

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

Textile Society of America Symposium  
Proceedings

Textile Society of America

---

1990

## Textile Design in the Marketplace

John E. Vollmer

*Design Exchange in Toronto*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf>



Part of the [Art and Design Commons](#)

---

Vollmer, John E., "Textile Design in the Marketplace" (1990). *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings*. 621.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf/621>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Textile Society of America at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Textile Design in the Marketplace

John E. Vollmer  
Design Exchange, P.O. Box 18, Toronto-Dominion Centre, Toronto, Ontario  
M5K 1B2

INTRODUCTION:

As textile historians we are trained to observe physical evidence -- materials, structures, methods of applying surface decoration and patterns. In brief, we deal with design. Despite our design focus, we frequently seek to explain differences within the context of art historical research. Our conclusions, like those of the art historian, often focus on attribution and connoisseurship, rather than contributing to an understanding of textiles as cultural or economic indicators.

Although the academic study of design dates from the mid-19th century, only in recent years has this study moved from considerations of styling. Within the last three decades the critical examination of design objects and processes have given rise to the nascent discipline of design history. Increasingly design is viewed as the material embodiment of social and economic values. It is examined in light of the interrelationships that exist among the design process, marketing, distribution, customer satisfaction, and factors of supply and demand.

In this context, design is viewed as evidence for the complicated means of managing the activities of daily life. Those who use design in effect make choices about technology, aesthetics, function, market trends, even about our notions of progress, when creating the objects and processes for others. The user, in fact, has only two choices: to acquire the product or to reject it.

DESIGN HISTORY MODEL FOR TRADE TEXTILES:

The study of trade textiles compels us to consider the marketplace. Regardless of their place in time or the nature of their production, trade textiles embody an economic imperative. They were created as commodities to be bartered or sold. Only after the market transaction occurs, do the actual objects assume meaning through usage or association. Take, for example a seventeenth-century embroidered bed cover made in China for the Spanish market. To the producer the product existed solely for financial gain. To the user, its meaning as a status possession was based on prestige, embodying notions of taste, exotic appeal, cost, rarity. Its meaning as an artifact for the contemporary textile curator is based on age, survival, the history of ownership and technique.

The marketplace is a point of transfer. Transfer is both physical and intellectual; it is based on a contract between buyer and seller. If a contract does not exist, negotiation breaks down and trade does not take place. In some sense this contract is embodied in the bill of sale. Yet, the contract is infinitely more complex. It consists of a number of interrelated factors and influences.

This paper uses a case study to demonstrate a design history model for studying trade textiles. It reveals a range of data about a specific group of Indian fabrics made for the Western market that helps us appreciate the process of design transfer from one culture to another. The model integrates the study of design process and design aesthetics with the issues of marketing, distribution, manufacturing, economic strategies and consumer expectations. There are six criteria which may be charted thus:

	Technology	Economics	Expectations
Design			
Marketing			
Distribution			

Three criteria are concerned with product development and are controlled locally: design, marketing, and distribution. Each can be defined for the particular circumstance -- identifying the people, processes and points of control. Three additional criteria are concerned with external variables. Again, each can be specifically defined.

Each criteria is in fact considered in relation to three others. The model attempts to analyze data quantitatively, offering a basis for comparison with other trade commodities. It must be noted the research is incomplete. Several avenues of research have not been exhausted.

A CASE STUDY: THE C.M. HADOW FACTORY:

In 1981 the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, received as a donation, a collection of archival materials once in the possession of the C.M. Hadow factory of Srinagar, Kashmir. The Hadow factory was established by Hadow, an Austrian, in 1888 to produce hand-made carpets and other textiles for export to the West. Production continued under the founder's son, Major C.M. Hadow until 1948, when he and other foreign manufacturers were expelled from India. Major Hadow and his wife retired to Victoria, British Columbia, where he died in 1978. Shortly thereafter, his widow began to sell pieces from the estate, including three classical-style carpets that were documented in the pages of Hali.

The Hadow donation includes 169 cartoons and 158 preliminary drawings for chain stitch and gros point embroidered upholstery fabrics, 8 designs for petit point handbags and one cartoon for a carpet. There are over 370 glass plate negatives and glass slides of these types of embroideries and others, plus knotted carpets, all of which were manufactured for the European and American markets.

The upholstery fabric designs include preliminary sketches done in pencil or charcoal on tracing paper, ink drawings on translucent paper and finished gouache cartoons on fine paper mounted on muslin. The drawings are extensively annotated in English. Some of the preliminary drawings are pricked or perforated for pouncing; others have very worn

The fabrics for which these cartoons were created were embroidered in coloured wool yarns on canvas (called needlework tapestry) -- documented both by a sample and in photographs. Wool chain stitch embroidery on wool ground fabric was also employed. The patterns were specifically designed for European seating furniture (chairs, benches) and accessories (firescreens, book covers, gaming table covers, cushions). Eight of the drawings are dated: one each for 1922, 1933, 1936, 1939 and four examples dated 1940. We can assume the remainder also date from second quarter of the 20th century.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

Personnel: The archives specifically record the names of two designers -- Elizabeth Raynbird of 10 Mecklenburg Street, London W.C. 1 (16 designs) and F.J. Hofman (3 designs). H. Boddy (1 example) may be a third. In addition, the gouache works record the names of 8 "tracers" of which four occur on more than six designs each and the names of 11 "painters", of which five occur on more than nine designs each. The names of tracers and painters (i.e. Ali Sheakh, K.M. Abdullah, Naki Shah, Murtaza Shah) indicate these individuals were male and most likely local Kashmiri artisans. Although there is no additional information about this pool of workers, we note that the work of tracers and painters does not overlap. Two of the most frequently noted tracers bear the surname Sheakh; 5 of the painters have the surname Shah.

Process: Designs were created for specific furniture types and shapes. These forms are part of the tradition of western high style furniture - Tudor, Queen Anne, Georgian. In the same way that the furniture shapes are derived from historical/museum sources, the embroidery designs are also inspired by historical precedent. In six instances the Musée du Cluny is cited; in two, the Victoria and Albert Museum, accession number T149-1929. Postcards from the Victoria and Albert in the archive or the citation of designs from well-known published sources, for example, Faraday, plate 15, p. 137 or Apollo Magazine, January 1937 and December 1938, leave us to ponder how directly the copy/adaptation follows an original textile.

Sources: Sourcing designs and adapting those designs to the required furniture shapes would appear to have been done in England. Some of the preliminary sketches have modifications to the outlines of furniture shapes and corrections in the form of separate pieces of paper glued over the original lines, as if they were working drawings. The ink drawings and gouaches were made in Kashmir as they are the only works to have tracers and painters names recorded. The gouaches most probably served as guides to embroiderers. The transfer of image was done full scale. Notes such as "allow 1" plain all way round" and directions as to which shape was intended, suggest that the furniture frames were not available to the cartoon painters and embroiderers. We have no further information about the actual working conditions at the Hadow factory, or data about how the pieces were finished, checked and prepared for shipment to market.

DESIGN AND ECONOMICS

Costs: Hadow was the employer/broker for its various designers/artisans, commissioning the work required at each end of the transaction. These represent a particular aspect of production, i.e. custom-order, in contrast to more routine factory production. We assume two pay standards -- one for the Western designers, another for Kashmiri workers. Kashmiri artisans were compensated by the number of days each work took, since the archives carefully records time spent in days or half days. The separate recording of the efforts of tracers and painters indicates a difference in rates of pay. The rates of pay for the Western designers is not recorded.

DESIGN AND EXPECTATIONS

Clients: More than 10% of archive document consultation between the Hadow factory or its representative in London, the supplier (Maple and Company, Limited) and the client. 22 individual clients, seven with more than one order are documented through the drawings. Of this total, at least three are titled individuals, five are male, two may be French, one may be German. Some designs were produced for more than one client; some indicate exclusivity, i.e. "copyright reserved, private to Mrs. Metaxa".

Taste: As a group this archive reflects a conservative middle-of-the-road taste in interior furnishings. This taste is informed by and exhibits an educated interest in antique European furnishings and the prestige owning such pieces confers. The "historical" design sources include mid 16th-century counted stitch furnishings with narrative designs and delicate floral silk embroideries, 17th-century crewel patterns, 18th-century silk embroideries and mid-Victorian domestic work. In addition, there are designs from French tapestry (Lady and the Unicorn series at the Musée Cluny), Central Asian suzanis, Chinese porcelain, and one based on architectural elements from Ajanta.

MANUFACTURE AND TECHNOLOGY

Production: These fabrics and designs for them are entirely hand produced. Orders were taken in England (probably at the point of sales), transmitted to Kashmir where raw materials and a work force were assembled for production. The finished product was shipped to England where it was applied to the appropriate furniture frame (process not documented) and delivered to the customer. Commercial success was based more on consistency and quality control over traditional skills and talents, than on innovation. The work, whether in England or Kashmir, required minimal or very basic equipment.

MANUFACTURE AND ECONOMICS

Costs: Low labour costs in Kashmir made it viable for Hadow to maintain a production facility in Srinagar and a distribution system at a great distance. The archive provides little data about this aspect of the operation.

MANUFACTURE AND EXPECTATION

Market niche: The market niche for Hadow's embroidered upholstery fabrics is partly based on exclusivity and would have relied on creating and supplying a demand for specific products.



Craftsmanship: For Hadow's clients authenticity of design in the sense of a strict reproduction or copy appears to be of less concern than the overall impression of fine craftsmanship within a heritage tradition. Hand manufacture appears to have been an important factor. The Hadow factory was able to meet these demands and offer personalized service. Whether the appeal of exotic, "Indian" origin was significant cannot be determined. Counted stitch embroidery on canvas is not a traditional Indian technique. Although chain stitch embroidery has Indian sources, its presence in the West has been documented since the late 16th-century. With one exception, none of the designs is Indian.

Customized service: Not only were fabrics custom designed, but clients could also select colours. The archive includes a canvas swatch with yarn samples and another with sample stitches. Individual drawings bear directions for "red ground", "background Ivory 774", among others.

DISTRIBUTION AND TECHNOLOGY

Vendor: Maple and Company Limited, a major distributor of Hadow factory furnishings (confirmed by the donor), is cited on one drawing. The donor also identified B. Altman in New York, that carried Hadow products. It remains to be confirmed what inventories of Hadow products were maintained by these stores. The archive would suggest a range of products for general distribution such as the carpets in addition to the special order furnishings under discussion.

Transfer of information: The exact mechanics of design development between customer, vendor, manufacturer and designer is not known.

Marketing: There is no information concerning advertising or promotion.

DISTRIBUTION AND ECONOMICS

Taxes: Specific information concerning export and import taxes has not been researched. Shipping costs would have included internal transit from Kashmir to an Indian port, and transit costs from India through Suez to England

Pricing: Information about the actual pricing of the product in the marketplace is unconfirmed. The archive records only one price: "about L12. 10s for a fender stool". Whether is the price of the embroidery alone or the finished piece is unknown.

Competition: There is no information concerning competition or the market.

DISTRIBUTION AND EXPECTATIONS

Product: Clients were probably fully aware of what the product would look like before ordering and would have based a decision to purchase on examination of samples and a personal consultation with the vendor and a designer.

CONCLUSIONS:

The fact much of the evidence required for this case study is missing reveals to this researcher, who was the cataloguer of the collection in question, among other things, the need to ask appropriate questions of the donor at the point of gift acceptance. Our accessioning and documentation methods must be thorough and rigorous.

Collectively such studies could clarify our knowledge of textile history. The model attempts to analyze data quantitatively, offering a basis for comparison with other trade commodities.

Further, the model reveals that trade textiles are more significant than the fact the fabric is old, that it has survived, or that it demonstrates qualities which are admired for reasons for rarity or technique. Social and economic contexts for trade textiles reveals information about values, including money and taste. It is imperative for us as textile historians to record the real context and share that information with our publics. As connoisseurs we may be tempted to censor data or misrepresent it as we defend the status of the object. As a trade commodity textiles have several contexts and a wide range of meanings.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Brown, David J. 1981. Carpets from the Hadow Factory in Kashmir." Hali III,3:219.

Dilnot, Clive 1982. "Design as Socially Significant Activity." Design Studies 3 (July):139-46.

Dilnot, Clive 1984. "The State of Design History, part 1: Mapping the Field." Design Issues I (Spring): 4-23.

Margolin, Victor, ed. 1989. Design Discourse: History, Theory, Criticism, Chicago and London: University of Chicago.

Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto. The C.M. Hadow archive consists of three parts: 980.270.1-82 (personal collection of shawl fragments); 981.199.1-319 (drawings and cartoons for embroidered fabrics) and approximately 370 unaccessioned glass plate negatives, prints and miscellaneous paper documents. These collections were the gift of Mrs. C. M. Hadow, and have not been published or exhibited.