Guidance on design for longevity – tailoring

Extending the lifespan and use of garments is one of the most significant ways of reducing the environmental impact of clothing.

**Product overview**

- Tailoring refers to formal wear such as suits, jackets, skirts, trousers and coats.

- It is related to certain types of occasionwear: the key difference is around frequency of wear. In this category, the focus is on items to be worn daily or many times in a week.

- Longevity is expected of tailoring, and is valued. Bespoke items are often long-lasting and handed down between generations, while mid-market tailored items may last several years.

- It is generally assumed that higher price points imply longer-lasting items – reflecting fabric quality and skill in construction.

- Tailored garments are generally less susceptible to fashion trends than other types of clothing.

- They tend to be discarded when they no longer fit or when they no longer look smart: however, they are less susceptible to wear and tear, staining etc. than many other categories.

**Top five solutions**

- Using high quality outer fabric and ensuring lining and interlining are compatible.

- Applying classic styles, cut and colours, and building-in features to allow easy adjustment size and shape alteration.

- Including clear guidance and advice on the care label.

- Where possible utilising detachable elements, such as collars or linings, which can be replaced when worn.

- Providing a specialist aftercare service, as well as mending and repair advice.

*Extending the average life of clothes (2.2 years) by just three months of active use per item would lead to a 5-10% reduction in each of the carbon, water and waste footprints, and cut resource costs by £2bn.*
What limits lifetime?

Tailored garments are generally less susceptible to fashion trends than other types of clothing. They tend to be discarded because they no longer fit, or as a result of damage or wear and tear that affects appearance.

- Areas such as collars, cuffs and hems can become worn.
- Individual components like buttons or zips can break.
- The shape of garments can be distorted, or creasing or shrinkage can occur after washing or cleaning. This is a result of the different properties of the fabrics used as outer cloth and those used as linings.
- Changes in the body shape of the wearer can mean that items no longer fit, or no longer look as smart as required. This is a common issue when garments are unworn for long periods.

Around **30%** of clothing waste ends up in landfill.

The waste footprint for clothing is estimated at **1.2 million tonnes**, equivalent to **5%** of UK household waste.
Recommendations on fibre and fabrics

Choice of fibre and fabrics has a major influence on the longevity of tailored garments. While decisions will depend on the price point of the garment, the general principle that higher quality fabrics last longer is particularly important for these items, where longevity is expected.

- Natural fibres such as wool or a silk or linen blend are generally considered a better choice for longevity than synthetics. Natural fibres tend to resist dirt and odour better.

- Where it is not commercially feasible to produce garments in 100% natural fibres, wool mixes generally offer the best quality for the price.

- Polyester blends will help with abrasion resistance and shape retention. Pure silk is not recommended.

- For woven fabrics, key criteria include a high tear strength and low seam slippage.

- Extensive testing is recommended, particularly around colourfastness against perspiration and in washing or dry cleaning. Wash tests are best conducted at 10 degrees higher than the wash temperature stated on the care label.

- When testing, it is important to consider not only the properties of each individual fabric, but also the combinations. In particular, testing can help identify where fabrics used as interlinings may not withstand the cleaning processes recommended for the outer cloth.
### Recommendations on design and manufacture

The fundamental principle underpinning design and manufacture of tailoring is that customers expect longevity.

- Classic cuts and colours are recommended, rather than following fashion trends. This will increase overall longevity and frequency of wear.

- Seasonal colours can be used effectively as highlights, such as piping or contrast stitching, or for linings.

- Longevity can be further increased by designing items that can be easily adjusted and altered over time – for example, by including detachable elements, such as collars or linings, which can be replaced when worn.

- By designing-in features such as seam allowances, a choice of waist fastening widths, and the use of elastic in waistbands, designers can protect against changes in body shape. These features can be easily included in ready-to-wear garments.

- Mass manufacturing processes can adopt some of the practices of skilled tailors to increase lifespan – such as including interlinings to protect seams and preserve shape. Interlinings and top cloth need to be aligned in the same direction of the grain to avoid distortion.

- To ensure seam security, top-stitching for seams is recommended. Appropriate-size needles can prevent seam puckering, and minimise distortion of warp and weft yarns. Where garments are unlined, it is important to finish seams to avoid fraying.
**Recommendations on care and repair**

Because tailored garments are often purchased as investment pieces, with longevity in mind, consumers are potentially more receptive to messages around the correct care for the garments and options such as fitting, alteration and repair services.

- Accurate care instructions are essential – whether for dry-clean items (i.e. most wool items) or machine-washable garments.

- For dry-clean garments, there is an opportunity to encourage spot or steam cleaning, to remove minor stains and reduce the frequency of dry cleaning to prevent fibres from breaking down. Consumers may need guidance on how to spot or steam clean.

- To facilitate simple home repairs, spare buttons and matching thread can be provided as applicable.

- As specialist skills and machinery may be required for repairs and alterations, there is an opportunity to develop specialist aftercare services or identify companies to recommend to customers.
Recommendations on re-use and discard

Because tailored garments do last for a long time, there is a strong second-hand market for them, through charity or vintage shops.

- Retailers can provide advice on garment labels and their websites about options for re-use, including online resale, charity shops and swap or swishing events.
- Garments designed in classic styles and colours are more likely to be re-used, particularly where the design allows for modification.
- Garment design can affect the ease with which clothes are recycled. Using a single fabric facilitates recycling, but where multiple fabrics and components are used, there is scope for designers to make it easy to disassemble these, without compromising the robustness of the product.
- There are also potential business opportunities to develop ‘buy back and resale’ or hire services for tailoring – drawing on the model used in men’s occasionwear for the hire of wedding suits or dinner suits.

Alt. of the garment when it no longer fits enables longevity
This is one of a series of Guidance Notes for product development teams offering guidance on design for longevity.

For further information visit:

www.wrap.org.uk/clothing

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