



## Beginning/Learning

*What initially inspired you to start garment making?*

I came to making clothes by way of art school. I've been truly inspired by and interested in personal style my entire life. As an art student working with textiles and fibers as my medium, I soon came to realize that one of the most powerful ways we can communicate with these materials that I love so much is by way of using them on the body. The rich combination of cloth, the body, and the rich history of style and fashion is one that endlessly inspires and fascinates me.

*Did you start out knowing you wanted to design unique garments, or did you come to this after following existing patterns for a time? Was learning to sew a necessary obstacle to designing, or do you enjoy the making as much as the designing?*

At the end of the day I am a maker. Every day in my studio seems to be an exercise in finding ways to create a life for

myself where I can make things, and welcome in others to make beside me and create the world I see in my head. Because I love spending countless hours with my materials, learning to sew was an obstacle and challenge that I wholeheartedly welcomed. While in art school I was more or less self-taught when it came to needle and thread. I worked from commercial patterns for a short while, but quickly felt the itch to branch out and make my own. The minute I left graduate school I found work with the Seattle Opera where I was able to work with expert tailors and dressmakers day in and day out. American theaters are one of very few places where ages-old sewing traditions and techniques are still used and celebrated, so I knew that it was essential for me to be there for a time. My sewing know-how is absolutely essential to my work and process as a designer, and I am certain the work I do would not be as strong if I was not so enthralled by the careful nuances of expert tailoring and sewing.

*How do you experience the relationship between sewing skill or craftsmanship and garment design?*

In my mind, one of those things effects and feeds the other. A certain design idea brings an opportunity to flex a particularly dynamic, impressive sewing technique. And conversely, expert craftsmanship and sewing can open the door to design possibilities that may not have otherwise been present. I find that working on only one side of that coin and not the other leads to dreadfully uninteresting work. I celebrate the dynamic language that emerges when expert craftsmanship and inspired design commingle to make something we have never seen before!

*What were some of the main break-through techniques or understandings you recall that helped take you from beginner to more accomplished sewer/designer? Any notable surprises along the way?*

A handful of techniques stand out in my mind. Here's a list:

**Basting.** So many home sewers seem to be shy about it or gripe about it. Realizing that basting is quick and easy and makes all the difference in the world hugely improved my craft.

**Avoid gadgets and craft store sewing gimmicks.**

My studio is equipped with nothing more than a straight stitch industrial machine, chalk, fabric, pins and basic measuring tools. 99% of the time they are all I need to do my work.

**Favoring seams.** One particularly helpful touch and mark of quality in my mind has to do with how you use the iron, and in particular favoring your seam to one side or the other depending on where in the garment it happens. For seams that are not pressed open this is particularly useful, and that little extra finesse of seeing a seam line slightly rolled or favored to the inside of a garment is such a fine mark of extra care and attention.

*Was there a moment when you realized that designing your own garments was no longer a dream or wish but was going to be a reality?*

Owning and operating a studio and a clothing label of my own has made it all feel especially real.



## Current Process

*Do you continue to sew as part of the design process, or just for yourself, now that you're producing a line, or do you work with sample makers?*

In many cases I am my own sample maker still, or at the very least I am present when the samples of a design are being made by others whom I hire. A significant portion of the design process happens at this stage for me, and I hope to always keep my hand in it for that reason. I cannot express the relief, however, of no longer needing to be the one doing

ALL of the sewing ALL of the time!

*How do classic or traditional men's shirts and shirt details factor into your vision?*

They are absolutely central. I have come to be known as a shirt maker, and see endless creative and artistic potential in mens shirts in particular. Because of their



time-tested and time-honored legacy, the template of a basic mens shirt in my mind is the equivalent of a blank sheet of paper or blank canvas. The basic dimensions are secure, but within that structure there is endless room to play. If a moratorium on all other garment styles were put in place and shirts were all that could remain, I would be more than content for the rest of my life.

*Do you regard shirts as fitted garments...and/or...what's your sense of how a shirt "ought" to fit the male figure? The female figure?*

The fit of a shirt on a man is so linked to personal style and period-specific tastes that it is hard to hold firm to

one particular means of cutting the garment. Currently my shirts are slim and tailored without any pleats for ease or additional fullness. I think of shirts as being an under-layer in many regards, so eliminating the fullness is helpful, but not so much as to create the loss of appeal and sexiness of a shirt that loosely floats around a handsome torso. In time I have no doubt that I will come to explore other cuts and styles - and they will most likely be part of a bigger vision and experience that I will aim to create in future collections. Any designer would be foolish to say there is one and only way to cut a shirt. I'm an artist and I believe our best tool in the studio is flexibility.

*A main theme of my new book is designing around basic block shapes by adding details to them without necessarily changing the basic fit/silhouette, especially as a good approach for beginners to design. Any thoughts on that approach as it may or may not be part of your process?*

What you describe is very much how I design shirts. I am not interested in reinventing the wheel. I much prefer finding variations on a long standing theme and tradition within shirt making. We also cannot forget the importance of the cloth itself. Finding spectacular, unique, fine quality goods to work with is a very straight forward means of creating an exciting design. Fine fabric and skilled craftsmanship alone can be all you need to succeed, so adding details and special moments in addition becomes your own artistic signature on each piece.

*Are you designing for yourself as well as for a specific customer? Who IS your customer? Have you been surprised at all by who that is?*

When I design I follow the spirit of what inspires me the most. I figure if it inspires me, it will likely inspire someone else. I also try to then adapt this inspiration that I feel to fit a particular need out in the world. My recent American Dreaming collection is a fine example of me trying to do just that. Amidst a culture fully loaded



with corporate greed, confining politics and a general lack of passion, I focused on designing a collection that was inspired by America's counterculture of the 1960s and 70s - a moment in history that not only inspires and delights me, but also fully embodies the sense of freedom and artistic liberation that I would love to see more of today.

In taking this approach rather than marketing to a single (narrow) demographic I find that my customers are of a wide variety, and I like it that way. Come to any MC event and you will see hip young fashion freaks mingling with working class folks, or clean cut businessmen mixing with never-say-die hippies. I think this is how the world should work, and I try to create design that facilitates just that.

*Anything you'd like to say to the hobbyist garment maker?*

Learn the rules, and then get ready to break them. Then go back and learn some more rules and break those too. And once you've broken a few, break a few more and come to see that there is great fun in learning how to carefully construct something with thoughtful craftsmanship without losing out on your chance to stumble upon something new or something that excites you.

And a note to all the seasoned tailors and garment makers out there: Please share what you know. There are thousands of young people yearning to learn and master a craft in the way you have, but the means in which we can learn today are becoming fewer and fewer. Share what you know, extend a hand to the young people around you looking to learn and grow and bring these gifts into their own world. This can be your very special way of leaving a meaningful legacy behind, and ensuring that the crafts and traditions we all love so much do not die.

<http://michaelcepress.com/home/>

The screenshot shows the website for Michael Cepress, a clothing designer and design studio. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for PORTFOLIO, SERVICES, STOCKISTS, PRESS, INFO, SHOP, and BLOG, along with a stylized 'MC' logo. Below this is a header for 'MICHAEL CEPRESS • CLOTHING DESIGNER & DESIGN STUDIO'. The main content area features a large image of the Seattle Symphony performing at Carnegie Hall, with a caption: 'LATEST COLLECTIONS: SEATTLE SYMPHONY AT CARNEGIE HALL'. To the right of this image is a portrait of Michael Cepress and a quote: 'Creating garments that people can truly LIVE with...wash, wear, sweat on, love in, dance in... is an amazingly exciting proposition to me, and it's the one I plan to spend the rest of my life investigating.' Below the main image is a 'RECENT NEWS' section with three entries: 'THE ROBBIE TURNER REVUE - APRIL 17 & 19, 2015', 'THE ROBBIE TURNER \*HOLIDAY\* REVUE - DEC 14, 16, 22', and 'OPEN HOUSE THIS SUNDAY, HOLIDAY STYLES AND MORE NEWS FROM MC!'. To the right of the 'RECENT NEWS' section is a smaller image of a performance from 'THE ROBBIE TURNER REVUE - APRIL 17 & 19, 2015'.