



# The Dallas Challenge

A city's innovative past inspires formal looks

BY CAROL J. FRESIA

**T**hreads issues an annual challenge to the members of the Association of Sewing and Design Professionals (ASDP) to spur their creativity and test their design chops. In 2018, we asked the designers to sew unique ensembles inspired by the artistic and technological innovations that characterized Dallas, Texas, in the 1950s. That decade saw the introduction of the integrated circuit by Texas Instruments, multiple achievements in modern architecture, and a visit to the Neiman Marcus flagship store by none other than Coco Chanel.

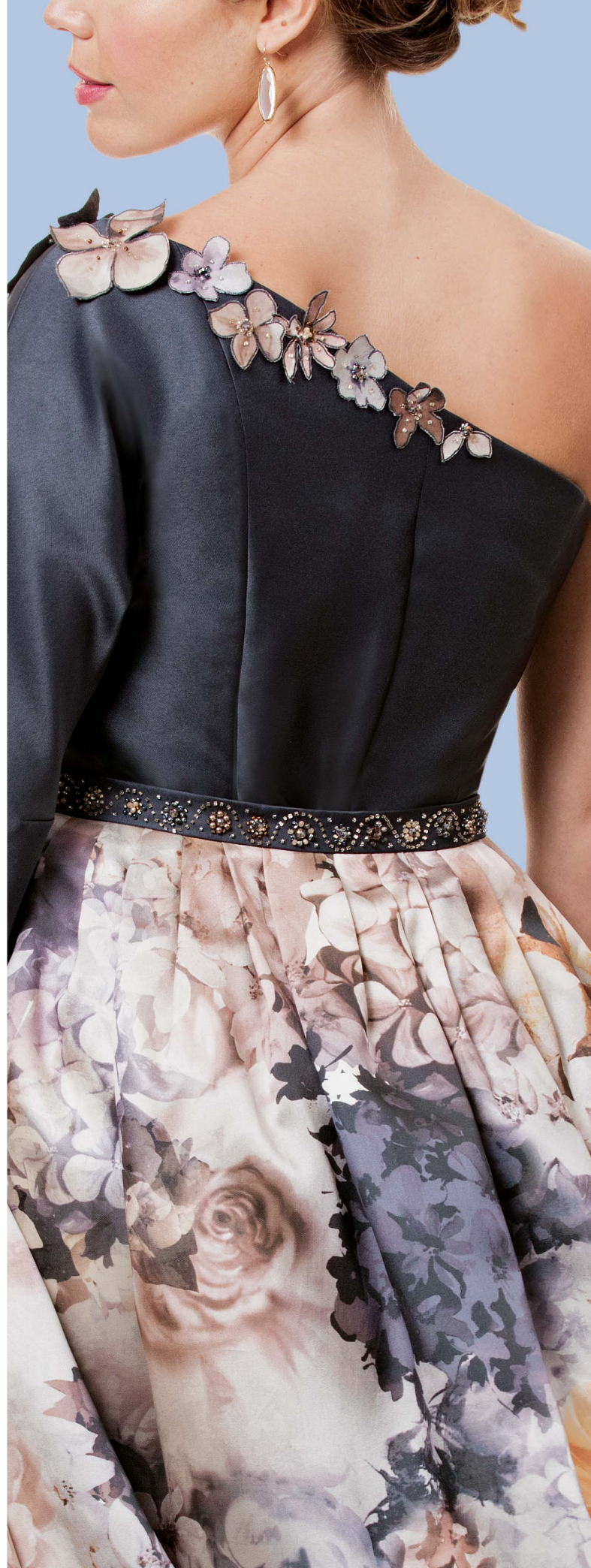
We asked the ASDP members to create a special-occasion look that combined innovation, luxury, and updated 1950s styles for today. The entries were judged on design merit and construction excellence. Judges included Patricia Robison, a past ASDP challenge winner; Michael Crigger, owner of Dallas fabric store Tissu; *Threads* Editor Sarah McFarland and myself. We were impressed by all the entries, and found it difficult to narrow the field to four winners. The finalist pieces were modeled on the runway and the audience selected a fifth winner. Enjoy viewing these expressions of the spirit of Dallas in the 20th and 21st centuries.

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*Carol J. Fresia is Threads Senior Technical Editor.*

*Designers adopted a range of silhouettes, styles, and embellishments to express Dallas's bold and glamorous aesthetic.*

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## Best Overall

### Helen Haughey, *Rhapsody in Black and White*

Helen, who lives in Celebration, Florida, was inspired by the play of light and shade and the geometry in George Dahl's midcentury modern Dallas Public Library and Frank Lloyd Wright's Dallas Theater Center. She also looked to the simple lines of garments designed by Coco Chanel. Helen selected an unusual fabric with a large zigzag pattern in black and white, and draped the slender, one-shoulder gown on a dress form over a bodice and skirt muslin. Creative seaming and pleating enabled her to place the fabric on the bias so its design wraps around the body and forms a fanlike burst at the left waistline.

The fabric is a double-faced Italian woven blend of polyester, cotton, and rayon. The black areas have a woolly texture; the white areas have a satiny sheen with a quilted effect along parallel diagonal lines. While the fabric has an appealing spongy depth, is not especially stable: At each cut, the layers separated. Helen underlined the entire garment with silk organza to give support and stability, even hand-stitching the organza within the body of each piece to anchor it to the fashion fabric.

The gown's silhouette is uncluttered, but the dynamic black-and-white pattern enhances the figure, adding a sense of movement and shape. It's a brilliant pairing of fabric and garment design, and is further elevated by a host of couture-level sewing techniques resulting in a piece that truly reflects the simplicity and luxury of classic Chanel.

- The fabric was pieced throughout to obtain sufficient width for the long skirt and to bring the zigzag points together.
- The bodice is boned for support. The boning is attached to the toile, which is used as an underlining.
- The back bodice is entirely black, for visual contrast with the bold white diagonal of the skirt.
- Couture construction techniques include extrawide seam allowances and hand basting to control the fabric and refine the fit, hand-understitched pleats on the bodice, and a hand-picked side zipper sewn with waxed thread.

**web extra**

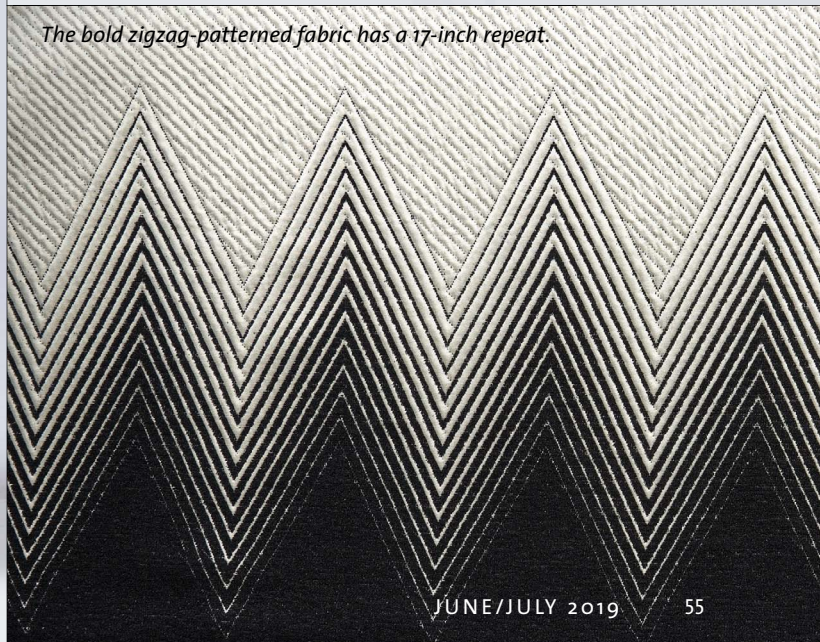
Learn more about the garments featured in this article at [ThreadsMagazine.com](https://www.threadsmagazine.com).

Photos: Jack Deutsch. Stylist: Jessica Saal. Hair and makeup: AgataHelena.com. Styling credits: (p. 52, left; pp. 54-55) earrings—H&M stores, bracelet and clutch—stylist's own, shoes—Jessica Simpson (DSW.com)



*By piecing the fabric, the designer created a dynamic, spiraling effect around the bias-cut skirt.*

*The bold zigzag-patterned fabric has a 17-inch repeat.*



## Best Construction

### Debby Spence, *Digital Delight*

Taking a cue from French couturières of the 1950s, Debby chose to work with the swing dress and fitted sheath silhouettes. The Lancaster, Pennsylvania, designer created a one-sleeve top, fitted pants, and a full overskirt with a large-scale digital print. The textiles and embellishments reflect modern technology and 21st-century Chanel design, while the skirt is reminiscent of the New Look hourglass shape.



Jeweled adornment

Debby drafted the top and pants patterns and cut and pleated the skirt from a single length of fabric. The top features a single dolman sleeve with an underarm gusset, a common 1950s design solution. The asymmetry adds visual interest, but Debby found it tricky to fit, so she added soft boning for support in selected areas.



Dimensional appliqué

Three-dimensional floral appliques, made from motifs cut from the skirt fabric, adorn the neckline. Beads and sequins add sparkle to the blossoms.

More hand beading appears on the skirt's waistband (see detail, p. 53).

All three pieces were underlined with silk organza and lined with silk crepe de Chine (top and pants) or translucent satin-faced silk organza (skirt). Hand-installed linings, hand-worked understitching, and plenty of hidden catchstitching ensure an impeccable finish at every seam and edge.

- The top and pants are made of polyester mikado. Careful understitching controls the edges on the difficult-to-press fabric.
- The skirt is made of polyester/silk zibeline, a heavy, twill-weave fabric similar to mikado, featuring a floral print in tones of blush and gray.
- Jeweled embellishments at the skirt's front waist were fashioned from a purchased necklace and sewn in place by hand.

*Lovely floral embellishment adds sparkle to the elegant ensemble.*

## Most Innovative

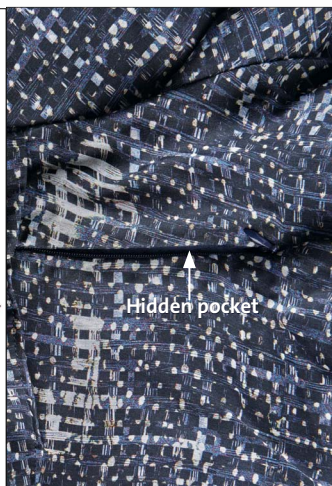
### Denise Severson, *It's a Wrap! Jumpsuit*

Denise, a Janesville, Wisconsin, resident, wanted to create a jumpsuit that was wearer-friendly during the course of a long evening. Her design makes it easy to use the restroom, and its hidden pockets eliminate the need for a handbag. She selected lightweight fabrics (silk/modal chiffon and Bemberg rayon lining).

The jumpsuit updates vintage elements in an unexpected way. Denise began with the Retro Butterick 1952 dress pattern 4790. She redrafted the bodice to a surplice front, standard back neckline, and sleeveless style. The jumpsuit's pants were designed by revising Vogue 8267 (discontinued from the Today's Fit line by Sandra Betzina). Denise made the palazzo pants fuller and redrafted them as wrap pants with open side seams. A wide neckline flounce and peplum give the garment additional movement and hint at the 1950s silhouette.

The bodice's front and back are joined only at the shoulders, and it pulls on over the head. The bodice and pant fronts, which are joined at the waistline, wrap and fasten at the center back. Then, the pants' back waist wraps forward and closes at the center front. Finally, the bodice back wraps to the front and fastens at the waist; its peplum covers the other waistbands.

- All edges are finished with 1/8-inch-wide machine-stitched hems.
- Each of the three waistbands has a different closure. The bodice/pant front fastens with an adjustable bra hook-and-eye set. The pant back has a large skirt hook on the front, for security. The back bodice closes in the front with hidden snaps and hooks with thread loops.



*A full back lining and hidden pockets in the peplum waistline seam are practical features.*



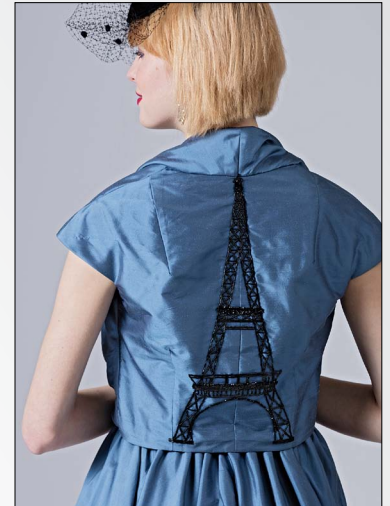
## Best Example of 1950s Luxury

### Jennifer Phillips, *Paris Mon Amour*

Inspired by the luxury and femininity of 1950s Parisian fashion, Jennifer set out to create a special-occasion gown suited for today's woman. The Portland, Oregon-based custom clothier created the ensemble as separates. Her look includes a black velvet bustier, a blue silk shantung bolero-like jacket, a shantung ball skirt, and a fascinator and mitts in black velvet. Together, the pieces are dramatic and opulent.

Jennifer, a bridal specialist, applied her knowledge of gown construction to the

ensemble's many details. She developed the design via draping and patternmaking. She underlined the shantung with silk organza for stability and body and included boning and bust cups in the bustier for support and shaping. A multilayered, full petticoat creates the extravagant silhouette of the 1950s.



- The petticoat's layers were cut from assorted fabrics, some featuring decorative borders.
- A band of wide horsehair braid bolsters the skirt's hem.
- In addition to the crystal brooches at each side of the jacket front, Jennifer hand-beaded the outline of the Eiffel Tower on the jacket's back, in jet beads.

*With yards of rich silk fabric, the gown moves beautifully and makes a sumptuous statement.*

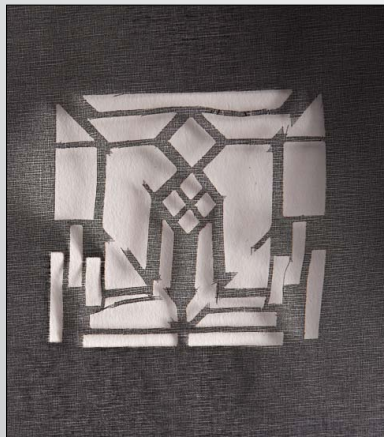
## Audience Choice

### Terri Tipps, *Sophisticated Glamour*

A resident of Frisco, Texas, Terri has always been drawn to fashion of the 1950s. She finds women's clothes of that era flattering and feminine, and even the most serviceable pieces have a pleasing romanticism. Familiar with the Dallas area, Terri knows that the city is and was a hub for major technology companies. To wed these ideas, she designed a four-piece evening ensemble, comprising a black bustier, pink satin cigarette pants, a vibrant, vintage taffeta overskirt, and a capelet in black organza.

Although Terri was strongly influenced by the midcentury silhouette, she employed up-to-date details to enhance her outfit. She inserted small pockets on each side of the skirt for convenience, something few vintage dresses provide. Three magnets close the skirt at center front so it can conveniently fold back to reveal the pink pants, in a hostess pajama-inspired style.

The most innovative feature is the laser-cut embellishment on the capelet. Terri developed an ornate motif based on stained-glass window designs by Frank Lloyd Wright, and had it laser-cut into the fabric. This created a delicate, lacelike design element. It is fragile, however, and is suitable only for the most decorous occasions. The outfit looked gorgeous on the runway, and Terri's peers honored her with the Audience Choice award.



*Delicate laser-cut details on the capelet were inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright.*

- The capelet closes over the shoulders with 40 covered buttons and loops.
- The hemline is embellished with double layers of 6-inch-wide horsehair braid.
- The simple strapless top is made of stretch satin, with a separating zipper; it's easy to wear and comfortable.



Photos: Jack Deutsch. Stylist: Jessica Saal. Hair and makeup: Agata Helena.com. Styling credits: (p. 52, right; p. 58) earrings—Jcrew.com, shoes—Betsey Johnson (DSW.com); (p. 59) earrings—Jcrew.com, shoes—I.N.C. International Concepts (Macys.com).