



Zoe Hong doesn't remember a time when she didn't want to work in fashion. "I grew up wanting to be a fashion designer," she says. After graduating from high school, she attended the Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles, where she earned a bachelor of fine arts degree. She started working in the industry in Los Angeles right away, first as an assistant designer, then as a designer. Eventually, she moved to San Francisco where she continued in the fashion profession.

IN THE CLASSROOM

The teaching trajectory of her career emerged while she was helping organize an art and design event in Oakland, California. While meeting with one of the showcase's fashion designers before the event, Hong critiqued his collection, suggesting things he fix before the exhibition.

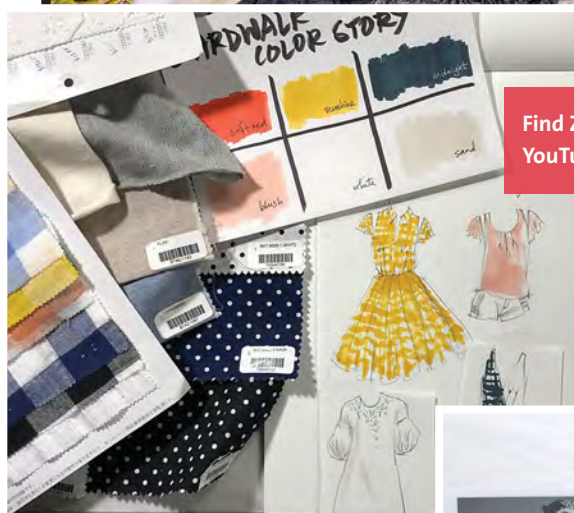
"And he said to me, 'You just told me 27 things that were wrong with my pants and I didn't feel like killing myself. You have a knack for critique that's not soul-crushing. Have you ever considered teaching?'" Hong says, laughing. As anyone who has ever received a design critique knows, this is indeed a gift.

That designer was a senior at the Academy of Art University in San Francisco and he arranged for a meeting at the school. The Academy was eager to have her. "I didn't know how I would respond to teaching. So I asked for just one class, and I fell in love with it immediately," she says.

Zoe Hong

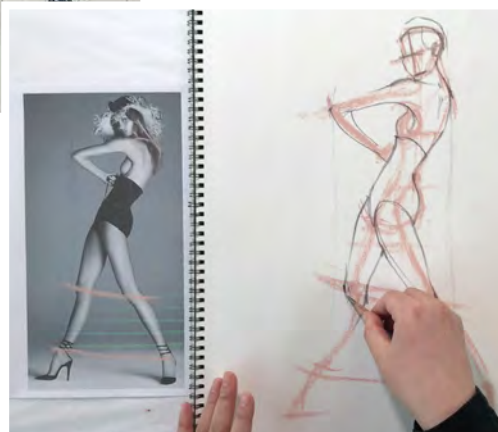
THE FASHION DESIGN TEACHER WE ALL NEED

A talent for in-person teaching and a love of mentoring fashion students led Zoe Hong to develop a popular YouTube channel that covers just about every aspect of fashion design education.



Find Zoe Hong on YouTube at [YouTube.com/c/ZoeHongTeaches/videos](https://www.youtube.com/c/ZoeHongTeaches/videos)

Collection development, fabric selection, fashion illustration, and more are part of Hong's extensive video curriculum.



TEACHING ON YOUTUBE

The following semester, Hong asked for more classes and taught there for a few years before beginning her YouTube channel in 2015. “My sister was actually the one who thought I should do a YouTube channel,” Hong says.

“She thought that my personality was well suited for it, and I, at the time, thought it would be a good idea to have these videos up there because I had so many students where English was not their first language. And I didn’t want them to take video in class. I wanted them to pay attention to the demo.” YouTube videos offered a way for the students to review and supplement what they had learned in class.

“The channel blew up bigger than I thought it would and I got really busy with it,” Hong says. “I left my teaching position. I miss teaching in the classroom and wish I could go back to it, but this is a far more interesting and varied career path for me.”

The YouTube channel is filled with how-to videos on all aspects of the fashion design business, from fashion illustration to garment construction, pattern drafting to design techniques, and fashion history to fabric tutorials. There’s even advice for launching your own fashion-based business.

INDUSTRY EXPERTISE

Hong is completely engaging to watch and learn from. She’s funny, honest, obviously knowledgeable, and able to deliver all sorts of instruction and advice clearly. Her videos aren’t just for aspiring fashion designers. For those who sew for themselves, her garment construction and fabric videos will likely be of specific interest, though most of what she teaches constructionwise might differ from how they learned to sew.

Hong teaches garment construction from the ground up. “I teach it on an industrial level, closer to how it would be done in a factory or sample room setting. I answer a lot of questions as to why something is the way it is in home patterns and what happens if they want to change something,” she explains. Learning how garments are constructed in a factory “allows people to think more adventurously about other projects that they might want to work on because they’re understanding more of the foundations of garment construction.”

She notes: “Many home sewers decide that, because they have this previous love of sewing, they actually do want to go into fashion and they start watching my fashion design videos, too.”





BODIES AND FABRIC

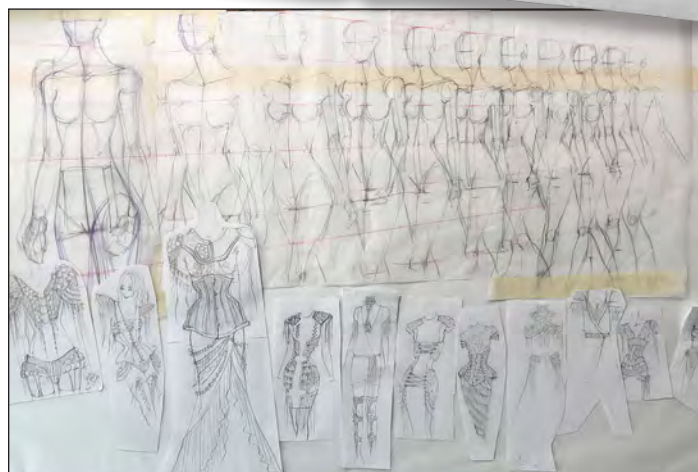
According to Hong, the two things fashion designers need to know backward and forward are bodies and fabric. Fabric is, after all, a fashion designer's true medium.

One way to get to know bodies is through figure drawing. Hong teaches figure drawing on YouTube and Patreon by delving into anatomy, especially the bold points you see on the skin's surface—like the elbow and clavicle ends.

She also talks about body movement in the class. "When you construct a jacket, you need to understand how people's shoulders and arms move so you can accommodate those movements," she explains.

After figure drawing classes, Hong recommends learning how to draw clothes on bodies. "If you understand how your fabrics and your clothes are going to fall on the body, it's really going to help you visualize."

In her Fashion Design 101 class, Hong does "a really slow, deep dive into the fashion design process where it mimics as closely as [she] can how the industry works." She explains in detail how the creative director puts together a collection's inspiration and direction as well as the color story. There are specific "color people" who put together the color story and merchandisers who pull their fabrics according to that brand's budget. After all that, individual designers are given items to draw and design specific garments. Hong critiques every homework assignment that crosses her desk.



From preliminary sketches to a fully illustrated lineup, Hong shows the process of designing a collection inspired by American football padding.

A BETTER FASHION INDUSTRY

Hong is committed to teaching for a better, more sustainable fashion industry. She started her clothing line in 2007 with the tag, “future heirlooms.” She wanted her clothes to be passed down through generations—dresses that daughters would steal from their moms’ closets.

“I always felt that the strongest vein of sustainability we should consider is the idea of buying fewer things, buying better things, and keeping things longer,” Hong says. While she’s aware that the fashion business has made strides with new technologies, materials, and supply chain practices, she doesn’t feel the majority of consumers truly care about those things.

The real sustainability problem (and solution) lies with the idea of respecting clothes. “We have this fast fashion problem because . . . people don’t respect clothes. They don’t respect the people who make the clothes, the people who earn 30 cents a day,” she says.

Hong’s “teaching for a better fashion industry” philosophy is wrapped up in bringing clothes a new kind of respect, similar to how the farm-to-table movement has made us willing to pay \$25 for a burger because we know exactly where it came from. She believes the fashion industry itself needs to embrace that kind of thinking and marketing, in order to influence consumers’ attitudes.

“And so, not only is it sustainable for the earth, but it is ethical to the humans who make the fashion,” Hong explains. Because, she believes, ultimately, you can’t have sustainability if you don’t address the people. It’s all wrapped up in the ethics of manufacturing. “I have this hope that I can influence the next generation of designers and creators and fashion manufacturers to do everything a little bit better, to be a less toxic industry.”

Vanessa Nirode is a patternmaker and tailor for TV and film, as well as a freelance journalist. Look for her shop, setgirlz, on Etsy.com.



Hong created a one-of-a-kind patchwork and boro-inspired coat.



Hong’s engaging personality and industry expertise combine for online teaching success.

web extra

Read an extended version of this profile at [ThreadsMagazine.com](https://www.threadsmagazine.com).