

Modern Methods of Pattern Designing*

Changes in Practice of Getting Up Shirt- ing Designs—Developments of a Decade

By Charles M. Schwartz

THE people of to-day are not content with simplicity such as marked the fabrics of the ancients, but each must have something a little better or a little more elaborate in color and design than his neighbor, and so the art of designing has become a large business in itself.

In designing shirtings to-day, one cannot entirely base the colorings and stripings upon last season's "best sellers," as the styles change so very quickly. In the accompanying illustrations are shown some examples of this. On Chart A are shown four designs. Each design represents the "best seller" of that particular season, namely: 1, spring, and 2, fall of 1916; 3, spring, and 4, fall of

1917. All represent good selling patterns of the past season. Of course, these are all cloths of the finer grade. On the cheaper fabrics the colorings are not as elaborate as on these higher grade fabrics, as the dyestuff is very expensive and, therefore, large quantities cannot be used.

There is, however, one grade of shirtings which still clings to the neater patterns. This is a high-grade madras, usually worn by men of more refined tastes. It is true that this class of merchandise is generally shown more by the custom-shirt houses than by others, and there is an apparent reason for this. Their trade is limited, and they can only

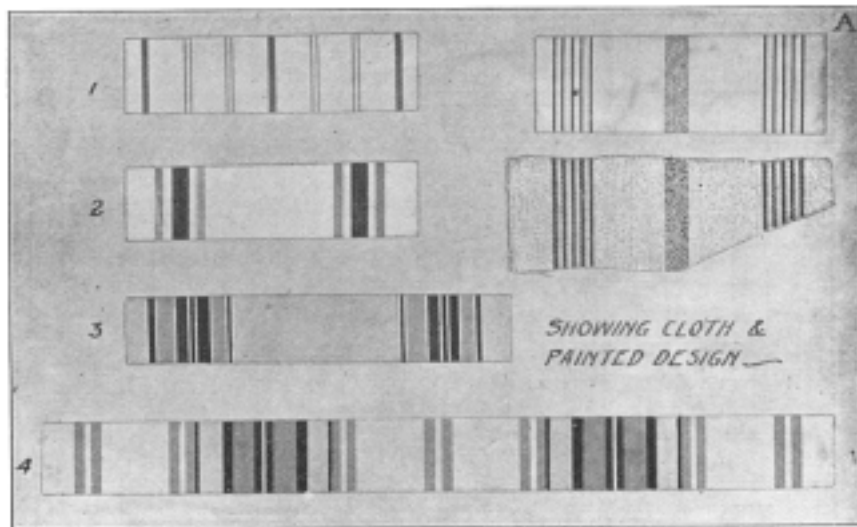


CHART A. POPULAR STYLE SHIRTINGS IN 1916 AND 1917

1917. One can readily see from these examples how the taste in men's styles has changed in the past few years.

This chart also shows a design and the cloth produced from it. Although the distinctness of stripe varies a trifle between the painting and the fabric, still one can get a fair idea from the painting how the cloth will look when woven.

DEMAND FOR COLOR

To-day the more color one can put in a design, the better it sells. This can best be explained by the scarcity of dyestuffs due to the war in Europe, and other causes. Before the war, the best-selling patterns were neat stripes of little color, mainly blues and blacks, probably not more than one-half inch apart; but the shirting trade of to-day can sell a pattern most readily if it has six or seven heavy colors and the repeat is two or three inches wide.

The above is well illustrated by Chart B, in which are shown samples of five different fabrics, with patterns rang-

ing from $2\frac{3}{4}$ to $3\frac{3}{8}$ inches in width. Naturally, they use the neater patterns, so that if they cannot dispose of their entire purchase during the one season, the same patterns can be used the following year.

CHANGES IN A DECADE

It is interesting to note, on Chart C, the changes which have come about in the past ten or twelve years. I have pictured here samples of madras from 1905 to 1917. One will notice how crude the designs were in 1905. The prevailing colors in those days were reds and blues, and the majority of shirtings were made in those two colors. But the man who bought a deep red and navy blue shirt, generally wore, after a few washings, a shirt of pink and sky blue. It required only a trace of bleach in the laundry to remove the larger part of the color from the cloth, and generally the little color left in the fabric had run into the white ground work. Happily, about 1907, the fast-to-bleaching colors were introduced commercially and this trouble was obviated.

By 1909 we had come to a wave of conservatism in patterns and only hair-

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lines were used. This fashion changed during the succeeding years, until, in 1916, plaids were largely used, and to-day, almost anything with plenty of color will sell.

HOW THE DESIGNER DESIGNS

Ten or twelve years ago the designer in a mill would make up a range of patterns in blanket form for selection. He

things have, of necessity, changed, so that the manufacturer must get the maximum work for the minimum time.

In laying out a line of goods to-day the large shirting mill superintendent will not go to the designer and say that he is ready for his fall or spring season and would like such and such ideas executed in blanket form. But he keeps

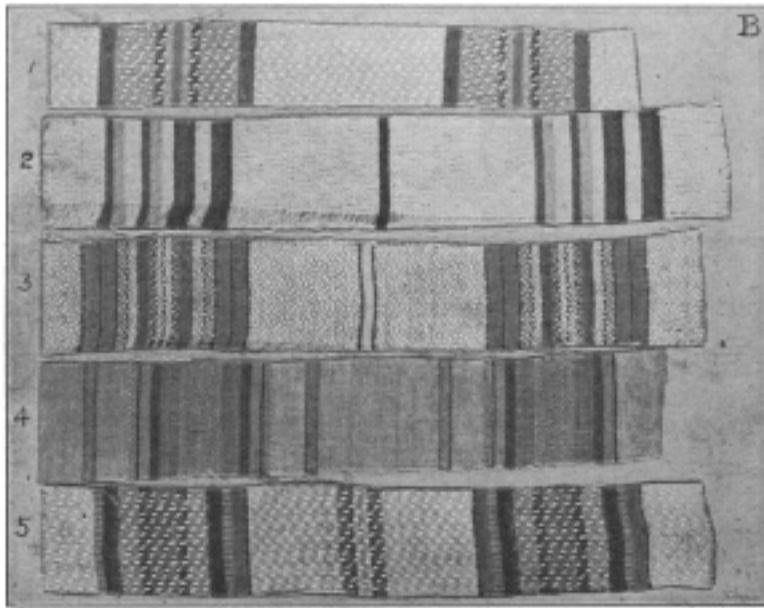


CHART B. GOOD SELLING PATTERNS OF PAST SEASON

would weave ten or twelve inches and then make his tie-ins. He would then weave his second ten inches and make another tie-in. This would be repeated for five or six times and when his blanket was woven (which took about a week or ten days) he would have thirty or forty patterns, which must, of necessity, be somewhat similar. It is plain to see—and one who has tried can easily be convinced—that to tie-in will surely make a change in pattern, but, unless 25 per cent. to 50 per cent. of the yarn is tied-in, the pattern change is slight and only of a minor character.

his designer employed doing only designing all the year round. This, however, is not done as previously. The present-day designer never handles the yarn and need never go to the weave room, except to see that his ideas are properly carried out. He merely paints his designs on paper, showing the weave, pattern, color, etc.

KEEPING COST WITHIN LIMITS

In making these designs, of course, the designer is limited, as before, as to the amount of satin striping or coloring to be used, so as to keep his cost within a certain limit. This is best gotten by

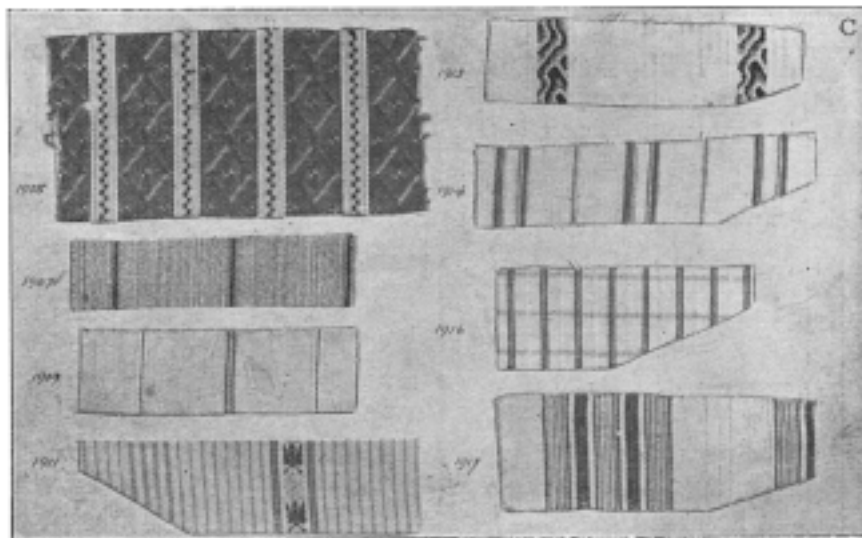


CHART C. SHOWING CHARACTERISTIC CHANGES IN A DECADE

Now, in making up a line of patterns, it is the object of the manufacturer to get as varied a collection of patterns as possible, so as to please all buyers (if such a thing is possible) and to give the big buyer a large enough assortment to choose from. In order to do this, the manufacturer has had to make three or four blankets. This meant one month's work only to get up his blanket range for one line alone. Besides the time which it consumed and the expense of labor and yarn, the designer was continually at the loom, directing the sample weaver to make these changes of tie-ins, and was not able to do his designing as it should be done.

But with competition as it is to-day,

the use of a reed-card and percentage chart. Designing such a pattern will take a good designer, at most, one half hour. He can usually make twenty-five to forty patterns a day, each one entirely different from the last, a thing which could never be accomplished by tieing-in. The paintings are then submitted to the manufacturer for his selection of ten or twenty good patterns, which he can usually find in a collection of forty. The selected patterns are then made up into sample pieces, from which the buyer makes his choice. This entire work consumes only a week, instead of five or six weeks, and gives the manufacturer a greater variety of designs from which to make his selection.