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Abstract

Purpose: The fashion scene in Ghana is a dynamic fabric knit together with creative designs. We explore the inspirations and creative processes of Ghanaian fashion designers as they get from studio to catwalk. The objective of the study is to investigate and clarify the inspirations and creative processes that propel Ghanaian fashion designers from ideation to catwalk presentation.

Methodology: The paradigm used was a qualitative research approach. This includes observations, interviews, and portfolio analysis of fifteen (15) selected fashion designers in Sekondi Takoradi Metropolis. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Findings: The findings of the research indicate the diverse range of elements influencing Ghanaian fashion designers' creative processes. This creative journey reflects not only the designers' technical expertise but also their profound connection to their cultural heritage and their ability to translate inspiration into tangible works of art. While the runway remains a traditional showcase for designers, leveraging digital platforms can extend their reach and visibility. In recommendation, designers can explore virtual fashion shows, live-streaming events, or interactive online galleries to showcase their collections to a global audience. Embracing digital innovation can amplify brand exposure and drive engagement with fashion enthusiasts worldwide. Ghanaian designers should collaborate with international platforms, this can help them gain recognition and share their culture with the world.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The study also contributes to theories of creative processes within design disciplines shedding light on the systematic stages involved in fashion design. By applying entrepreneurship theory, we can analyze how Ghanaian designers identify market opportunities, innovate in design, and create value for their businesses. This was validated in the study where designers conceptualize, iterate, and refine their ideas, thus contributing to the broader discourse on creative practice. From a practical standpoint, this study offers valuable insights for both emerging and established fashion designers, particularly those operating within culture-based industries. The study contributes to theory by documenting the systematic creative processes employed by Ghanaian designers, it provides a roadmap for other practitioners to follow, helping them enhance their design practices and navigate the complexities of the fashion industry.

Keywords: *Inspiration, Creative Process, Runway, Fashion, Portfolio, Designers, Fabrics*

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INTRODUCTION

Designers who are working towards developing their businesses to reach the stage of export expansion are key players in contributing to cultural identity and economic advancement in Ghana and are representative of increasing entrepreneurship in culture-based industries. These creative entrepreneurs are the focus of this study (Brydges and Pugh2021). The current fashion scene in Ghana has been considerably affected by what has been coined as the "new global fashion system. (Dzitse et al, 2023)" This new system originated in the 18th century and has become more apparent over the last 50 years. In a journal article by Eicher, Maynard, and Sekine, they describe that after various stages of diffusion of styles, a revolution of "ready-to-wear fashion" led to the process of "production dislocation," where mass production of clothing traded with increased foreign access to markets and the decline in local garment production. (Gill, 2020) With an ongoing past of import liberalization policies and exposure to imports, the Ghanaian garment industry was significantly dislocated and has suffered a relative decline.

This decline then led to the garment industry being regarded as an infant industry with the potential to develop (Sarpong et al., 2023). Steiner's "stage of export expansion" is what Ghanaian designers are trying to reach, as she says it is a long process and a prelude to "competitive manufacture for markets abroad. "The introduction provides a background to the current fashion industry in Ghana and more specifically, the sartorial practices of Ghanaian fashion designers who are contributing to socio-economic and cultural development in their country (Majeed et al, 2023). The fashion industry in Ghana has become a vibrant and buoyant one, which has received considerable attention from the local and international media. Robin Chandler, in her article entitled "Ghana: Fashion Comes Home," describes how international interest in African style has led to mixed results in accessing Africa's indigenous markets (Majeed et al.2021). She provides an account of issues such as how the process of marketing export goods created by international companies by using Africans has increased a certain "influx of symbols of Africa's under-development" of Ghanaian craftsmen who make products for Western consumers. As a result, Africans are depicted as being in need of the products being consumed by Westerners (King et al., 2023). Although the primary concern of the article is about how African designers can gain financial success by using culture-based industries and developing their local and international markets, it gives an analysis of the effects of globalization on African designers and producers. This is just one such article that describes the current effects of globalization and the socio-economic situation of the fashion and art and craft industries in Ghana (Bandauko et al.2022).

An overview of how globalization is affecting the developing world and how it has considerably transformed the production and consumption of cultural goods and services has been illustrated in books such as "Culture and Public Action" by Vijayendra Rao and Walton and "Development and Culture" by John Tomlinson. Globalization has been claimed to be a powerful dynamic making for greater interconnectedness and interdependence of countries worldwide through the exchange of cultural goods and services, people, and information. One significant challenge for Ghanaian designers is accessing international markets due to barriers such as high export costs and limited visibility. This limits their potential customer base and revenue streams. (Aboagye, 2019). Limited access to advanced technology and infrastructure can hinder the design process and the ability to compete on a global scale. Improvements in infrastructure and technology could enhance productivity and quality in design production. (Miyen, 2018). Ghanaian designers often face difficulties in protecting their intellectual property rights, both domestically and internationally. This lack of protection can discourage

innovation and investment in design. Strengthening IPR laws and enforcement mechanisms is crucial to fostering a conducive environment for design businesses. (Osei-Tutu, 2018).

Problem Statement

The fashion industry in Ghana has experienced a surge in attention both locally and internationally, highlighting the potential for economic growth and cultural representation. However, amidst this recognition, there exists a critical gap in understanding the intricate journey Ghanaian fashion designers undertake from their studios to the runway. While the industry is celebrated for its vibrant creativity and cultural richness, there is limited research that comprehensively explores the creative processes of these designers.

One of the central problems lies in the lack of detailed insight into the specific stages and methodologies employed by Ghanaian fashion designers. Understanding their creative processes is essential for appreciating the depth of cultural influence, sourcing of inspiration, and the fusion of tradition and innovation that characterize their work. Without this understanding, stakeholders are unable to fully grasp the unique challenges and opportunities faced by Ghanaian designers as they navigate the global fashion landscape.

Balancing cultural authenticity with global design trends is a constant challenge. While incorporating local elements into designs adds uniqueness and appeal, designers also need to stay relevant in the global market by adapting to evolving trends. Finding this balance is essential for success in the international arena. (Simpson, 2017). There's a need for continuous skills development and education among Ghanaian designers to keep up with evolving design practices and technologies. Investing in design education and training programs can help bridge the skills gap and empower designers to compete effectively in the global marketplace. (Adomako, 2020). With increasing global awareness of sustainability issues, there's a growing demand for eco-friendly and ethically produced designs. Ghanaian designers have an opportunity to capitalize

Furthermore, there is a dearth of research focusing on the socio-economic factors shaping the creative practices of Ghanaian fashion designers. Economic constraints, market dynamics, access to resources, and the influence of globalization all play pivotal roles in shaping the creative decisions of designers. However, the extent to which these factors influence design choices, business strategies, and the overall trajectory of the fashion industry in Ghana remains largely unexplored.

This lack of comprehensive understanding poses significant barriers to the sustainable growth and international competitiveness of Ghana's fashion sector. Without insights into the creative processes of Ghanaian designers, policymakers, industry stakeholders, and development organizations are unable to formulate targeted interventions and support mechanisms to nurture the industry effectively. Additionally, the absence of empirical data on the challenges faced by designers inhibits the development of tailored solutions to address issues such as access to finance, skills development, market access, and intellectual property protection.

In light of these challenges, there is an urgent need for research that delves into the creative processes of Ghanaian fashion designers. By gaining deeper insights into their sources of inspiration, design methodologies, and the socio-economic context in which they operate, stakeholders can identify opportunities to foster innovation, enhance competitiveness, and promote sustainable growth within Ghana's vibrant fashion industry.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for understanding the creative processes of Ghanaian fashion designers encompasses several interdisciplinary perspectives, including fashion studies, cultural studies, entrepreneurship, and globalization. Here's how these theories can inform the analysis:

Fashion Studies: Fashion studies provide insights into the social, cultural, and economic dimensions of fashion. Scholars like Elizabeth Wilson ("Adorned in Dreams") and Joanne Entwistle ("The Fashioned Body") offer perspectives on the role of fashion in constructing identity and expressing cultural values. By drawing on fashion studies theory, we can analyze how Ghanaian designers negotiate cultural heritage and global trends in their creative processes (Wilson, 2003; Entwistle, 2015).

Cultural Studies: Cultural studies offer frameworks for understanding the intersection of culture, identity, and creative expression. Scholars like Stuart Hall ("Encoding/Decoding") and Dick Hebdige ("Subculture: The Meaning of Style") explore how cultural practices are shaped by broader social forces. Applying cultural studies theory allows for an examination of how Ghanaian designers navigate cultural hybridity and negotiate their identities within the global fashion landscape (Hall, 1980; Hebdige, 1979).

Entrepreneurship Theory: Entrepreneurship theory provides insights into the business aspects of fashion design. Scholars like Joseph Schumpeter ("The Theory of Economic Development") and Howard Stevenson ("Definition of Entrepreneurship") emphasize innovation and value creation in entrepreneurial endeavors. By applying entrepreneurship theory, we can analyze how Ghanaian designers identify market opportunities, innovate in design, and create value for their businesses (Schumpeter, 1934; Stevenson, 1983).

Globalization Theory: Globalization theory elucidates the interconnectedness of cultures, economies, and societies in the contemporary world. Scholars like Arjun Appadurai ("Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy") and Roland Robertson ("Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture") examine processes of cultural exchange and hybridization. Applying globalization theory enables an understanding of how Ghanaian designers navigate transnational flows of ideas, materials, and consumer preferences in their creative processes (Appadurai, 1990; Robertson, 1992).

Intersectionality Theory: Intersectionality theory highlights how multiple dimensions of identity intersect to shape individuals' experiences and perspectives. Scholars like Kimberlé Crenshaw ("Mapping the Margins") and Patricia Hill Collins ("Black Feminist Thought") emphasize the interconnected nature of social categories such as race, gender, and class. Applying intersectionality theory allows for a nuanced analysis of how Ghanaian designers negotiate their identities within the fashion industry, considering factors such as gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic background (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2000).

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, we can develop a comprehensive framework for understanding the creative processes of Ghanaian fashion designers, taking into account the complex interplay of culture, entrepreneurship, globalization, and identity. This interdisciplinary approach facilitates a deeper analysis of how designers navigate the dynamic fashion landscape and contribute to cultural innovation, economic development, and social change.

METHODOLOGY

The research design for this study employed a qualitative approach to provide a deep understanding of the creative process and sources of inspiration of Ghanaian fashion designers. Qualitative research allowed for in-depth exploration of the subject matter and was particularly suitable for studying complex and context-dependent phenomena like fashion design. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with selected Ghanaian fashion designers. These interviews served as the primary data source, allowing designers to narrate their creative processes and discuss their sources of inspiration (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Ethnographic observations were conducted in the designers' studios and during fashion events to provide a firsthand account of the creative process and runway presentations (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Existing documents, such as designers' sketches, inspirational boards, and fashion collections, were analyzed to complement the interview and observation data (Bowen, 2009). Ghanaian fashion designers who had gained recognition on both local and international stages were purposively selected for interviews and observations (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). A diverse sample was sought to capture a range of design perspectives. To identify additional participants who may not have been easily accessible through purposive sampling, a snowball sampling technique was used, relying on referrals from the initial participants (Berg, 2009). The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. This approach involved systematically identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. Themes related to the creative process and sources of inspiration were identified and organized. Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring that they understood the purpose of the study, their rights, and the confidentiality of their responses. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of participants in reporting.

FINDINGS

The designers outlined several pivotal stages in their creative journey:

Inspiration: Across the board, designers found inspiration in their Ghanaian cultural heritage. Adinkra symbols, kente patterns, and traditional attire emerged as recurrent sources of creative stimulus. Additionally, Ghana's natural landscapes, bustling markets, and the juxtaposition of tradition and modernity in everyday life were noted as influential sources.

Conceptualization: Following inspiration, designers delved into conceptualization. This phase involved sketching ideas, crafting mood boards, and shaping a cohesive vision for their collections.

The Creative Process

The participants also specified the systematic creative processes that their collections have to go through:

Design brief is a fundamental stage in the creative design process mentioned by all the fashion designers interviewed. This is in line with Cumberbatch & Bannerman (2012) who explained that a design brief in fashion creative design is a foundational document that outlines the scope, objectives, constraints, and expectations of a design project. They also said It serves as a roadmap to ensure that their designs align with the client's vision and requirements.

The participants also indicated the next stage as developing a detailed *customer profile*, which assists fashion designers in creating clothing that resonates with their target audience, resulting in increased customer satisfaction, brand loyalty, and ultimately, business success. (Solomon et al 2021)



Figure 1: These are some of the Things This Particular Customer Likes: Fufu and Light-Soup, Local Fabrics, Nice Buildings

Source: Filled Data, 2024

They described the third stage of their fashion creative design to be the development of a **trend board**, also known as an inspiration board or mood board, which is a visual tool used to gather and communicate inspiration, ideas, and trends for a design project or collection. Tungate (2014) states that Trend boards play a crucial role in the design process by providing designers with a visual reference point and helping them to conceptualize and develop their ideas cohesively.



Figure 2: This Represents Some of the Styles Invoked

Source: Field Data, 2024

According to the participants another important stage is the **theme board** which is a visual representation of the concept that inspires the designer. According to Tungate (2014), it serves as a foundational tool for designers to communicate the mood, aesthetic, and narrative of their designs, helping to establish a cohesive and compelling creative direction.



Figure 3: This is the Concept That Inspired the Designer

Source: Field Data, 2024

The participants describe **Motif boards** as a stage that helps them to refine and develop their ideas, Francesca and Joanne (2019), explain that a motif board is a visual tool used to explore and showcase specific motifs, patterns, symbols, or design elements that are central to a collection's theme or concept.



Figure 4: These are the Motifs that Provided the Visual Appeal for the Designer

Source: Field Data, 2024

The **colour board** provides the designers with a comprehensive overview of the colors that will be used in the garments, accessories, and other elements of the collection, helping to establish a cohesive and harmonious visual identity.

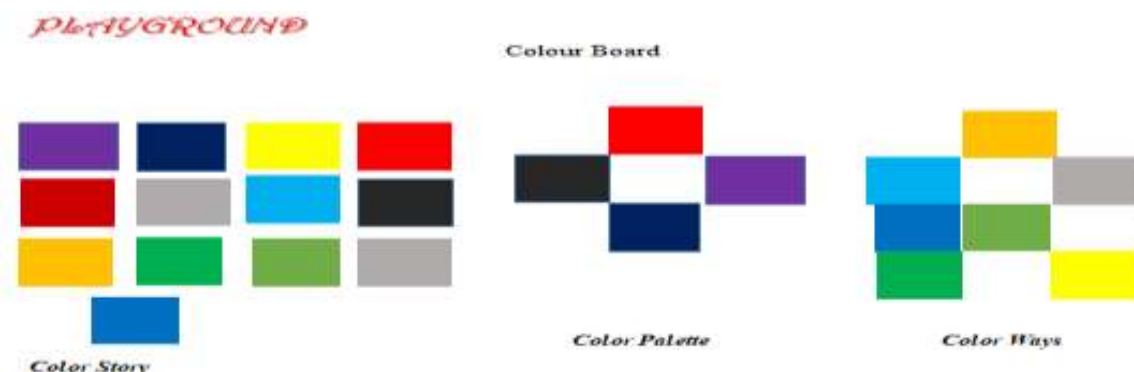


Figure 5: These are the Colour Options for the Designing

Source: Field Data, 2024

Style board serves as a visual roadmap, helping the designers to define and refine the overall style, aesthetic, and mood of their designs.



Figure 6: Front View of the Style One



Figure 7: Back View of the Style two

Source: Field Data, 2024



Figure 8: Front View of the Style One



Figure 9: Back View of the Style Two

Source: Field Data, 2024

A **fabric and trimming board**, according to the participants is a visual tool used by the designers to showcase and organize the selection of fabrics, textiles, and trimmings that will be used in a collection. It includes fabric swatches, texture, and weight, trimming, and embellishments.

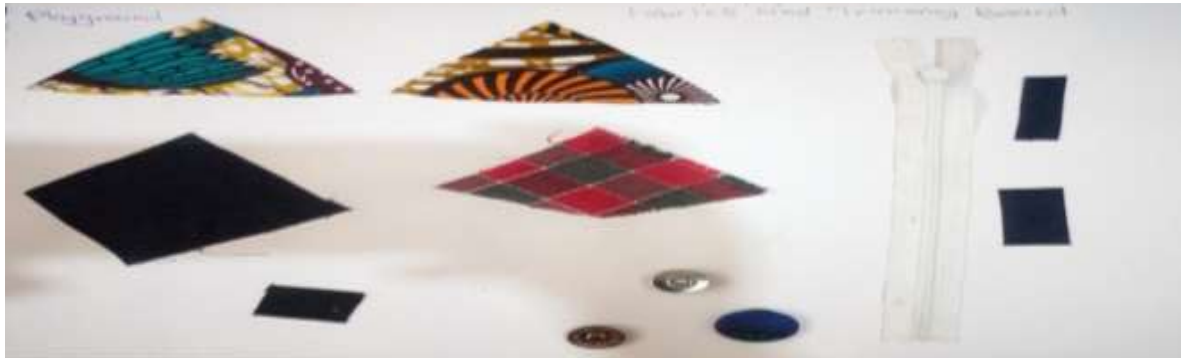


Figure 10: These are some of the Fabrics and Trimmings Alternatives Available for the Designer to Select

Source: Field Data, 2024

This Design board comprises the design details of the garment including colour and texture. Below is the front and back view of the style.



Figure 11: Front View of the Designed Style One Figure 12: Front view of the Designed Style Two

Source: Field Data, 2024

The participants explained that **Pattern-making** is a stage in the design process that involves translating the designer's sketches or ideas into precise measurements and shapes that can be replicated to create multiple garments with consistent fit and style.

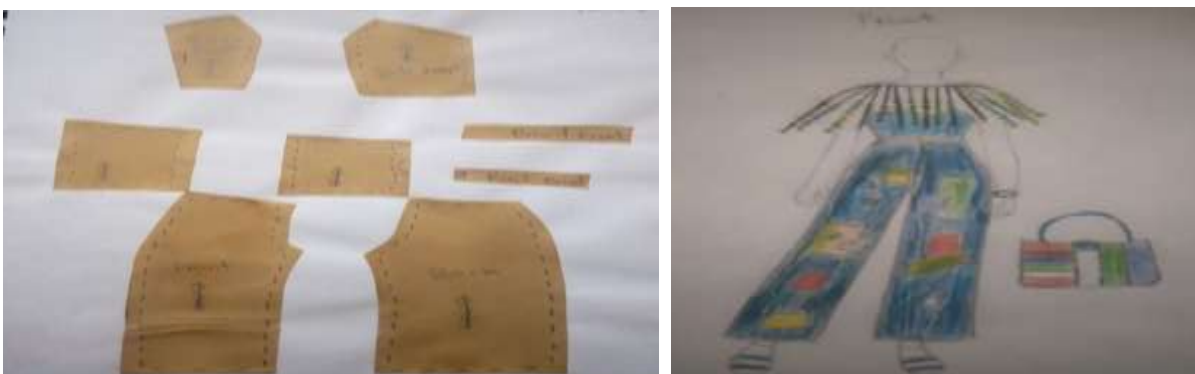


Figure 13: This is the 1/5 Scale of the Patterns for Style One

Source: Field Data, 2024

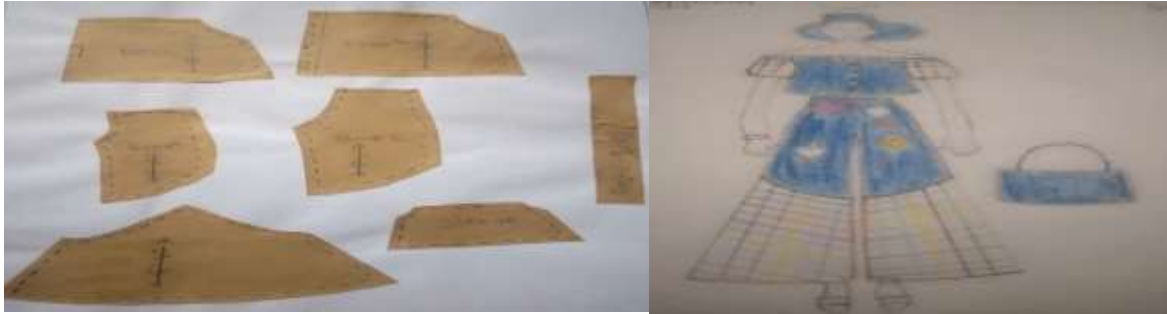


Figure 14: This is the 1/5 scale of the patterns for style two

Source: Field Data, 2024

The pattern made is then used to create **toile**, a prototype that allows the designers and pattern makers to test the fit, silhouette, and construction of the garment before cutting into the final fabric.



Figure 15: One of the Prototypes that were Subjected to the Necessary Correction

Source: Field Data, 2024

Fabric preparation, Laying, and cutting out: after the corrections have been done on the toile, the fabric preparation laying out, and cutting are done. The pattern pieces are placed on the fabric, beginning with larger pieces.



Figure 16: Fabric Preparation, Laying and Cutting Out

Source: Field Data, 2024

Assembling of the Garment: after the cutting out, the pieces are then stitched together to make the final garment.



Figure 17: Assembling of the Garment

Source: Field Data, 2024

Ironing is done to enhance the finished appearance of the garment and to remove any creases and bulkiness in the garment that occur during the sewing process. The seams are also pressed open for the seam to lie flat to enhance the beauty of the garment.



Figure 18: Ironing the Finished Dress

Source: Field Data, 2024

The runway is then a showcase for the designers to unveil their latest creations to an audience of industry professionals, media, buyers, and fashion enthusiasts.



Figure 19: Finished Garment on Runway
Front view of style one



Figure 20: Finished Garment on Runway
Back view of style one

Source: Field Data, 2024



*Figure 21: Finished Garment on Runway
Front View of Style Two*



*Figure 22: Finished Garment on Runway
Back View of Style Two*

Source: Field Data, 2024

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

In conclusion, From the detailed account of the creative journey provided by the designers, it's evident that their process is both systematic and deeply rooted in their cultural heritage and artistic inspirations. The journey begins with a profound exploration of Ghanaian culture, drawing inspiration from symbols, patterns, landscapes, and the vibrant juxtaposition of tradition and modernity. This cultural immersion lays the foundation for a creative process marked by meticulous planning and execution.

The designers meticulously navigate through various stages, from conceptualization to fabric selection, pattern-making, and garment assembly. Each stage is informed by a clear vision, as outlined in design briefs and customer profiles, ensuring alignment with client expectations and target audience preferences. Trend boards, theme boards, motif boards, and color boards serve as visual guides, facilitating the coherent development of ideas and aesthetics.

The process culminates in the creation of prototypes and final garments, meticulously crafted and refined to perfection. Ironing and finishing touches enhance the quality and presentation of the garments, preparing them for the spotlight of the runway. The runway becomes the stage where their creations come to life, captivating audiences with their fusion of tradition, innovation, and artistic expression.

Recommendations

Theory

While the designers have already tapped into their Ghanaian cultural heritage for inspiration, they can further enrich this aspect by engaging directly with local artisans, exploring historical archives, and participating in cultural events.

Practice

Design briefs serve as roadmaps for the creative process, ensuring alignment with client expectations. To enhance effectiveness, designers can adopt an iterative approach to design briefs, soliciting feedback from clients and stakeholders at various stages of the process. This ongoing dialogue can lead to more tailored and client-centric designs. Developing detailed customer profiles is crucial for creating designs that resonate with the target audience.

Designers can further leverage customer engagement strategies, such as surveys, focus groups, or social media polls, to gain deeper insights into customer preferences, lifestyles, and aspirations. This proactive approach can foster stronger connections with customers and drive greater brand loyalty. Pattern-making is a critical stage that requires precision and accuracy. To streamline this process, designers can invest in digital pattern-making software and technologies, enabling faster prototyping and iteration.

Policy

In an era of increasing environmental awareness, developing policy to integrate sustainable practices into the creative process is paramount. The policy could guide designers as they explore eco-friendly materials, adopt waste-reducing techniques, and prioritize ethical sourcing and production methods.

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