

City University of New York (CUNY)

CUNY Academic Works

Capstones

Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism

Winter 12-16-2016

How I Made an \$880 Jacket for \$37

Hayley Lind

CUNY Graduate School of Journalism

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gj_etds/128

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).

Contact: AcademicWorks@cuny.edu

I put on a white satin slip dress, a leather jacket, and a pair of black booties I DIY'ed with rainbow rhinestones and headed to Bergdorf Goodman for a day of “shopping” alongside Manhattan's elite.

I passed the Balenciaga “city bags,” the brooch-encrusted Alexander McQueen clutches, and the delicate Chanel fine jewelry and found the shiny silver elevator. I pressed the number three and waited for the doors to open like the gates to a fashionista's heaven.

Bergdorf's third floor houses its “advanced designer collections,” which include gold silk brocade coats, merino wool sweaters woven with leather, and kaleidoscope-print dresses with ruffled hems. Among these detailed pieces by the likes of Prada, Altuzarra and Mary Katrantzou, was a more basic garment—a black polyester bomber jacket married with the front panel of a denim jacket by Japanese brand Sacai.

As the brand website says, the Sacai aesthetic centers on reinterpreting classic, everyday styles.

Composed of already-existing styles, the jacket looked out of place and unworthy of its \$880 price tag. I thought I could easily make it myself at a much cheaper cost. When a high-end piece of clothing—like this jacket—isn't made of expensive materials or complicated construction techniques, it is easy to replicate.

It doesn't require sophisticated machinery or even much talent. Making the product myself would also alleviate the ethical ramifications of purchasing a designer knockoff from Forever 21 or Canal Street.

I planned to not only reproduce this jacket, but also replicate a pair of \$300, feather-trimmed MSGM jeans and a \$1400 star-embellished Dolce & Gabbana t-shirt. I prepared to literally fake it until I made it.

The first step was to buy materials. I went to Target at Barclays Center and headed straight to the kids department. It took about 2 minutes to find a denim jacket.

Designed by the store's newest in-house brand, Cat and Jack, the jacket was medium blue with brass buttons. It was \$22, and the color closely resembled the indigo-blue denim on the Sacai jacket.

Fabric shopping took a bit longer. The garment district, located between 35th and 40th streets, is filled with trimming shops, wholesale retailers, and luxury and economy fabric stores. A decent fabric store was surprisingly difficult to find. Many are either hidden on third floors of unmarked buildings or have odd hours.

I decided to visit Mood designer fabrics on W 37th St.—also known as the destination for students at Parsons School of Design and designers on Project Runway.

I had been to Mood once before, so I knew to take the elevator in a discrete-looking building before I reached mass of designer fabrics. The space is filled with fabrics of every color, texture and print imaginable. I admired the metallic red and black brocades and the rainbow floral tapestries before searching for what I actually needed—plain black fabric.

One yard of black rayon fabric with a copper silk backing was \$14. The tag said “From: Alexander Wang.”

I asked a girl in a black and yellow Mood apron if the fabric came directly from Wang's Soho-based headquarters.

"Yup," she said. "I spent a *lot* of time calling the designer to get that fabric."

A designer's leftover fabric was perfect for my designer knockoff.

After visiting the designer fabric store, I went to look for designer trimmings at M&J Trimming.

I first heard of M&J Trimming when looking at the fashion credits in *Teen Vogue* fashion spreads. Often times, the stylist would wrap a ribbon from M&J Trimming around a model's neck or waist.

M&J Trimming is located on Sixth Avenue between 37th and 38th Street.

Squares made of pyramid studs and grommets, white crocheted granny squares, and navy suede ribbons with royal blue rhinestones fill the wall of embellishments.

Walls and walls of ribbons fill the rest of the space. There are silk maroon ribbons, brown ribbons woven with light blue and beige threads, and grey and silver jacquard ribbons etched with intricate patterns.

There is a back wall decorated with the sewing essentials: silk thread, strong scissors, and various-sized needles. The customers at this place are either artsy-looking design students dressed in all black or 60-something grandmothers with a love of crafting.

Other displays contain opulent accouterments like sequin and rhinestone-affixed bridal accessories, bags of metallic-tinted sequins and studs and kitschy iron-on patches shaped like tigers, donuts and roses.

My jaw dropped at the fancy brocade ribbons, beaded fringe, and rosette-affixed pieces. I was intrigued by an embroidered red rose patch, which looked like the kinds adorning the leather jackets and denim in Gucci's most recent collection. I decided to be more practical and settled on a black feather trim and some sequined stars.

I also left the store with a tan grosgrain ribbon, some brass studs and some red sequins— just because I thought they were pretty. I have a habit of buying various findings, such as floral and lace appliques, with the intent of creating something. Often times, my inspiration for creation comes years after the purchase. However, in the fashion capital of America, inspiration is easy to come by.

With the feathers, I intended to replicate a pair of jeans from the MSGM Spring 2015 collection, which featured navy blue and orange feather trim. Black feathers would make the jeans compatible with my wardrobe, which is filled with black tunics and tops.

The red, aqua and silver-sequined stars would embellish the neckline of a basic black tee, which would closely resemble a Dolce & Gabanna t-shirt from spring 2011 that is black with silver stars around the top.

At the corner of Canal Street and Broadway, a woman sporting a black Chanel cross-body yelled, “handbag, handbag?”

I looked through photos of colorful and neutral-colored Louis Vuitton bags, and settled on the iconic Louis Vuitton “Speedy” bag, a mini brown satchel with tan “LV” logos all over it. The lady disappeared for 5 minutes and returned with a black trash bag filled with an eerily close “Speedy” replica.

A high-pitched whistle sounded, and the lady immediately pulled the trash bag over the purse. I figured the sound could have been the police, but it ended up being a false alarm.

The purse had the same shape, brown color and LV logos as the original bag, but the gold zippers looked gaudy, and the beige piping was an icky, fake-looking color.

That bag was a counterfeit.

In simple terms, to counterfeit something means to “imitate.” Fashion counterfeiting, as most people know it, means to produce a replica of a designer’s item such as a handbag or a wallet. In order to protect his or her creation legally, a designer must register a trademark, which will prevent another company from copying his or her name or logo.

The first written trademark law was the Lanham Act of 1946, which fined counterfeiters and allowed lawyers to seize counterfeit items.

The US Patent and Trademark Office defines a trademark as a “word, name, symbol, or device, or any combination thereof.” The law (15 U.S.C. 1127) states that a person has a “bona fide intention” to use his or her mark in business practices. The purpose of registering is to “identify and distinguish his or her goods, including a unique product, from those manufactured or sold by others and to indicate the source of the goods, even if that source is unknown.”

Harley Lewin, a lawyer whose first job was to protect trademarks on band merchandise in 1970, accidentally transitioned into fashion trademarks. In 1980, Lewin met someone who worked for an emerging sneaker company. The company sold shoes logoed with an arced triangle split into three pieces and cut down the middle by a scalene triangle, followed by the word, “Reebok.”

“We went out into the street and sure enough, this fledgling shoe company was starting to have its t-shirts out on the streets as counterfeits,” he said. “Conventional wisdom was that, if you changed the name, you could make the product. And I said, that’s not right, that can’t be right.”

But that was the law. The Lanham Act legally protected the Reebok name, but not its triangular logo.

Lewin wrote the first anti-counterfeiting law, the Trademark Act of 1984, which deemed counterfeiting a criminal offense and protected logo designs as part of a trademark. Its offenders could receive up to a \$5 million fine and up to 20 years in prison. The prongs of the act state that clothing must have the following three attributes to be protected: distinctiveness, secondary meaning and functionality.

The products with the replicated Reebok logo failed the distinctiveness test.

"The standards are whether or not they are likely to be confused with the first," Lewin said, and they were indistinguishable.

The Reebok case was Lewin’s first foray into fashion counterfeit law. He has since won counterfeit cases for luxury companies like LVMH, Cartier, and Christian Louboutin.

Counterfeits—such as Louis Vuitton Handbags and Cartier watches—account for \$116.2 million of the \$1.7 billion seized goods, and take away more than 750,000 U.S. jobs each year. However, these numbers don’t include clothing knockoffs.

Clothing knockoffs—which rarely become seized—are found right in stores.

Lewin said the reason retailers get away with it is because a trademark takes 1-2 years to go into effect, while Zara and H&M can manufacture runway styles and have them on shelves in several weeks.

“We are one of the very few countries in the world that has a gap,” he said. “What that gap means is that fast fashion can copy your product before you have time to get rights.”

Even though these products are technically legal knockoffs, they do the same damage as a counterfeit—they take away income from the original designer. Since retailers typically win the lawsuits, there is no way to calculate how much money the original designers lose.

Copying a garment from a high-end designer also takes away the integrity and the exclusivity of the original product.

"I think designers should be free to look at someone's work, be inspired by someone's work, and change it," Lewin said. What I don't think they should have the right to do is copy it. I don't like people being stolen from."

I told Lewin about my idea to recreate the Sacai jacket. He said it was legally okay for me to create a copy—as long as I would not sell it under the Sacai name.

"Who says you shouldn't copy it?" he said. "I think anyone should have the right to make a bomber jacket."

Laura Pifer grew up in small-town Utah, where her closest encounters with high fashion occurred at her local library. She flipped through Vogue's fancy photo spreads and dreamt of wearing Chanel clothing.

"I didn't read the articles. I was just looking at the clothes," she said.

Pifer decided to take up sewing in middle school, but there was one problem: her local sewing classes focused on old-fashioned craft, not couture.

"They were making quilts. I was like, 'I am making high fashion over here.'" "I would turn in these up-cycled, thrifted projects," Pifer said, referencing a top she made using a denim waistband as a collar.

Pifer turned her unique hobby into a lifestyle, and in 2010, created the blog "Trash to Couture," which posts DIY tutorials on how to create designer-inspired pieces.

There's a joy in making it," Pifer said. "That's why I'm a maker. There's nothing more inspiring to me than taking out the materials and making it for myself. It might be a sort of kind of defiance."

In the past few years, Pifer found internet success through advertising on her blog and creating video tutorials. She attributed her blog's popularity to the high-fashion audience that lives outside of her hometown and demands a more unique product.

"People are more interested in going back to the handmade industry because it's different," she said. "People just want to say, I'm different. I'm standing out."

As Pifer gained credibility as a blogger, fast-fashion sites like shein.com and romwe.com began to contact her for prospective partnerships. Pifer is well aware that these sites—which sell baroque-printed dresses copied from Dolce & Gabbana and nude sweatshirts reminiscent of Yeezy's line—have endured counterfeit lawsuits. She repeatedly declines the companies' offers.

"These sites are always reaching out to me. I'm like, I am not supporting you guys whatsoever," she said. "Counterfeit is not a luxury for me. You couldn't even give it to me for free."

This year, Pifer dressed up as Coco Chanel for Halloween. She made a tweed skirt suit and made her own Chanel pin, replicating the "double C" design. This is called "parody," which passes the "secondary meaning" prong of the trademark act. Also, she was not selling her Chanel outfit for profit.

"I'm very careful about knocking off designers for DIY," she said. "I don't think it's ok to DIY a logo or a designer's work for profit."

Replicating the Sacai jacket was not parody, but most importantly, it wasn't for profit, so I figured I was good to go. Pifer agreed.

"I think that's honestly your own form of design right there and I honestly think there's nothing wrong with that," she said. "You're not selling these and you're not listing them on Etsy."

I took out my denim jacket and the polyester fabric and got to work.

I held off for about a week, because I didn't have a sewing machine, and for someone who lives in a big city, sans car, and can only lift 20 pounds at the gym, it is logistically difficult to acquire one.

My parents, who live in Amish country, came to my rescue. My dad took a day off work and drove 3.5 hours from Lancaster, PA to Brooklyn to deliver my mom's 20-year-old sewing machine.

As soon as I got to work, I realized that the first step to create the jacket didn't require sewing. I cut off the denim jacket's sleeves with a pair of \$3 fabric scissors from Mood. The newly cutout shoulders were surprisingly clean looking, complete with cool-girl frayed edges.

Cutting was by far the easiest part. The trick was to turn this fitted jacket into a bomber, a style originally worn by pilots during WWI. Unlike denim jackets, which are typically fitted, bomber jackets are voluminous all around, but cinched at the cuffs and around the bottom.

Josh Barnett, a 23-year-old YouTube blogger who creates sewing tutorials for different street styles, has an 11-minute video demonstration called "DIY: How To Make A Bomber Jacket." Barnett describes each step of the detailed process, from creating a pattern to sewing the lining and zippers. The video has almost 500,000 views—and Barnett is cute and British—so I figured I couldn't go wrong.

As per Barnett's instructions, I took a bomber jacket (a brocade version from H&M that I already owned) and traced the sleeves onto my fabric. I then cut them out so that each sleeve had two equal sides. I did the same with the back portion of the bomber, which would replace the denim in the original jacket. I didn't have to sew a lining, create a pocket, or sew any zippers, so I was able to skip about half of Barnett's steps.

Then it was time to sew. Threading a machine isn't too difficult. I even called my mother to make sure I did it right. Something still went wrong, and the bobbin kept getting jammed and tangling the threads. I messed with it some more, and the whole piece broke altogether.

This sewing machine was out of commission, and I was more desperate than ever. There were several options: find a friend with a machine, find a sewing lab to rent machine time, or buy a new machine. Nobody in graduate school had a sewing machine for me to borrow, and the cost to rent a machine was \$40 for just one hour. The smartest thing to do was to buy my own machine.

A \$100 Singer Fashion Mate from Amazon arrived at my doorstep the day after I ordered it.

Fashion counterfeiting began in the early 1900s.

In 1858, Charles Frederick Worth founded the first couture house in Paris, defining couture as high-end creations for the upper-class woman. In 1908—the same year “haute couture” became a term—the fashion show emerged.

While designers attempted to curate their audiences, some show-goers could not be trusted. People posed as “fashion buyers” attended the shows and sketched designs as they hit the catwalks. By 1914, these copiers produced more than two million replicas of designer pieces, complete with fake labels sewn into the garments.

Some of the first designs copied were Coco Chanel's tweed skirt suits. Chanel and Madeleine Vionnet even sued a woman who copied 20,000 of their sketches.

This was the early 1900's, so the Lanham Act did not yet exist and fashion designers like Chanel had trouble defending their designs by law.

Counterfeiting couture brands—as demonstrated by Pifer—still exists today, but those who are smart copy design concepts—without using logos or profiting.

Jenny Benoit, managing editor at Allfreeseewing.com, a magazine dedicated to posting DIY tutorials, said she has emulated Gwen Stefani's style since the 90s.

Benoit made a pair of pants with a “Gwen-inspired bumflap,” and ironed the phrase “rebel blonde” onto a t-shirt. She sported this look at a No Doubt concert, and received many compliments on her outfit.

“When I was wearing the bumflap leaving the concert, someone asked me where I got it and I said I made it. They were shocked. Everyone was really impressed with it and thought that it looked like a great representation of what she wore on stage.”

Benoit was flattered, but by no means considers herself a professional sewer, but attributes her successful DIY to dedication.

“It just has to be your passion,” she said. “It takes time and patience and experience, and in order to get to that point, it’s hard work.”

The entire concept of “do-it-yourself” was formed on the basis that anyone could create something himself or herself. It was not intended to be exclusive or judgmental.

Perhaps this is why the idea of “craft fashion” calls to mind grandmothers crocheting and bags adorned with unattractive pins and patches as opposed to luxury.

"Personally, I think it's obvious when it's handcrafted and I'm always a lot more impressed when it looks like something they bought," Benoit said. "Our definition of DIY is dollar-store craft."

DIY’ers have gained popularity in the past decade, by selling handmade products on crafting sites like Etsy or posting demonstrations to blogs or Pinterest. Benoit said it has taken on its own “life form.”

DIY knockoffs and counterfeits have also made their way onto these sites.

While mass-produced counterfeit products emerged in the early 2000s, when TV shows like *Sex and the City* and *The Simple Life* popularized the Hermes Birkin and the Louis Vuitton Speedy bag, DIY counterfeits came about in the past few years. You can find fake Chanel jewelry on Etsy and tutorials for Chanel-inspired jackets and beaded “double-c” logo purses on Pinterest.

Not only have DIY knockoffs and tutorials become popular, but the look of DIY has also become mainstream. Products with a “personalized,” “hand-crafted,” or “one-of-a-kind” feel are now available en masse.

Forever 21 is filled with smiley-face and floral-patched jeans and moto jackets. Topshop sells hand-painted denim and lace-trimmed t-shirts. Zara sells purses in tapestry fabric and button-downs with repurposed pockets.

Willem Schenk, an assistant at Trend Union, a fashion-forecasting outlet, acknowledged that DIY is everywhere.

“There’s a very big trend in do it yourself,” he said. “It’s really about changing old garments into something that is more personal and that is more unique.”

He said that all “trends” have been done and redone, so the future will focus on how garments are made. DIY will mesh even further into the mainstream.

“The idea of human creativity and human touch will definitely define luxury and you can use machines to get there,” he said.

Still, the struggle of man versus machine will be omnipresent. Since increased workmanship takes additional time and money, handmade items will inevitably have higher costs.

It will always be more economical to DIY.

"People like cheap," Benoit said. Even if the fashion designers are making more craft-oriented and basic-looking items, I think people will still want to find a cheaper option. I think it is possible to DIY something and make it look luxurious.”

The Singer machine was easy to thread and the stitches glided smoothly. I sewed the sleeve fronts and backs together, then attached the back panel of the fabric to the back of the denim jacket. Somewhere between thick denim fabric and the excessive amount of pins I had used to attach the polyester pieces, the needle broke. Hand sewing was the next natural step.

Six hours and one mini Netflix series later—and some meticulous ironing, pinning and hand sewing—my denim jacket, with polyester sleeves and reattached denim cuffs, was complete.

Since the sewing needle on my new machine was broken, I decided to sew the feather-trim on the jeans by hand. I took a pair of old Vigoss jeans and folded the hem until they were cropped above my ankle. I pinned the feather trim onto the edge of the denim and hand-stitched the trim to the jeans. In a few hours, I created a pair of trendy new jeans that looked like MSGM’s \$300 version, but only cost \$10 to create.

Now that I had two completed DIY designer-inspired garments, I decided to take them for a spin.

I put on a black t-shirt; a pair of pleather pants, black motorcycle boots and my repurposed, “Sacai-inspired” jacket and returned to Bergdorf Goodman.

In the Sacai section, the pre-fall collection was no longer on outward display. Instead, the mannequins sported fur and grosgrain-trimmed leather and twill jackets from the fall 2016 line.

Tucked into the more obscurely placed racks was some of the pre-fall collection, and the denim and twill jacket was still there one month later.

A saleswoman named Peggy sporting a lurex-woven sweater and a silvery blonde bob, approached me and asked if I needed help.

"Does Sacai sell well?" I asked.

"Sacai's actually one of our best sellers," she said. As she picked out a jacket for me, she said, "It kinda looks like your thing," and smiled.

She pulled out a black bomber jacket with ruffled leather sleeves and asked if I wanted to try it on.

"Sure," I said. It was cool looking, but the sleeves were a little long. She proceeded to tell me that we could have them taken in, and she could fetch someone from the alterations department to get a cost estimate.

After a talk about our mutual love for Florence, Italy and cameo jewelry, Peggy disappeared to find the alterations lady. She handed me a bottle of water while I waited—a mini bottle with a light purple Bergdorf Goodman label. It was probably a Deer Park bottle originally.

A stout lady with broken English arrived and tucked and pinned the leather-ruffled trim that adorned the jacket sleeves.

The alterations would only be \$40, Peggy said, like it was nothing. Granted, it was, next to the jacket's \$2200 price point. Peggy then suggested we leave the pins in the jacket sleeves, and I could go on and purchase the jacket.

There was only one problem—the jacket cost twice as much as my rent. I told Peggy I might come back for it another time—a trick my mother taught me for these situations—and asked her what other stores in Manhattan sold Sacai. I asked about a small boutique I had researched.

"Boy, for a starving student, you sure know where to shop," she said. I put on my replicated Sacai jacket and smiled to myself. She had no idea.