

# **Emilio Pucci: Revolutionizing Textile Design**

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## **Abstract**

Emilio Pucci's influence on American fashion design is undeniable, but his contribution ranges far beyond the runway. During the 1960s and '70s, Pucci explored and pushed the boundaries of textile design through both art and science. His contributions to color chemistry, graphic design and textile engineering laid the groundwork for American designers from Diane von Furstenberg to home goods innovators like Suki Cheema and Nieves Lavi to explore and create fabrics that owe their inspiration to the Italian "Prince of Prints."

## **Pucci and Pattern**

"The body of the woman moved the dress, the dress didn't create the body of the woman" (Taschen 22). Emilio Pucci's innovative and bold use of patterns pushed textile design, color chemistry and pattern/textile engineering in demanding steps forward in the 1960s and 1970s. The results of Pucci overseeing every detail of production are still influential in 21<sup>st</sup> century fashion. Famous for his innovative, colorful, and complex patterns, Pucci revolutionized textile design and how it is used to enhance, emphasize, and flatter the female body.

Emilio Pucci's clothing freed women's bodies by using fabrics much lighter than those being used at the time but he also utilized his patterns to flatter the body. "There were few gathers, tucks, or pleats to hide anything, but the patterns themselves camouflaged, and the cut was ample" (Kennedy 7). Because Pucci had such a great grasp on the engineering aspect of textile design, he was able to utilize such information as textile placement for patterning. A great demonstration of this use of pattern to flatter the body is a silk-jersey dress from 1969 whose "oversized marbled print follows the body contours and suggests Florentine hand-printed paper" (Kennedy 94). Today we see the influence of Pucci's pattern use on the body in collections as recent as Diane von Furstenberg's Pre-Fall 2011 collection. The movement made from the complexity of different shapes and colors complements the body. Although the pattern utilizes darker and more neutral colors, geometric and abstract pattern is a staple characteristic of Diane von Furstenberg's brand, which is a direct inspiration from Pucci.

In the 1960s, Emilio Pucci's patterns were innovative, new, and fascinating. The importance of pattern and his development process influenced textile design as we know it today. Pucci created patterns and designs that were handcrafted and unique and sparked Lord & Taylor's Marjorie Gris to suggest that "Pucci begin signing his work, and

hence the scripted ‘Emilio’ was worked into every print” (Taschen 26). These unique designs were developed from different inspirations and influences in Pucci’s life and surroundings.

### **Pucci’s Influence on American Design**

Unlike previous generic floral and striped prints that had been seen as dominant pattern works in fashion, Pucci’s patterns drew from personal inspiration. Pucci’s patterns developed from the “curving roof of the Duomo opposite his top-floor window and the mosaics from the floor, the scrollwork of the iron gates at the palazzo, the flags of the competing city zones... shooting stars, and waterfalls” (Taschen 29). This inspirational development aspect is seen in work from textile designers Khristian A Howell, Suki Cheema and Nieves Lavi. Kristian A Howell’s colors reflect her life and although not as numerous as Pucci, she utilizes bright colors to make a statement (Howell 1).

Textile designer and print manager Suki Cheema has been greatly influenced by Emilio Pucci in his design process. As Diane von Furstenberg’s lead textile designer and print manager, Cheema uses brilliant color stories and intricate shapes to create prints. He has also developed an independent home collection that utilizes his textile design expertise. In his Spring 2011 ‘Nasca’ Collection, Cheema draws inspiration from India that is similar to Italy’s inspiration for Pucci. "His bright, geometric, hand-silkscreened throws, pillows, napkins, quilts and rugs are inspired by his travels in India, Peru and elsewhere” (WSJ 1). As Pucci did, Cheema designs from location inspiration saying, ‘Travel broadens the mind, but home is where the heart is’ (Cheema 2). Emilio Pucci would agree with this statement as for lifestyle and design inspiration.

Another textile designer today who is strongly influenced by Emilio Pucci is Sharon Lavi who is co-director of Nieves Lavi. Lavi draws inspiration from travel and home town as well, as “Some antique wall tiles spotted on a recent trip to Lavi’s native Israel, sparked a series of prints” (Muir 1). The geometric and colorful prints of the brand Nieves Lavi are strongly influenced by Pucci’s pattern development.

Pucci’s innovation took textile design from the generic level to a unique art. This developed textile design as an art form. Today there are specific textile design majors in universities such as at the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising courses such as Color & Design Theory, Fabric Identification, Natural Forms, Print & Dye, Design for Form and Function, as well as many others are essential to understanding the wonders and expression that can be formed through textile design. This art form and the requirements for learning it are descended from Pucci’s ability to embody “movement, clarity, and unexpected surprises” (Kennedy 67) into textile patterns.

### **Color Chemistry**

Emilio Pucci’s influence on color chemistry was also essential in the advances and processes of colors in textile design today. Pucci pushed for and demanded what did not already exist in color and dye fabrication. Pucci found a lot of his color inspiration from

the world around him, taking photos and bringing them to color chemists. “He took photos to textile chemists and dye experts in Como, Italy, explaining that he wanted to reproduce these colors on fabric. When they told him it was impossible, he worked with them until the process succeeded,” by doing “color variations, mixing colors together, and imagining colors together” (Kennedy 64). Suki Cheema still uses this method of taking photos and translating them into prints and colors.

In any given pattern you could count up to fifteen different colors due to the new technology Pucci implemented for in the 1960s. An article by Noel Barber in a 1963 *Cosmopolitan*, clearly explained Pucci’s process for adding color into pattern.

“Pucci has a special color shorthand, and can create intricate color patterns for as many as 100 scarves in one hour. He draws the sketches for four to five scarves, then they are photographed, and twenty prints of each black and white are enlarged to the size of the scarf. The 100 photo prints are scattered on the office floor. He has lots of bottles of colored ink, each one is numbered, and he says he knows the colors by heart. With a girl following him, Pucci walks among the prints, pointing out certain spaces on the designs, calling out numbers. The assistant marks the correct number in the space, and each print is then colored when the house models are not busy. They paint the design by filling in the spaces according to the number, then the designs go to the printers at Como” (Kennedy 103).

Today this process can be created effortlessly with the help of technology and graphic design. Taking color from images using the eyedropper in Photoshop allows designers to pull color palettes from inspirational images as Pucci did (Gerver 2). Such programs as Photoshop and computer-aided-design (CAD) allow us today to quickly and more efficiently perform the same tasks as Pucci’s pattern and color development.

Graphic Design has also been greatly affected by Emilio Pucci’s color and textile design methods. “Graphic design has been interwoven into the fabric of fashion,” and graphic design has a “vital role in branding” (Victionary 4). What Pucci developed was essentially graphic design without a computer as Pucci “reproduced patterns in many colors to appear as different prints” (Kennedy 98). We utilize the same process through graphic design today.

### **Textile Engineering**

Emilio Pucci understood textile engineering, and his demand for advancements and innovation pushed textile engineers to progress with technology and new fabrication. Pucci “experimented with printing on velvet or toweling, weaving wool with ribbon, hemp with silk, constantly searching for better forms of stretch material,” and pushing “textile technology as far as he could at the time” (Kennedy 110). In 1960, Pucci developed a fabric called ‘Emilioform’ which was an “elasticized silk shantung made by Trabaldo and used for slacks, bodysuits, and even evening wear” (Kennedy 47). Pucci pushed textile firms to create the “lightest silk jersey, the finest cotton batiste, the stretchiest nylon, and the softest cashmere” (Kennedy 47). Pucci’s fabric development

for printing has a strong influence on Sharon Lavi's use of fabrics and printing. "It's not just the print which is important, finding the right fabric to complement is vital. For us that's jersey. It's the perfect canvas as it's so simple and elegant" (Muir 1). Pucci's printing on silk jersey strongly influences the Nieves Lavi brand which is completely composed of prints on silk jersey.

Pucci's understanding of engineering allowed for unique garments. "The prints were not only diverse, but varied within each garment - the front different from the back, and the whole pattern engineered to outline and define the wearer's shape. This was not run-of-the-mill ready to wear, but collections in which each fashion received individual attention from the designer" (Kennedy 103). Textile designer Suki Cheema values individuality in product using "hand silk-screened prints and embroidery techniques that are centuries old, ensuring that no two items are ever the same" (Cheema 1). These printing techniques are direct descendants of Emilio Pucci using individual silk screens.

Emilio Pucci's innovative, colorful and complex patterns had a very strong influence on textile engineering, textile design, color chemistry and how these fields operate today. Because of Pucci, print has become a means of identifying a brand. The development processes for new technology in textile design continue to move forward because of Pucci's strong influence that still exists today in the industry.

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