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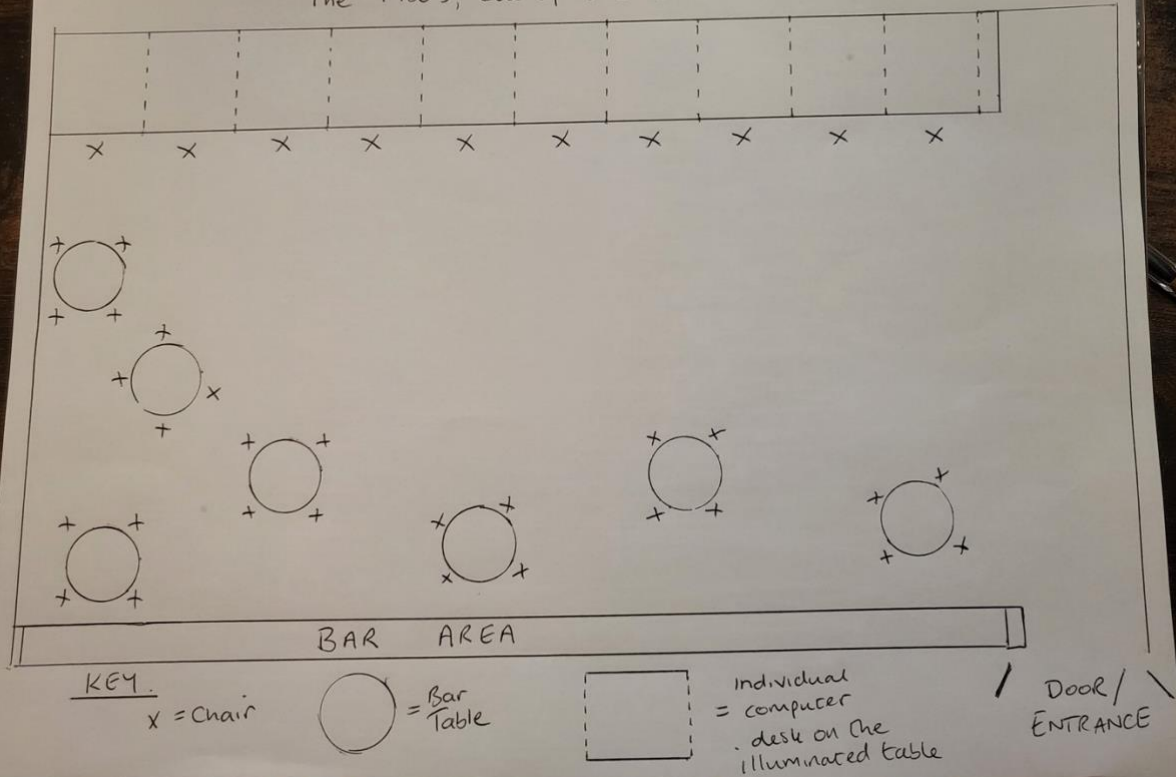
Student Number – 2104750

Course – BA: Surface Pattern Design (Maker)

Word Count - 850

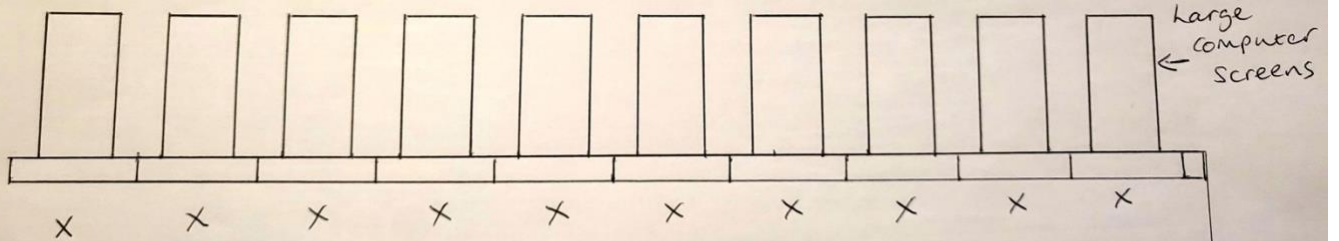
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The 1980's, Cut of The Culture





WALLS for Projection on to.



The exhibition is entitled 'The 1980's, Cut of the Culture'. It appeals to a wide range of observers, those who reminisce on this particular time of their lives, those who wish that they had been able to experience such an extraordinary flamboyance of style and anyone who is just simply curious about its fashion.

I have curated a space within the O2 Academy2 Birmingham, formally known as the Digbeth Institute. As it is usually a music venue it creates an atmosphere indicative of the 1980's fashion origins of nightclubs and hangouts. Birmingham, as a location, is easily accessible for all regions within Britain due to its efficient infrastructure of motorways, trains, and other methods of public transport along with its position of being in the Midlands. The location needed to be realistic in regards its obscure position in a less popular area of the city, devoid of fancy bars, restaurants, and department stores. Its dated, windowless interior of wooden tables and chairs and a long, straight bar which takes up a whole wall are essential to the experience. The exhibition suggests to the public that it was this kind of environment which created the associations which led to the famous looks of the 80's, especially that of the New Romantics. One of the most iconic clubs of the time was the Blitz club in Covent Garden. It was here that the New Romantic genre began. York (1980, quoted in Jones, 2021 p.7) describes the members intentions as

"The British future style is a dandy one – it's software rather than hardware. What they're setting up is the cellar club of the future rather than the next shuttle station. They're working on the great look, rather than the five-year plan".

Lighting is very important to create the perfect ambience and has been carefully considered. The room is dark enough to create the essence of the mood of the time but also light enough to see the exhibits without missing any detail. Lighting inspiration has been taken from the Great Expectations Exhibition by Casson-Mann (Dernie, 2006, p.138).



Figure 1. (Casson-Mann: *Great Expectations*, 2001)

As in Figure 1, a long, illuminated table is present, but has been situated along the length of the wall facing the bar to allow freedom of movement within the middle space. In a bid to enhance the

exhibition, specialist computers have been brought in to create a virtual reality experience, an increasingly popular additive Dernie (2006, p.74). On arrival every visitor is photographed. Permission is granted by means of a signature on a form detailing the laws of the Data Protection Act of 2018 along with the reasons for the picture. It also includes an option to not take part. The image is available, should the person wish, to be used to produce a virtual experience of how they would look in interchangeable outfits from the New Romantic era. Copies of the images are available to purchase.

The main theme of the exhibition is to bring alive the fashion and designs unique to the time, by means of visual and haptic senses. The so-called silhouette, an upside-down triangle shape created by large, padded shoulders then thinning downwards to tapered trousers or a pencil skirt, was a popular shape of the period. It was sometimes referred to as The Power Suit, especially with regards to women. Designers using this shape were people such as Issey Miyake, Thierry Mugler and Giorgio Armani.



Figure 2 (Maldini, 2019)

More extravagant followers of the New Romantic scene were sporting frilly cotton shirts, tasseled scarves and were, essentially, dressing as pirates. This particular look was a creation that was synonymous with Dame Vivienne Westwood. Her creations from this time have been exhibited at the V&A in London



Figure 3 (Westwood, 2003)

Staff have been brought in to act as living mannequins. They are dressed in a variety of outfits sourced from vintage clothing hire shops to fit the brief. By mingling with the members of the public it allows those who are inquisitive to have the opportunity to be tactile with the materials of the garments. Popular materials of the day were;

- Taffeta – is made of silk and woven with man-made synthetics such as polyester. It looks lustrous and feels smooth yet is stiff, allowing movement while keeping its shape.
- 100% cotton – a very versatile and naturally produced product, used for all types of clothing.
- Silk – popular for use in the making of colourful, cool, light weight tops and shirts. These were usually highly patterned.
- Suede / Leather – suede was used for footwear, most commonly for pixie boots which were ankle length, flat comfortable boots worn by males and females. Leather was also a popular choice for footwear. As a strong, versatile contexture it worked well for jackets and trousers.

Along with the look came a new type of music too, synth-pop. Retro video clips of bands performing their hits and featuring their own special take on the fashion are being projected on to the walls of the room.

As the visitors leave, I want them to feel that they have been part of the story.

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Figures

Figure 1 – (*Casson-Mann: Great Expectations*, 2001)

Figure 2 - (Maldini, 2019)

Figure 3 – (Westwood, 2003)