

# Ebb and Flow

A project proposal exploring the feelings of surfing and being immersed in water as a mindful practice, exploring how this can translate into pattern design.

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Surface Pattern and Textiles

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In this essay I will discuss the plans and strategies which I will be undertaking to produce a successful final major project, which can drive me forwards in my journey as a designer. My aim is to research new techniques for my desired context, whilst carrying out my own investigations into the relationships between materials and processes. Furthermore, I intend to discuss relevant design theories to my practice such as Louis Sullivans, 'Form ever follows function,' Dr. Wallace J. Nichols' 'Blue Mind' theory, and innovations within the textile design industry.

My proposed narrative aims to reflect the emotional connection between humans and the sea, and the feeling of surfing. A catalyst for this project has been exploring the resilience of female surfers, Rell Kapolioka'ehukai Sunn, Bethany Hamilton, and Carissa Moore, as I intend for them to be muses throughout my project. This project will be informed by their personal journeys whilst also capturing the power and grace of wave riding and the ocean's rhythm.

According to Luis Pinto, writer for 'Surf Today', Rell Sunn was known as 'not just a woman of the sea, but the heart and soul of Hawaiian surfing' (Pinto, 2023). Her legacy is known all around Hawaii as a pioneer for women's equality in surfing, to which there is now an award known as the Rell Sunn award given to young female surfers for their notable embodiment of the grace and kindness that Sunn was known for.

Bethany Hamilton is the embodiment of perseverance, bravery, and determination. Losing her arm to a tiger shark at age 14 didn't stop her from becoming an even more incredible surfer. Furthermore, she is an author of numerous books about her life story, and motivational speaker for those struggling with adversity. Within her biography, Hamilton reflects on her situation, stating 'One of the most beautiful things that came from the accident is how it has allowed me to see that I can overcome difficult thing' (Hamilton, 2013).

Carissa Moore is known as a powerhouse in surfing being a five-time world champion and actively helping young women to achieve their dreams. She is an inspiration to many and has had so much success within her career, receiving the first-ever Olympic gold medal in women's short-boarding, and being inducted to the surfer's hall of fame at 21 years old.

With each of these influential surfers as a muse for my project, I want to reflect their experiences and values through my imagery and print making, so that the essence of each is woven



Figure 1: *First Lady of Surfing*, Jim Russi, 2012



Figure 2: *Soul Surfer*, Bethany Hamilton, Rick Bundschuh, 2006

throughout my project. My narrative seeks to capture the sensory and emotional qualities of being in and around the ocean, and my muses serve as a framework for exploring themes of empowerment, bravery, and our overarching connection to nature.

Through my collection I would like to evoke a feeling of mindfulness and wellness, specifically in relation to water and the feeling of being in it. In psychotherapist Kate Ibbotson's article 'Why being near water brings the mind back into balance', she discusses how living near water offers moments of reflection and opportunities for mindful living, through 'The gentle rhythm of water, combined with outdoor activity and intentional observation, nurtures calm, clarity, and resilience' (*Ibbotson, 2025*).

Researching this concept of our wellness from water further, Dr. Wallace J. Nichols' 'Blue Mind' theory, suggests that when we are near or in water, we can feel a meditative or calm state which can increase our happiness and improve creativity. Nichols was the founder of the 'Blue Mind movement' and was dedicated to helping others counteract the 'Red Mind' which is a state of anxiousness and stress. Nichols' goal with introducing his blue mind theory to the world was to help people understand the importance and impacts of spending time in, on, or underwater. In an interview with Dr. Nichols, he discusses how blue spaces influence human's mental health, and how this also leads to influencing people's efforts on environmental conservation. Blue mind is a way that the planet gives to the people, and we in turn can give back to it. Being a marine biologist, Nichols was constantly around water and researching everything in it. He soon recognised his personal improvements from his time spent in the water and began noticing others' improvements as well. This led him to explore more about the connection between humans and water, bringing together neuroscientists and water people to help him do so. Katie Lockhart, a journalist for Vogue Magazine, discusses the blue mind theory and its impacts on our mental wellbeing, especially when involved in water sports. 'A 2020 study in the national library of medicine shows that travelers who participate in water-based activities saw a positive impact on their quality of life' (*Lockhart, 2024*). All physical activity typically results in a positive mental state, relieving you from the stresses of everyday life, or helping you feel energized and free. This is even more rewarding when out in nature and doing something active, swimming, surfing, paddle boarding, anything in the water leaves the participant with an overwhelming sense of gratitude for the outdoors and the feelings it brings to us.

This theory is not just a matter of opinion but a scientific fact; Natalie Hamingson, journalist for Red Bull, discusses the psychology and science behind the Blue Mind theory in an article about surfer, Kai Lenny. 'According to Blue Mind science, since humans are mostly made of water, our brains see it and think, 'I'm in the right place.' Call it surprising, soothing neuroscience of water environments.' (*Hamingson, 2024*). Furthermore, the science behind this is, 'the negative ions in the oceanside atmosphere increase serotonin and other happiness hormones.' (*Hamingson, 2024*).

My chosen concept mirrors this as I wish to emulate the many feelings of surfing and being in the water, from the calmness and freedom of riding waves to the excitement and strength of being in the water. I will reflect these contrasts in my prints which will convey the rhythm and journeys of waves, the weightlessness of being in the water, the movement of light on the water's surface, and the textures that wander around the coast. Due to this project being metaphorical and based on feeling rather than physical, I will have to adapt to find tangible things to create imagery from. My initial ideas for this include observing wave formations and swell patterns, light reflections on the water's surface, coastal forms, and surf textures such as seaweed silhouettes or surf wax scans. The imagery will be a mixture of abstract and detailed pieces, all reflecting emotions of being in the water, whilst still capturing my unique hand as a designer.

This project's narrative will be presented in a fashion context for spring/summer. My target audience, initially dedicated towards women in the water is now towards anyone who finds themselves deeply connected to the ocean. I intend to create a convincing collection that reflects our mindfulness when in the water and the feelings of surfing. To produce this successfully, I will use an array of techniques and fabric manipulation methods to emulate textures and movements in and around the ocean. The processes I am considering using are layered mono-printing to keep fluidity throughout my designs, cross-dyed fabrics and devore, translucent and puff binder layered, needle-felting, digital embroidery, and reactive print paste. I also intend to do a lot of photoshop editing of my own surf imagery or found textures which will inform my screen artwork. Furthermore, digital print will be used and layered with other techniques to keep the designs interesting. I will produce a cohesive collection where the viewer feels the need to take a minute to observe its entirety, similar to how we take a moment to admire the ocean.

As this will be a fashion collection, I intend to keep my prints wearable through the fabrics I am using. I will be designing for lightweight and breathable textiles which have movement and can interact with light, such as silks, cottons, linens, crepe de chine, and organza. Their qualities will lend themselves to emulate the serenity of surfing. With this project touching on mindfulness, I want to ensure I remain mindful throughout the process and can justify my decisions throughout. Researching more into the potential fabrics for this project, cotton, although a conventional fabric, is one of the most harmful ones to produce. Eco Stylist journalist Kaitlyn discusses how, 'it takes 1,931 liters of irrigation water and 6,003 liters of rainwater to produce enough cotton for a t-shirt and pair of jeans' (*Kaitlyn, 2020*). A better alternative when designing would be to use organic or recycled cotton, as both use far less harmful chemicals and less water to produce. Another material I would like to use but should be aware of its impacts is any viscose blended material. Although it is made from plants and the fibre itself is biodegradable and non-toxic, the process in which it is made is harmful to the environment. As viscose is the fibre which helps to produce devore fabrics and this is one of the primary processes for this collection, I have investigated environmentally friendly options. There is no perfectly sustainable way to devore as the technique is mainly chemical, furthermore the material is made from mixed fibers which is difficult to recycle. Alternative options would be to look for

fabrics made with more sustainable fibers than viscose such as Lyocell or find companies which sell dead stock fabrics and hope to find devore ones there. A similar dilemma is met with crepe de chine and organza, their environmental impact depends entirely on the fibers they are made from, if from silk they are naturally biodegradable and have a long lifespan making them more sustainable as they are not part of the throw away cycle, but if they are made with polyester or nylon, typically used within fast fashion, they are not bio-degradable and require a lot of energy and chemical use to produce. Overall, being mindful of my material and process use is important not only to this project but throughout my entire design journey. Although process printing will be a big part of my collection, I will remain mindful through ensuring there is minimal to no wastage throughout the course of designing.

For this project I not only want to successfully create a collection which embodies the feeling of surfing, but I want to challenge my process abilities and see what lays ahead for innovation within the surf world. Regarding this, I have investigated creatives who have found new ways of designing, and recently met up with Gower local India Aspland, who discovered a way to link her connection to the ocean and her love of print making. Intertwining her passion for surfing and mono-printing, India has partnered with surfboard shaper Arno Surfboards and produces beautiful and unique patterns to surface these boards. India kindly answered many of my questions where I was interested in how she began this career path. She discussed her passion for surfing and how she wanted to make her design journey more fun for herself without following the traditional artist career path. India described herself saying, “I think I’m more of a functional artist” (Aspland, 2025) discussing her need to create but making it purposeful. Indias artwork is inspired by how she feels when being in the ocean, using various mark making techniques, water dropping methods, and drying times for each piece, making each design one of a kind to the surfboard. “Still to this day I’ve never seen anyone create their own fabric [...] it’s a unique selling point” (Aspland, 2025).



Figure 3: *Gower Stories*, Ebby Ferguson, 2023



Figure 4: *India's Surfboard Design, Robyn Thorpe, 2025*

Following on from my interview with India, I have further researched ways to incorporate design into surf wear through techniques other than the usual digital print. I am interested in the possibilities that lie in swim and wetsuit materials and the opportunities for innovative ways to design them. I would like to explore ways in how these materials can be manipulated through non-conventional techniques and methods. My main curiosity lay in the possibility for devore, which I know would not allow the wetsuit to serve its purpose, however, it would be interesting to experiment with. Architect, Jeff Pelletier, discusses Louis Sullivan's 'Form ever follows function' theory, and argues that, 'Part of good design is pushing the limits [...] something may look pretty darn cool, but will not really function the way it should. Does that make it a failure? Certainly not.' (Pelletier, 2016). The theory of form vs function is an ever-going argument between all kinds of

creatives, architects, designers, and artists. And the so-called 'correct' answer will always change regarding the context of what you are designing. As a designer this is an area that I struggle with as my main goal is to create beautiful prints and patterns for fashion, however I sometimes neglect the practical side of design and how particular methods and processes I would like to use, will not always work for what I need to be designing for. Researching further into neoprene as a material and its qualities, devore would not be a possible process to experiment with. Eric Szoneier, founder of Szoneier fabrics describes neoprene in one of his articles, 'Neoprene has a closed-cell structure which makes it non-porous, elastic, and temperature sensitive, creating a challenge for any textile printing processes.' (Szoneier, 2025). However, Szoneier has an article on the possible areas for printing on neoprene which has led me in the direction of the ability for form and function to work harmoniously. Sublimation and screen-printing both work on neoprene; however, rubber-based inks and specific curing times are needed for these to be successful. Through my research I have discovered that there are little to no companies that screenprint their wetsuits, instead it is small brands who occasionally offer custom screen prints. This is likely due to a time and cost issue; it is much quicker to digitally print rolls of neoprene for batches of wetsuits; however, this gives me and my project room to explore the possibilities of screen printing onto neoprene.

With regards to innovation in swimwear, I thought it would be interesting to see what other brands or designers have done to create new, not just for aesthetics but the actual functionality of the product. Particularly looking at sportswear, Michael Phelps has been credited for his innovative materials in swimwear, partnering with Speedo to create ‘the most technically advanced swimsuit in the world’ (Phelps, 2019). This technologically advanced swimsuit, known as the LZR Racer, needed years of scientific research and experimentation. An impressive discovery during this creation was that swimsuits do not need to be made entirely out of fabric, and so they introduced laminated panels of rigid polyurethane to the areas of the torso which typically generate the most drag. Although I am not intending to create designs for the next best sports swimwear, it is important to investigate the factors that inventors consider, for example, not needing the entire suit to be made from fabric.

Another form of innovation in swim products which is becoming ever more popular for companies, especially those promoting sustainability, is using recycled and plant-based materials for their products. Furthermore, advanced technologies give UV protection, quick drying features, and chlorine resist creations, leading to the garments avoiding stretching and discoloration, thus leading to a longer lifespan of the product. A brand which prides themselves on their eco-conscious material choices is Ocean Soul Bali, who uses econyl to make their swimsuits.

Econyl is an innovative regenerated nylon produced from post-consumer waste like fishing nets, discarded plastic, and fabric scraps, offering a sustainable alternative to traditional nylon, reducing environmental harm whilst also keeping its quality. Ocean Soul Bali remain transparent with their customers regarding their fabric choices and processes, displaying on their website, ‘Choosing econyl means supporting a circular economy, where resources are reused, reducing our overall carbon footprint’ (Ocean Soul Bali, 2025).

Regarding fabric choices for fashion, it can be said that our bodies and minds react to the fabrics we choose to wear, influencing our daily lives. Each day we choose what and how we wear something depending on the actions that lie ahead, and different clothes make us feel different ways. In ‘THE FASHION READER, Third Edition’, Joanne Entwistle discusses how we tend to not think about what we are wearing when they feel right, ‘The fact that we do not develop epidermal self-awareness tells us a lot about our routine relationship to dress, that is, that it forms a second skin which is not usually an object of consciousness.’ (Entwistle, P.134). Entwistle suggests that a constant reminder of what we are wearing appears when we feel out of place or something isn’t right in our clothes. This could be apparent when you understand the lifecycle of



Figure 5: LZR Racer X Women's Features, Swim Outlet, 2015

your outfit, if your shirt was made ethically and through environmentally friendly processes, or even bought second hand, knowing it is having another lease of life and not a part of the fast fashion cycle could improve someone's overall feeling towards how they feel in their clothes. Furthermore, when we feel content and comfortable in what we are wearing this can aid our sense of mindfulness, resulting in performing better through daily tasks and generally feeling calmer and freer. As a designer who is passionate about creating prints for fashion, I need to be aware of the fabrics I design for, as well as the shapes they will be placed onto. With this collection I want to embody a sense of wellness and free feeling throughout, and this will be apparent in not only my designs but also the clothing I design for.

In the future, I hope to be working in the swim and surf industry where I have creative control and a significant impact on not only the prints and patterns but also the final product design. In completing my major project, I will have successfully produced a fashion collection aimed towards the surf industry, and those who love the surf lifestyle, which I can take forwards into my career as a designer. My plan to explore materiality and emerging technologies in textiles will provide me with the knowledge of swim and surf fabrics, how they are used and can be manipulated, and what people are experimenting with now. Not only will I have explored new techniques, but I will also home in on my most successful ones that I feel support my project and design choices. I will adapt my chosen narrative to the new and upcoming trend forecasts, whilst remaining unique and innovative, and will produce a beautifully cohesive collection designed for the comfortable and free-spirit aesthetic. My muses' stories will be woven throughout to give a subtle nod to their journeys within the water, whilst also keeping a personal connection to the project and intertwining my own experiences into it. In the future I hope to travel and share my designs around the world, working with, or for, the brands I have always loved such as Billabong, Roxy, or Rip curl. I aim to one day become a household name for unique and innovatively designed swim, surf, and fashion.

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Figure 2

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