

Zero Waste Fashion Designer

Job Description

A Zero Waste Fashion Designer creates garments using **sustainable design methods** that minimize or eliminate textile waste. This role involves **reworking materials**, using efficient **pattern techniques**, and designing with **environmental impact** in mind. They develop clothing that **reduces waste** in production while promoting ethical practices and responsible use of resources within the fashion industry.

Salary

WA Average

Entry — \$30,000

Middle — \$50,000

Top — \$70,000

Core Tasks

- **Design** and **develop** garment concepts based on creative direction and community change.
- **Construct** clothing through cutting, sewing, and assembly techniques
- **Modify** and **refine** designs to meet aesthetic and functional requirements
- **Prepare** finished pieces for presentation, production, or client use

Workplace / Environment

- **Work hours**
Approx. 40+ hours/week
(At key milestones, overtime work may be required to meet deadlines)
- **Environment**
Time spent **working in a studio**, using sewing equipment, tools, and materials to design and create garments
- **Travel**
Travel to **fashion shows**, exhibitions, or client locations, with work across different venues

Education / Prerequisites

Education Level

Associate or bachelor's degree in fashion design or a related field

Licensing

No specific license required

Pre-Job Preparation

1–3 years experience in sewing, garment construction, or design and working with textiles, tools, or creative projects

Experience

Soft Skills

- Communication
- Creativity
- Time management
- Attention to detail
- Adaptability

Technical Skills

- Sewing and garment construction
- Pattern making
- Textile knowledge
- Design and sketching
- Understanding materials and fabrics



Career Path: Janelle Abbott

About Me

Artist and Designer at JRAT Zero Waste

Bachelors of Fine Arts in Fashion Design
from Parsons School of Design

High School Life

"In high school I was **homeschooled through ninth grade** because my parents owned a **clothing manufacturing company**. I enjoyed a lot of freedom in my mode of dress and approached clothing more as an art form than a utility. In high school, I did **tap, jazz, ballet, and lyrical dancing**. I thrifted as a hobby, and I would find vintage clothes and cut them up and rework them in different ways. **Thrifting** was also a social activity. My friends and I would thrift together and collaborate on ideas. I did some **theater productions** and spent time by myself **writing and water coloring**. I like to go to the library and check out DVDs. And I also collected records. I listened to a lot of **vintage records**, and I would go swing dancing with my friends."

College Choices

"Figuring out where to go to college was a **bit stressful** in part because of my parents' financial situation. My ideal school was RISD, the **Rhode Island School of Design**, which I applied for but I did not get into. The other schools I applied for were **Pratt in Brooklyn** and **Parsons School of Design in New York City** and **UW** as my safety school. I wanted to go to Parsons because it was the best fashion school in the country. I got into Pratt and Parsons, and decided that Parsons was the school for me. And it was actually a really miserable experience, but now so many years later, I'm glad that I went because I have gotten a lot out of it. Without having gone to Parsons, I don't think I would have learned something like the **zero waste design methodology**, which is really one of the foundations of my practice today."

Into the Real World

"I'm an **artist and designer** who works with **Reclaim Clothing** to make **garments**, works of **art, wearable furniture, tapestries**, and **engage in community** events such as lectures and workshops. I just always knew I was going to go into **fashion**, even though it was a really **difficult industry** and there was a lot of traumas associated with it because of what happened to my parents and business. I was the **costume designer** for my high school for a year or two as well. That was kind of a **disaster** because the drama leader was very difficult to work with but it didn't deter me from **pursuing the career** that I have today. So I think I always knew I would end up here. It just took me a lot longer to get here than maybe I would have initially desired or thought."

About My Job

"Being self-employed is really a balance between responsibility and freedom."

Pros

- "I get to **choose my own projects** and **make my own work**."
- "I can **choose things** that I'm inspired by."
- "I can **pivot** if a project isn't working and find a new way to approach it."
- "I can also **redefine success** for myself."
- "The **freedom that I experience** in being self employed and being an artist is a big part of what I love about what I do."

Cons

- "I **don't get a paycheck** unless I do the work and market the work and sell the work."
- "I **don't get benefits** of traditional employment like healthcare and dental."
- "I **had to be really smart** about how I manage my money and my business in order to make it successful."
- "I think the **finances** of it is what can be the most uncomfortable at times."
- "Certain seasons are a **lot slower** so it can be discouraging."

Fieldwork

- "**Showing during New York Fashion Week** in September and February."
- "**Workshops** and **advocacy performances** around the needs of garment workers."
- "**Installing work** in different venues."
- "Doing **pop-ups**, **visiting shops**, dropping off, **exchanging work**, putting on fashion shows."
- "**Executing** the show in person."

Office Work

- "**Production, cutting, sewing, creating garments** in my studio."
- "**Sewing clothes** is the majority of what I do throughout the day."
- "**Reworking clothing** into new form."
- "Lot of **different projects, commissions, collaborations**."
- "I've **made about 500 garments** every year."

Skills

- "As an artist you need **spatial management** skills."
- "Keep your workspace **organized** in a way that you understand and that works for you."
- "**Develop excel spreadsheet** skills to know how to manage money coming in and going out."
- "Develop skills with **public speaking with clear communication.**"
- "Continue to **invest in writing skills.**"
- "Being **resilient** is a skill."
- "**Discernment** is a very important skill in running a small business."

Education/Experience

- "For fashion design **you don't technically need an education** formally, you can get **education through online** or **smaller groups.**"
- "There's just so **many different careers** available in fashion design."
- "In some ways **education is necessary** if you want to work in the industry."
- "If you want to be self employed making clothes on your own, you can do that **without spending all the money for a 4 year degree.**"

The Future of **Fashion Industry**

"Fast fashion is just getting faster."

"I hope my **business and career continues to develop** in the direction of fine arts more than fashion, in order to **bridge the gap** between the two. The work that I want to create is very **labor intensive, fast fashion** so routinely degrades the labor behind garment production, it invalidates the efforts of garment workers through **inadequate compensation** and **unsafe work environments**, and confuses consumers to believe clothing should be cheap."

"**Fast fashion is just getting faster.** It's becoming more **prevalent**, increasing the amount of waste that's created through garment production today. It could be the case that **it has to get worse before it gets better** in the fashion industry, but as an artist with a fashion practice, I want to demonstrate that there is a different and better way available now."

"I'm hopeful that **young designers coming out**, learn the truth about exploitation in the industry, and understand that they have the opportunity to **change that system** from within. We need both. We need **people inside making change** and we need **people outside making change**. So I'm grateful to be a part of that equation and just hope that over time the issues that we have today will not persist but they will become means of **creative resolution**. This is where I'm centering my business right now."

About Sustainability Ambassadors

We are here to **RAPIDLY ADVANCE A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE**. Empowering **YOUTH** to catalyze community sustainability, **TEACHERS** to integrate rigor with relevance for real-world impact, **COMMUNITY** to drive collective impact.

We support a year-round training program for over 60 highly motivated middle and high school youth, a Teacher Fellows Program, City-County CAP internships, and college-level interns, and work with hundreds of educators to design new models of problem-based, place-based learning around **a shared vision of educating for sustainability**.

Your Green Jobs Future

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Find career opportunities near you now! Use [Career Connect - Washington's](#) tool to find programs to build your career skills.

Interested in a future in solar? Take a look at the [Solar Jobs Census](#) to track solar job growth nationwide.

Explore [RVC's opportunities](#) to work with organizations led by communities of color.

Dive into the [Center of Excellence for Clean Energy's](#) robust career tools in the sustainable energy sector.

Grow your professional sustainability skillset with the [Seattle Youth Good Program](#).

See Seattle's [Clean Energy Resources Map](#) to examine what the city is planning for a greener energy future.

Check out the [U.S. Green Building Council](#) to explore the sector's current opportunities. :

Funder Acknowledgement



King County

Department of Natural Resources and Parks
Wastewater Treatment Division

