
1	3	4
1	0	1
0	3	1
Total		11 ^a

^aOne firm did not hire employees and one firm did not respond.

Although not related to firm size, some description of the employees in these custom houses might be noted here. All of the firms indicated their employees came from local sources. Five of the group described their workers as being of European or South American extraction. These individuals had received their training and developed their skills for custom work in areas outside the United States. When asked about hiring additional help in peak seasons, nine of the firms replied negatively. Four of these firms stated they

would be willing to hire additional workers, but a severe shortage of skilled labor made this impossible. Although four other firms did manage to employ extra workers during busy seasons, all but one custom establishment expressed difficulties in obtaining labor. Skilled labor has proved to be extremely scarce, and firms are reluctant to hire individuals who are unskilled because of the tremendous time expenditure necessary to train them.

None of the interviewed establishments was union affiliated. Their responses to the question concerning method of wage payment confirmed Hersker's view that "highly skilled workers...are almost never paid piecework."⁷ Eight of the firms paid their employees by the hour, one firm paid straight salary, and the remaining three paid either hourly, by piecework, or salary depending upon the jobs.

Methods and Types of Production

In the apparel industry, and most particularly in women's apparel, production methods are related to the final cost of the garment. Hersker's statement that the "ability to mechanize production of women's apparel decreases as the style element of the garment increases...."⁸ is especially true in custom-produced apparel. These garments are characterized not only by variety and individuality in styling but also by construction techniques requiring extensive hand

⁷Hersker, op. cit., p. 79.

⁸Ibid., p. 51.

manipulation. These factors reduce the possibility of employing volume methods of production, by which many garments are made at once. Instead, each garment is made separately, in some cases by one seamstress. Methods such as these are costly, not in terms of machinery, but in the need for highly-skilled labor. Garments are handled individually, so much of the work is done by hand. Many different types of skilled workers are needed for the variety of work to be done. These include assistant designers, drapers, patternmakers, cutters, fitters, seamstresses, finishers, pressers, wrappers, and milliners.

Actual production in these firms is carried out in an inside shop. This statement implies all work is performed on the premises under the control of a supervisor or the designer. In some of the smaller organizations the designer was actively involved in the actual construction of the garments. Table 4 shows the various production methods chosen by custom firms.

Table 4. Production methods as indicated by number of firms

Production Methods	Firms N
Garments completed by several workers	6
Garment completed by single worker	3
Initial construction completed by designer	4
Total	13

The design room of a custom salon is sometimes referred to as an assembly plant, where employees of many types work together to contribute to the total result.⁹ Since the firms used in the present study were relatively small operations, the designer plays an important role not only as the originator of the design ideas, but also in the supervision of the follow-through operations. Responsible for designing as well as fitting and drafting the patterns, the designer sometimes handles the initial construction. Later the garment is turned over to the finishers for completion. Three firms made the seamstress responsible for the construction of a complete garment from start to finish. The other firms divided the steps in construction and allotted the jobs according to the workers' skills. Two of the custom design firms included a line of ready-to-wear which they produced themselves during slack periods. Volume production methods were applied in the construction of these garments, which were usually simple, classic daytime dresses. In the custom lines, however, each garment was treated individually, and little attempt was made to systematize construction techniques on these one-of-a-kind items.

Sources of Materials

Fabrics and materials contribute equally with skilled labor to the creation of the products executed by the custom house. This study sought to determine whether

⁹Chambers, op. cit., p. 172.

the fabric was supplied by these firms and whether their fabric sources were within Michigan or outside the state.

The firms were first asked to specify the amount of material which they purchased themselves. Tabulation of responses showed all of the establishments supply from 50 percent to 100 percent of their own materials. Four firms supplied all of the fabric which they use, and six supplied over 75 percent of it. Seven firms charged the customer for the fabric in addition to the labor cost.

Most of the firms utilized imported fabrics which were ordered through New York suppliers. A few mentioned using domestic materials; only two indicated Michigan sources. The following shows responses in regard to fabric sources:

Sources of Fabrics:

	<u>Number of Mentions</u>
Foreign sources	10
New York firms	8
Michigan firms	2

Advertising and Distribution

Advertising and distribution varies with the cost and type of apparel being produced. Several custom firms felt advertising neither desirable nor necessary. The consensus toward employing advertising media showed the most prevalent method was customers' recommendations. Five of the firms declared they attracted most of their customers through such a source. Those firms least interested in advertising

stated they had all the customers they could comfortably handle. Methods used by these firms for advertising are as follows:

Advertising and Public Relations Media:

	<u>Number of Mentions</u>
Customer recommendations	6
Newspapers	5
Fashion shows	5
No advertising	4
Mailers	2
Radio	2
Telephone book	1
Public relations agency	1

Some firms were unique in their choice of other distribution methods, using garments shown in local store windows, road salesmen, and trade center showings.

Selling methods in the custom salon vary from shop to shop. The following shows how the individual firms handle this procedure:

Methods of Selling Garments:

	<u>Number of Mentions</u>
Verbal discussions	11
Sample garments in fabric	8
Sketches	7
Fabric alone	2
Samples in muslin	1
Photographs of designs	1

In many instances the customer and the designer plan the garment with verbal discussions alone; sometimes these consultations are implemented with sketches or fabric swatches. A few firms show a complete collection either to individuals or groups of customers, who use this method to select their garments.

Summary

The greatest number of custom design firms interviewed were established during the past ten years. These firms were located in areas of a high concentration of wealth and population. According to their statements concerning factors important to location, representatives of the firms feel: (1) the location must be convenient for their type of customer, and (2) must contain suitable facilities for their operational needs.

These custom design establishments are either privately or partnership owned. In the latter case, one owner was also the designer. The firms are small in size according to both yearly volume and number of employees. All but one firm mentioned obtaining skilled labor a problem. Several firms described their employees as having obtained their skills in areas other than the United States.

Production is handled under the designer's rigid control. Often the designer is actively involved in fitting and in cutting as well. Although several firms set up production methods according to the skill of the workers,

with one worker specializing in one technique, most of the firms reported garments are individually made. Some of the firms are also involved in a line of ready-to-wear. Three produce their own garments in this category. These garments are executed with methods more closely allied to those found in a volume production operation than those in a custom shop.

Fabrics which these firms use come from several sources. Much of their material is imported through fabric suppliers in New York, from New York firms themselves, or from suppliers in other large cities. Only two firms mentioned Michigan as a source of materials. Four firms provide all of their own fabrics, while all of the firms supply at least 50 percent. The materials not furnished by the custom design firms frequently come from customers who collect fabrics during their travels.

Though a few of the firms have fashion shows in the manner of the French couture, most of the selected custom establishments show their merchandise by means of individual discussions, supplemented with sketches and fabric swatches. Some advertising is employed, but six of the firms agreed that customers' recommendations are sufficient means for attracting other customers.

CHAPTER IV

THE DESIGNER WITHIN THE CUSTOM DESIGN FIRM

A major objective of this study was to gather information regarding the education, training, job experience, inspiration, and design methods of the designer in the custom design firm. As one of the most important elements in the success of the custom design firm, the designer contributes significantly to the fashion apparel industry.

Training and Experience

The designers with the custom design firms selected for study have achieved their present positions from widely varying educational and experiential backgrounds. The academic educational level of these designers ranged from some high school to completion of college. Five of the group either attended or graduated from college. Four designers received no formal professional training. Two of these designers acquired their skills from apprenticeship experience, and the two others were raised in families active in the garment industry. Of the nine designers with some professional training, five were schooled in Europe.

Job experiences of these designers were quite diverse, ranging from selling to teaching. It seems significant that the varied jobs held by the selected individuals were in some

may related to the apparel industry and few designers entered the field with no experience. Four of the group began their careers as professional designers in their own firms, six had similar positions in other organizations, and three had some previous experience related to the apparel industry but in non-designing capacities. A compilation of the designers' years of experience designing in the industry and the number of years they have headed their own firms is shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Number of years of professional designing experience of designers as employed by other firms and as heads of own firms.

Years	Designer's Experience	
	Professional Designers For Other Firms	Professional Designers Heading Own Firms
	N	N
1- 4	3	3
5- 9	1	3
10-14	2	1
15-19	..	4
20-24	..	..
25-29	..	1
30-34	..	..
35-39	..	..
40-44	..	1
Total	6 ^a	13

^aFour of the group had no experience when they opened their own firms; three had experience, but not as designers.

The years of designing experience these selected custom designers had prior to heading their own firms ranged from two to twelve years. Three had been in the industry for over twenty-five years and three had been professionally involved for fewer than ten years.

Seven designers indicated no membership in professional organizations, while five specified membership in one of the following: Fashion Originators, The Fashion Group, Italian Business Women's Club, The Negro American Fashion Association for Designers, and the Handknitters Association.

Sources of Design Inspiration and Ideas

A designer's position in the fashion industry is unique. Designers produce the commodity which, above all other factors, determines the success or failure of the business. In a custom operation the whole structure of the organization is contingent upon the ability of the designer. Failure to please a customer in design quality could result in lost sales, regardless of the expenditure upon skilled labor and fabric. Questions concerning sources of design ideas were asked in order to gain insight into the factors which the custom designer considered most helpful in determining his designs. The sources which the designers felt to be both significant and inspirational are:

Sources of inspiration:

Number of Mentions

Customer's wishes	7
Fabric	7
Designer's environment	3
Customer's figure	3
Customer's personality	2
Fashion trends	2
Design books	2
Architecture	2
Historical costume	2
People	2
Draping methods	1
Art works	1

Using these inspirational sources to stimulate designs, the designers produce styles for both their individual customers and for women of general physical types. Seven designers of the group stated they designed for individual women, and created garments exclusive in both fabric and design for one customer. Although the five other designers worked in a similar manner, upon occasion they produced more flexible designs suitable for more than one person. These garments became their seasonal collections and ready-to-wear lines.

Although inspirational sources of designs were varied, the designers stated the customer was the primary influence on the design of made-to-order garments. The client's figure,

clothing needs as regulated by her mode of living, and her personality or how she expressed herself through clothes were mentioned, in that order, as determining factors in creating designs for the customer. Other influencing factors mentioned were: the need for comfort in clothing, the suitability of the design to the occasion for which it was planned, and the restrictions fabrics impose upon a design.

When the designers were questioned about the importance of adaptation as an inspirational device, all but one indicated employment of this method in working out designs. Trade papers and fashion magazines were verified as principal sources from which designs were adapted. All sources of adaptation mentioned were:

Sources of Adaptation:

	<u>Number of Mentions</u>
Fashion magazines	12
Trade paper	11
Designer's own previous designs	4
Other designers	2
Fashion leaders	1

Methods of Design

Methods employed by the selected custom design firms for the execution of designs do not appear to be different from those used by ready-to-wear firms. The custom designer uses the following techniques:

Design Methods:

	<u>Number of Mentions</u>
Sketching	8
Draping in muslin	6
Flat pattern techniques	5
Draping in fabric	1

Techniques used by custom designers to achieve the basic pattern did differ from the preparation of patterns for ready-to-wear apparel. Four of the designers declared they used a basic, standardized pattern which was adjusted to the customer. The remaining nine designers drafted a basic pattern for each customer by means of measurements. The final designs were then developed from this block or sloper. In addition, one designer employed dress forms made according to the customer's measurements, and two other designers adjusted commercial forms to fit their customers.

Summary

This selected group of Michigan custom designers was composed of persons with academic training ranging from some high school to the completion of advanced college degrees. More than half of the group had received some professional training, five having attended European schools. Those with no professional training came from families active in the dressmaking business or had learned the required skills in apprenticeship situations.

Eight of the respondents had professional experience as designers before they began their own businesses. The

remaining five initiated their designing careers as heads of their own firms; however, all but one had worked in the apparel industry in some capacity before assuming the position as head of a firm. Less than one half of the group specified membership in any professional organizations.

The customer's desires and fabric choices were the chief factors modifying design ideas. The designers considered the customer's figure, needs, and personality the most important influences upon their designs. Designers who created more for individuals than for general types declared their products were exclusive in style as well as fabric. Some styles suitable for a wider range of women were executed for the ready-to-wear and seasonal collections. All but one designer cited design adaptation as one of their inspirational devices, and named newspapers and fashion magazines as the richest sources of design ideas.

Actual design methods included many techniques, with sketching and draping as the primary choices. The designers also affirmed flat patternmaking as a ranking design method. Some designers use basic patterns, but the rest develop slopers from measurements or drape on a dress form which is the same size as the customer.

CHAPTER V

CUSTOM DESIGNED APPAREL IN MICHIGAN

The custom design firm, using methods differing from those of the ready-to-wear manufacturer, creates fashionable clothing for its customers which is distinctive in type, price, size, and seasonal character. In this chapter the characteristics of custom designed apparel will be presented, as described by the selected designers and heads of firms. Also included is a description of the ready-to-wear offered by these firms. The future of the Michigan custom design houses, as viewed by the owners of such firms, and their contribution to the Michigan apparel industry are final considerations discussed in the next chapter.

Distinctive Characteristics of Custom Designed Apparel

The operation of custom design firms is unlike that of companies which produce ready-to-wear apparel in volume. In the custom firms the emphasis is on a greater variety of apparel, while the volume manufacturer tends to specialize in garments of a particular type and in a particular price range. According to the group under study, Michigan custom design establishments produce a wide variety of apparel rather than specializing in the creation of one type of

garment. Because many customers purchase complete wardrobes, the custom firms produce a wide diversity of garments to fulfill the demands of their clientele.

Types of apparel

The products of the group of custom houses selected for study were divided into three major categories: daytime apparel, evening apparel, and special occasion dresses. The custom firms in Michigan produce a wide range of apparel types from daytime separates to wedding gowns. The largest proportion fall within the daytime and evening wear categories. Responses to questions indicated more firms produced daytime garments than evening apparel. Suits, ensembles, and casual dresses were mentioned most often as the specific garments made for daytime wear. One of the respondents confined her production to custom knitwear. Within the evening category, eight firms mentioned producing gowns. Evening ensembles and cocktail dresses were mentioned by four and five firms, respectively. Of the four firms producing special occasion garments, two explained that wedding dresses and attendants' gowns were made only for special customers, not as a general practice.

The variety of types of apparel and firms indicating production of the different garments are shown in Table 6. Included are the starting prices of garments, as designated by respondents.

Table 6. Types and range of starting prices of apparel produced by selected custom design firms by number of mentions of firms producing apparel

Types	Range of Starting Prices										Firm Mentions N
	(\$1 - \$1,000)										
	1 100	101 200	201 300	301 400	401 500	501 600	601 700	701 800	801 900	901 1000	
<u>Daytime</u>											
Suits	**	*o	o		o						6
Ensembles		**o	o				o				5
Dresses- casual	**o	*	o								5
Dresses- business	**	o	o								4
Coats	*		o								2
Separates	o										1
<u>Evening</u>											
Gowns		**o	***				o			o	8
Dresses- cocktail	**	**	o								5
Ensembles		*o								oo	4
Dresses- dinner			*o		o						3
<u>Spec. Occas.</u>											
Gowns- bridal		*o	*		o						4
Dresses- attendants		*	*o								3
Dresses- Bride's mother		*	*o								3

*Price is for labor alone.

oPrice includes labor and fabric.

Price of apparel

As shown in Table 6, the Michigan custom design firms produce apparel ranging in starting price from less than \$100 to over \$1,000. Prices for all garments above \$300 represent the complete cost of the garment, including labor and fabric. In two-thirds of the cases, lower prices represent labor cost alone. Price quotations for daytime apparel over \$200 include fabric and labor, whereas prices below \$200 usually represent only labor costs. Starting prices for evening apparel extend over a wide range, from less than \$100 to the category of \$901-\$1,000. The highest prices are quoted for evening gowns and ensembles, which include labor and fabric. The lowest quoted price, for cocktail dresses, represents only labor costs. These quoted prices rise according to complexity of design and expense of materials.

Sizes of apparel

Since the custom design firm sizes apparel specifically for its customers, the products of these firms reflect the sizes and figure types of their clientele. One question (see question 45, Appendix A) sought to discover whether the custom house supplied apparel in particular sizes. Perhaps figure proportions of the women who found it difficult to purchase ready-to-wear which fit them properly influenced the sizes of the custom designed products.

A tabulation of responses to questions regarding sizes produced by this select group of custom firms indicates a handling of a wide variety of sizes. Four heads of firms

felt it impossible to classify customers into any specific size group. Four other firms stated 50 percent of their customers wore Misses sizes 10 to 18, and the rest wore either smaller or larger sizes. Three firms mentioned that while 50 percent of their customers were in the Misses range, the other half of the clientele was composed of women with distinct figure problems. The most common problem mentioned was the long-waisted or short-waisted figure. Five of the heads of firms who were interviewed mentioned that most of their customers were women with particular figure problems. But the remaining eight firms stated that their customers wore a wide range of sizes; their clientele included some women difficult to fit and others who could easily wear regular Misses sizes.

Customers

Aside from customer size, information was also sought concerning customers' age and residence. Clients, it appears, are drawn primarily from the city and the regions which surround the custom shop. Five of the designers stated that some of their customers came from out-of-state as well as from within Michigan. The customers' general age level was mentioned as being more mature than young. As one custom designer stated, "Young girls don't have the money to spend on custom clothes."

Seasonal character

Seasonal changes remain an important factor in clothing production and selection. Though several of the inter-

viewed firms produced a collection at the start of their two major seasons, fall and spring, others felt their businesses were not of a seasonal nature. Custom production methods tend to be complex and time-consuming. The resulting garments take longer to produce, especially in firms of small size. Because of this time expenditure, seasonal productions follow more closely upon one another than is true in the larger apparel manufacturing firms. Custom designers do far more pre-planning in advance of a season because of individual customer needs. This tendency to plan in advance leads to a general mixing of seasons. Seven heads of firms denied the existence of any peak season, since constant customer demand kept them busy all year. Many designers felt they were generally forced to overlook seasons as a result of their individual work with a wide variety of customers engaged in different activities and modes of living. Designers at some firms mentioned working simultaneously on garments for different seasonal requirements. While some customers plan a trip to cold climates, at the same time others travel to warm areas. The clothing needs of both groups are vastly different in seasonal character.

Six firms considered fall as their most important season. One firm suggested summer as its busiest time of the year. Those who sold more garments in one season than in another stated these reasons: seasonal and temperature change, social and cultural events, and sports needs. Three firms specified fall as their predominate period because women have

more need of clothes for this season. Patrons of custom houses are more inclined to spend money on garments which they will wear during Michigan's long fall and winter.

Inclusion of Ready-to-Wear by Custom Design Firms

Some of the interviewed firms stated they carried ready-to-wear, principally in the form of a boutique operation. Half of the firms did not handle any ready-to-wear lines, but the remaining seven did report carrying some to varying degrees. The importance of ready-to-wear to the operations of the custom firms is shown in the following chart, which is a tabulation of the percentage of yearly volume realized through these items by the seven firms including this type of garment in their operations:

Percentage of Yearly Volume:

Number of Firms^a

Under 10	1
10-19	2
20-29	1
30-39	..
40-49	..
50-59	..
60-69	..
70-79	1
80-89	..
90-99	..

^aOne respondent declined to give a total, while another had just added the line.

The ready-to-wear lines which custom firms handled included such items as knitwear, moderately priced sportswear, fabric, casual dresses and suits, silk scarves, and other accessories. This apparel was obtained from three sources: outside volume ready-to-wear manufacturers, the custom house itself, which produced ready-to-wear during slack seasons, or outside contractors who made garments according to designs supplied by the custom designer. Those custom firms which produced their own ready-to-wear also sold ready-to-wear items made by other manufacturers.

Why did these firms become involved in ready-to-wear? One of the heads of firm stated she hoped to "groom customers from this up to her custom line," while all firms involved considered ready-to-wear a method of attracting customers. Ready-to-wear items also represented an additional source of profit. For the firm which handled more ready-to-wear than custom work, it represented 75 percent of the volume. This high percentage was a fairly recent development and according to the designer of the firm, was caused by difficulty in obtaining labor.

Summary

The garments produced by the custom design firms in Michigan have special characteristics in regard to type, price, and size which appeal to particular customers. Heads of four of the firms reported they created clothes of no particular specialized type, but a wide range of types. Two

others mentioned their garments were divided between daytime and evening dresses. The rest of the group, while tending to specialize to some degree, related they did more daytime than evening and special occasion dresses. These garments ranged from a \$25 starting price in the daytime category, to a \$100 starting price in the evening dress group. The final prices ranged upward, depending upon fabric and design. The quoted prices of more expensive garments included fabric, while prices in the lower categories were based upon labor cost alone.

Several firms indicated they had no peak season; because of the great variety of their customers' needs they found themselves busy all year. Those who felt one season was more important decided it was fall. Women bought more garments at this time, the designers felt, because of the type of apparel worn and the longer wearing period in Michigan. While four firms indicated their clients ranged so widely in size they could not be categorized into any size type, most of the customers appeared to wear Misses sizes. It was noted from the responses that only five of the firms indicated dealing predominately with women having problem figures. The eight remaining firms said their typical customer was the woman who wanted individual clothes made exclusively for her, rather than the woman who had difficulty buying ready-to-wear. Some of the custom firms sold ready-to-wear. The importance of this line varied from under 10 percent to 75 percent of the firm's yearly volume. The purpose was to attract customers and to serve as an extra source of income.

CHAPTER VI

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CUSTOM DESIGN FIRM IN MICHIGAN

The custom design firms represent a small but influential segment of the Michigan apparel industry. Along with the more extensive operations of the manufacturing firms in the state, the custom houses and their designers are making a unique effort to supply the wearing apparel needs of an expanding customer market.

Growth and Future of the Custom Design Firm in Michigan

To gain some information about the future of the custom firms in Michigan, designers were asked about the growth of their market. On an optimistic note, three designers responded that their market had tripled and two reported that it had doubled. Six responded that although their market had not doubled, it had increased somewhat. One firm declined to respond and another had been in business too short a time to determine growth.

Although all but two firms indicated some growth, only four of the selected group indicated any future plans for expansion. Nine of the thirteen heads of firms stated they had no definite plans for the future. Reasons for not expanding were of two types: difficulty in obtaining suf-

ficiently skilled labor, and difficulty in controlling all aspects of the operation by the designer if the firm grew too large.

Although they were optimistic about the future of their firms and seemed to find attracting customers no problem, most of the heads of the custom firms see their establishments as having a very personal character which would suffer if expanded. Designers also expressed fears about their abilities to extend careful supervision of workers under expanded conditions. These factors, combined with the difficulty in obtaining skilled labor, limit future expansion of the individual Michigan custom design firms.

Contributions of the Michigan Custom Design Firms

At the conclusion of the interview the custom designers were asked a series of questions concerning their contributions to the apparel industry in Michigan. Upon being asked if they designed particularly for the Michigan market, four of the designers expressed the feeling that their designs were so directed. They described their customers as conservative women who desired classic garments of simple lines and color. Four other designers reported that they did not design particularly for the Michigan client, stating, in effect, that good design knows no location. The remaining six explained they did not design for the Michigan market because their customers traveled extensively and needed clothes more universal than regional in design and fabric requirements.

The final questions were asked in order to detect the designer's perception of the role his organization, the custom design firm, plays in the Michigan apparel industry. Eleven designers felt they did make a contribution; two felt they did not. Four firms felt their contribution was made on an individual level, to supply clothes which were particularly suitable, exclusive, and distinctive to special women who could afford them. Three firms saw their contribution to have a broader consequence. They considered themselves arbiters of good taste, with responsibility to introduce customers to a higher taste and fashion level. Three firms felt their operations performed good public relations for the state of Michigan, as so few custom design firms exist in the United States. Two of the firms in the interviewed group expressed their contribution by comparing the role of the custom designer to the creative role of the artist or the musician, thus making a cultural contribution to the community, and to the state. This was related by one designer to the "renaissance of the arts in the Detroit area."

Summary

Although the designers were optimistic about their businesses and about the future of their firms, the majority indicated no definite plans for growth. Their major reason for non-expansion was the short supply of skilled labor. As a secondary reason, the need to keep these establishments small and personal so they could be controlled to the satisfaction and standards of the designers was expressed.

The heads of the custom design houses in Michigan saw their contributions to the apparel industry as falling into four categories: an individual service providing unique garments to the financially-able customer, a fashion source adding to the taste and fashion acceptance level within Michigan, a unique type of apparel producer providing good public relations for the state, owing to the lack of such firms within the United States, and finally, as artists making a creative contribution toward raising the cultural level of the community and the state.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Custom design organizations resembling those traditionally operating in the French apparel industry have been found to exist in the United States. This study involved investigation of the custom houses within the state of Michigan. Prompted by a larger ongoing study of the apparel industry in Michigan, this endeavor sought additional knowledge about the production of apparel and the function of the custom designer and his organization within this industry.

Direct interviews with owner-designers of firms which produce custom clothes were the methods used for the gathering of information. A structured interview schedule was administered to thirteen firms. Nine of these were custom houses, and four were involved in some dressmaking as well as being custom design firms. The interview was divided into three parts: the first part referred to the structure and organization of the firm; the second dealt with background information about the designer and his function in the establishment; and finally, the characteristics of custom apparel and the designer's perception of his contribution to the fashion industry were sought.

Although some of the firms had been established in the 1930's, most had developed during the past ten years. The firms which took part in the study were located in the areas of Michigan high in both population and wealth. Firm representatives explained they had chosen these locations because they were convenient to their type of customer and presented attractive and spacious physical facilities.

These firms, most of which were small by measure of yearly volume and number of employees, were either owned by one designer or by partners. Methods and techniques of garment construction were closely controlled by the designer. Most of the firms employed individual construction methods, with each garment being made by one seamstress. Besides supervision, the designers were deeply involved in the production of the garments. Often the designer functioned as fitter and cutter and in some firms, completed the first stages of garment construction, as well.

All but one firm reported difficulty in obtaining workers. Present labor forces are composed primarily of mature women, some of whom have been trained in Europe. All respondents commented on the difficulties encountered when training beginning employees. It is especially difficult to obtain seamstresses who are skilled enough to work on custom garments.

Most of the materials which the custom firms use are imported fabrics purchased through New York suppliers. Some firms furnish all fabrics, and all firms supply 50 percent or more of the materials used for apparel.

Distribution in the custom design firms is implemented by means of individual customer consultations, which are sometimes supplemented with sketches and fabrics. Some firms also produce collections which are shown to groups or to individual customers. The custom design firms use various advertising media, but most firms reported receiving sufficient work through recommendations passed from client to client.

Interviews brought out the fact that over one-half of the Michigan custom designers had been professionally trained, some of them in European schools. All reported at least a high school education, and some had had experience in the apparel industry previous to establishing their own firms.

The designers cited the customer's desires and the fabric with which the design was to be executed as their major design inspiration. Influential factors determining the designs were said to be the customer's figure, her clothing needs, and her personality. Designers also mentioned adaptation of designs from fashion magazines and newspapers as sources of inspiration. Their methods of creation ranged from sketching and draping to patternmaking. Basic patterns for customers were developed either by alteration of a firm's own pattern, or by a series of measurements. Some firms used dress forms made to duplicate the customer's figure, in addition to the basic pattern.

Differing from ready-to-wear manufacturers, who tend to specialize in one kind of garment, the custom firm pro-

duces made-to-order garments of all sorts, according to customers' needs. Prices begin at twenty-five dollars for labor alone and go to several thousand dollars, depending upon the firm, the fabric, and the design. Most firms reported having no peak season, but being busy all year. Fall was the peak season indicated by a few custom design houses, because of the higher costs of winter garments and the long wearing periods of these clothes in the area in which these firms work and serve.

Customer sizes covered a wide range. Only five of the firms indicated they dealt predominately with problem figures. The eight remaining firms said their customers were not those who had figure problems, but rather women of all sizes who desired individual clothes made especially for them.

According to the responses to interviews, the custom firms in Michigan indicated no definite plans for further growth. They seemed content to remain at their present operational level. Citing reasons for this attitude, heads of firms mentioned the difficulty in obtaining skilled labor and the desire to stay relatively small so that the establishments could be controlled to their satisfaction.

Michigan custom design firms see their contributions to the apparel industry as follows: servicing the financially-able customer with individual and exclusive clothing, raising the taste level and acceptance of high fashion garments among their customers, fostering public relations because they are

a relatively unique type of establishment in the United States, and making an artistic contribution to the community and to the state of Michigan.

Recommendations

This investigation of the custom design firms as part of the apparel industry in Michigan probed an area which has been relatively unexplored. The American designer and the production of wearing apparel in the state of Michigan have been bypassed by recent research, yet both offer rich ground for future scrutiny. As a result of this study, suggestions for continuing and expanding these areas may be made.

Replication of this study utilizing the instrument developed for interviewing might yield valuable information about other segments of the apparel industry in Michigan. An investigation of dressmakers, designers of ready-to-wear apparel, or custom tailors would extend the knowledge of those creative individuals who produce apparel in Michigan. A more detailed study of production methods and techniques would be obtained by augmenting this interview schedule with observations in the workrooms.

The interview schedule developed for the study obtained the desired information. Some respondents, however, had difficulty understanding the last questions in the instrument, particularly those dealing with the contributions of the custom house to the Michigan apparel industry. Lack of understanding indicates a need to restate these questions if the instrument was to be reused.

A study devised to include the custom designer in other areas of the United States would be significant in establishing the national position of the custom designer and his firm in our country today.

According to the findings of this study, an analysis of skilled labor is severely in need of further research in this state. A survey of the labor needs of the custom design firms, as well as the methods and techniques in which workers should be trained, could be made.

Such an investigation would be beneficial, not only to increase knowledge of labor needs of the apparel industry in Michigan, but also might lead to some suggestions for improving a problem which presents a handicap to the custom design firms within the state.

More information about the apparel industry, its operation and significance in Michigan, would offer assistance and stimulation to firms presently operating within the state and suggestions to those contemplating establishment.

APPENDIX A

Date _____

Apparel Industry Study
Custom Design Organizations in Michigan

Firm Name _____ Number _____

Address _____ Phone _____

Respondent _____ Position _____

Through this interview we hope to obtain information about the position of the designer in the custom design establishment within Michigan. I should like to begin by asking questions about your background.

1. How many years have you worked as a professional designer? _____

2. What preliminary jobs did you hold before your present position?

* _____ yrs. _____
_____ yrs. _____
_____ yrs. _____

3. How many years have you been in this firm? _____

4. Do you hold membership in any professional organizations?

_____ yes, which _____
_____ no

5. At what level did you complete your academic training?

_____ grade-school
_____ high school
_____ junior college
_____ college

Your professional training?

_____ none, where did you pick up skills? _____
_____ design school, where _____
_____ art school, where _____
_____ other, _____

6. Have you ever had any formal courses in:

_____ draping
_____ patternmaking
_____ sketching
_____ sewing
_____ history of costume
_____ design
_____ other, _____

Now, about your designing.

7. Where do you get your inspiration, your design ideas?

- ☐ customers wishes
- ☐ fabric
- ☐ historic costume
- ☐ films
- ☐ nature
- ☐ art
- ☐ architecture
- ☐ other, _____

8. Do you design:..... ☐ for the individual customer, or
☐ for a generalized type?

9. Do you ever adapt designs from any source?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no

10. What source?..... ☐ your own previous designs
☐ present fashion trends
☐ fashion leaders
☐ trade papers and magazines
☐ other, _____

11. What do you consider the greatest influence on your designs?

- * ☐ customer's figure
- ☐ customer's taste and way of life
- ☐ Michigan influences, ie. climate, sports
- ☐ other, _____

12. What methods do you use to design?

- ☐ sketches
- ☐ draping in muslin
- ☐ draping in fabric
- ☐ flat pattern
- ☐ other, _____

13. Do you use a standardized basic pattern _____, or do you draft patterns for each customer? _____

The following section of the questionnaire deals with the structure of the custom design house and its place in the Michigan apparel industry.

14. How long ago was your firm established? _____

15. Where was it located then?..... _____

16. (If not the same) How long have you been located here? _____
17. Why did you relocate? _____
18. Do you have any other locations?... yes, where, _____
_____ no
19. Do you plan to stay at your present location(s) in the future?
_____ yes
_____ no
20. (If yes) Why does this location suit you?
_____ in or near active business district
_____ convenient for customers
_____ materials easily available
_____ labor easily obtainable
_____ materials easily obtainable
_____ available financing
_____ real estate available
_____ space suitable
_____ other, _____

21. (If no, on no. 20) Where do you plan to relocate? _____
22. Why? _____

23. What is the present ownership of the firm?...
_____ individual, who is designer
_____ individual, other than designer
_____ partnership, owner and designer
_____ other, _____
24. How is your firm financed?.....
_____ self-financed
_____ commercial banks
_____ factoring companies
_____ textile manufacturers
_____ other, _____
25. How many people do you employ?.. men full time, part-time
_____ men full time, part-time
26. Could you give me a run-down of their jobs; who does what?

27. Do you hire additional help during peak seasons?
_____ yes, how many _____
_____ no

28. Where do your employees come from?

☐ local
☐ out of state, where _____

29. What is your method of wage payment?

☐ piece
☐ hourly
☐ salary

30. Are you union affiliated?..... ☐ yes, date _____

☐ no

31. Approximately what percentage of the materials which you use do you supply?

_____ %

32. Where do these materials come from?

☐ Michigan
☐ outside, where _____

33. Which is your peak sales season? ☐ no peak season

☐ Fall-winter
☐ Holiday
☐ Resort
☐ Spring
☐ Summer
☐ Transitional
☐ other, _____

34. What factors make this your biggest season?

☐ seasonal demand, climate changes
☐ cultural events
☐ social events, sports
☐ other, _____

35. Are all your designs produced on an exclusive basis?

☐ yes
☐ no, _____

36. How is your merchandise shown and distributed?

☐ showings to individual customers
☐ fashion shows in your own shop
☐ fashion shows under other auspices, _____
☐ trunk showings
☐ road salesmen, where _____
☐ retail outlets, _____
☐ marketing at trade centers, _____
☐ other, _____

37. Do you sell from..... ☐ sketches

☐ verbal discussions with customers
☐ samples in muslin
☐ samples in fabric
☐ other, _____

38. What forms of advertising do you use?

☐ newspapers
☐ mailers
☐ agencies or public relations counselor
☐ radio, T.V., or films
☐ other, _____

39. Do you produce any garments which are sold and manufactured on a wholesale basis?

☐ yes, what _____
☐ no

40. Do you sell any ready-to-wear items?

☐ yes
☐ no

41. What? _____

42. What % of your yearly money volume is realized through your ready-to-wear? _____

43. Would you describe the type of garments you produce, their price range, and their importance in your overall line.

Daytime.....	participant sportswear.....	\$ _____	____%
	separates (pants/skirts).....	\$ _____	____%
	casual dresses	\$ _____	____%
	business dresses.....	\$ _____	____%
	suits.....	\$ _____	____%
	afternoon dresses.....	\$ _____	____%
	afternoon suits.....	\$ _____	____%
Evening.....	dinner outfits.....	\$ _____	____%
	formal gowns.....	\$ _____	____%
	at-home entertaining.....	\$ _____	____%
	at-home, loungewear.....	\$ _____	____%
	sleepwear.....	\$ _____	____%
Special occasions..	debutante gowns.....	\$ _____	____%
	bridal gowns.....	\$ _____	____%
	wedding party.....	\$ _____	____%
Other, _____	_____	\$ _____	____%
	_____	\$ _____	____%

44. If the customer supplies her own fabric, how much does the price differ? _____

45. Can you tell me the general size category into which your customers fit? Approximately what % of your garments are produced for:

☐ junior and teen figures, 5-15
☐ misses figures, 10-18
☐ women's figures, 20-50

46. Where do most of your customers come from?

☐ from this city
☐ from this region
☐ from out of state, _____

47. Do you feel that you design especially for the Michigan market?*

48. Would you indicate your approximate yearly volume?

☐ under \$1,000
☐ \$1,000-\$4,999
☐ \$5,000-\$9,999
☐ \$10,000-\$14,000
☐ \$15,000-\$29,000
☐ \$30,000-\$49,000
☐ over \$50,000

49. How much has your market grown in the past three years?

☐ not at all
☐ small amount
☐ doubled
☐ tripled
☐ more than tripled, indicate amount _____

50. (If not obtained before) Do you have any plans to expand your production facilities?

☐ yes

How, _____

☐ no

The last two questions do not require a factual answer; just your opinions.

51. Do you feel that your establishment has contributed to the Michigan apparel industry?

☐ yes

☐ no

52. In what ways? _____

53...to the national apparel industry? Is Michigan making a unique contribution in this area?

☐ yes

☐ no.

54. In what ways? _____

Thank you very much for your contribution to our study.

APPENDIX B

To obtain a description of the apparel industry in our state, the College of Home Economics at Michigan State University is conducting a survey of clothing producers. We are interested in classifying the various firms according to the type of apparel made and the manner of production. Would you be willing to classify your firm as:

a custom design establishment, whose major emphasis is creating original designs which are sold individually to customers.

a dressmaking establishment, whose major emphasis is restyling, alterations, and making garments from patterns for individuals.

If your firm does custom designing or dressmaking, but does not quite fulfill these two descriptions, would you specify any other designation which you feel appropriately describes your method of operation.

Please check the category which best describes your establishment on the enclosed postcard and return it at your earliest convenience.

Thank you for your contribution to our study. Your response will be most helpful in the development of a description of the Michigan apparel industry. With the emphasis and interest in new industries in Michigan, it is important that recognition be given to those firms already in operation.

Sincerely,

Helen Kilbourne

Enclosure

APPENDIX C

List of Cooperating Firms

Ann Moore, Inc.

C.R. Originals

DeAnn Designers

Elizabeth's

Ethel Beres Boutique

Julia Grimes

Julo of Vassar --

Maria Dinon

Pollak's Custom Dressmaking

Rulaine Couture Fashions

Ruth Joyce Salon

Tina Trottier - Couture

Walton Pierce

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