

Think Like a Designer: The Brief

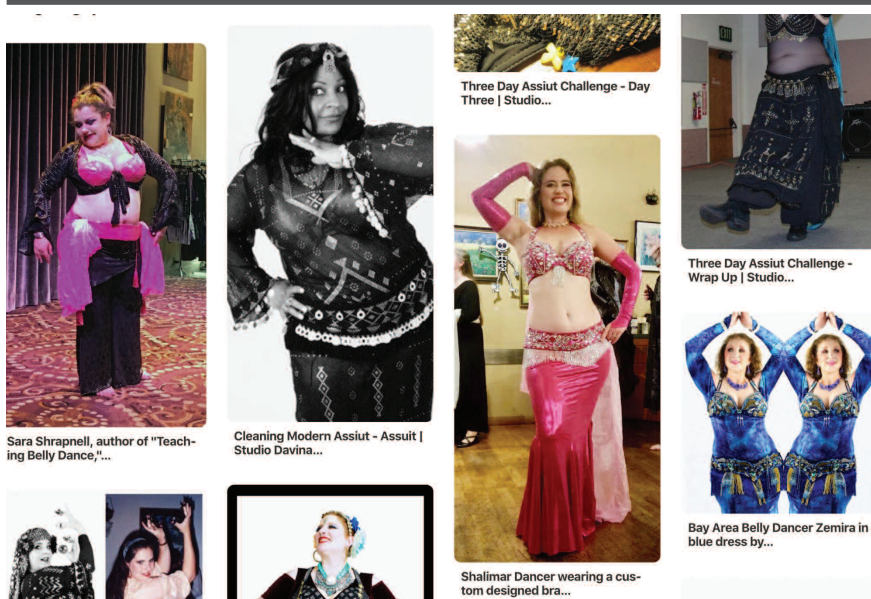
by Davina (Dawn Devine)

Would you like to save time and money as you build your costuming wardrobe? If the answer is yes, I would like to introduce you to a concept used by professional designers: The Design Brief. This is a document created by designers when working with clients and customers to communicate the essential details of the project. As a professional costumer, I consider this my most important tool.

But what exactly is a **Design Brief**? A formal definition of a brief might read like this:

A design brief is a document that is created to communicate the aims and objectives of a creative project. The design brief describes and defines the project, stipulating the scope, list of deliverables, and presents a plan of action.

Even when I'm working on my own projects, I create a design brief for myself to help keep my projects on time and under budget. If you roam around the internet looking for examples of a 'Design



One of the easiest ways for collecting your visual research together is to use the free web-based Pinterest. It's also a great way to create a portfolio of your design to share with your friends, fans, and followers.

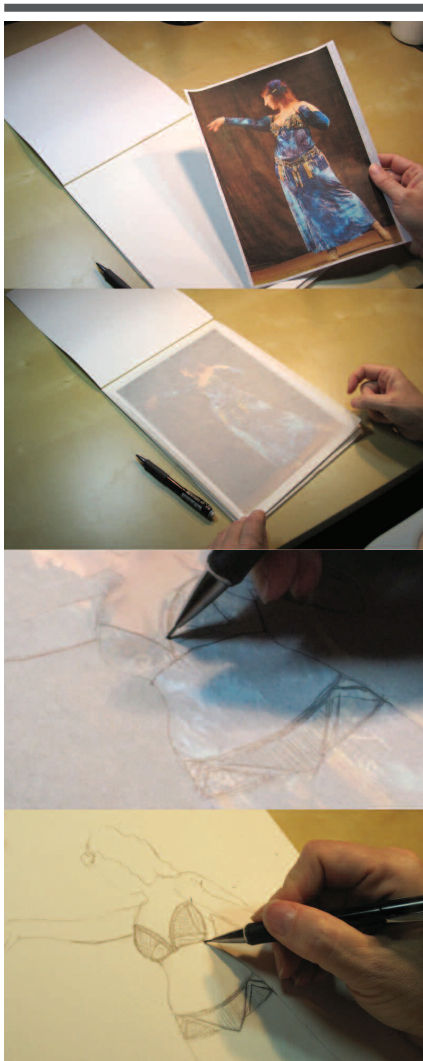
Brief' or 'Creative Brief' you will find lots of different types of formats with different questions that apply to different kinds of creative projects. An architect, for example, will need a design brief very different from a photographer, a web designer, or a costumer.

My method for building a complete design brief is to answer the following series of questions and to create the supporting documentation for each of the categories. You will probably find that not every question is relevant to your particular situation. For every project I ask myself:

- 1 Who is my **Client**? If you are designing for other people, this is an important question. However, if you are working for yourself, this is less relevant.
- 2 What is the **Title**? Often professional designers are working on more than one design, and need a way to organise their projects, so give them unique titles. Many dancers like to name their costumes to help organise and reference their wardrobe.
- 3 What is the main **Objective**? This is where I list the key features of this costume, such as style, colour, and materials. I also include the event it will be worn for, a troupe name if applicable, or the style of dance that it's meant to accompany.
- 4 What is the **Style**? While you might mention the style in passing in the #3 Objective, in section #4 I'm going to really break down the details. 'Tribal Ensemble' will be broken down into components with details about each element. This is where you make a list of all the costume pieces too. So, for example, Tribal ensemble composed of four pieces: A) assiut bra embellished with coins, B) two-piece side-tie tribal belt with assiut and



Bay Area Belly Dancer, Basinah wearing a costume entitled Assiut Tribal Style Bedlah with Hearts



Can't draw? Trace! Here's a quick way to make a custom croquis to draw your designs. First, print out a photo of yourself. Using a tracing pad and a pencil, simply trace your figure. Then remove the photo and complete your drawing of a new costume. This method eliminates the struggle to draw your proportions.

coins, C) two panel assiut skirt with coin at hem, and D) narrow harem pants with assiut panels at side.

- 5 How will I complete my **Research**? This section is all about how you will gather visual materials together to inform and inspire your design. In the design world, this is where we would list where we are gathering digital images on Pinterest perhaps. Alternately, I might make a mood or idea board to show my client. I keep a cork board in my studio to pin images, fabric samples and other elements I'm working on.
- 6 How will you **Visualise** your design? Every designer is different. Some use pencil on paper, others use a visual

collage, and others simply use examples from their past work to represent future work. I will often make a custom croquis or sketch figure for each customer.

- 7 What are my current **Capabilities**? This is the moment when we make an inventory of our tangibles and intangibles. Do we have the skills, tools, and time to get the project done? Will you have to research and learn any new techniques, or invest in additional equipment?
- 8 What is the **Source** of the materials and supplies? Perhaps one of the most complicated and difficult parts of building costumes is locating suppliers for exotic materials and embellishments. As a professional designer, I keep a digital 'little black book' of suppliers I like to use around the web that I can use as a jumping off place for researching sources. As you discover sources for products, add their contact information to your notes to refer to over and over again.
- 9 What is the **Budget**? When you are making your own costumes, this is a place where you will not only include the money you have available for the project, but also, the materials and supplies you already have in your stash to pull from. If you are buying a costume, this is where you will not only include the budget for all the garments but any jewellery, accessories, or special cosmetics or props that are essential for finishing the total look. Think about the entire look from head to toe and figure out how much you want to spend on each element.

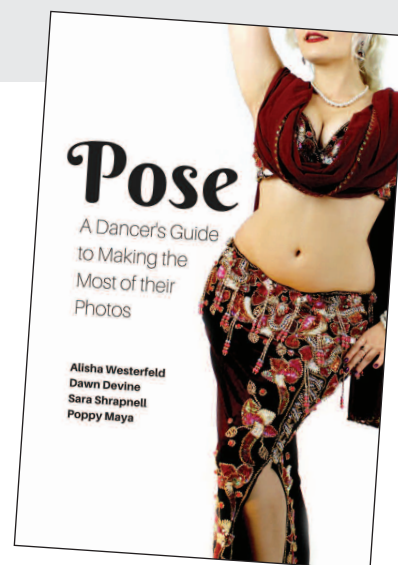
- 10 What is the **Timeline**? In this section, address the issue of time. If you are only sewing on the weekends, how many weekend days do you have to work between start and the deadline? Do a very realistic assessment of how long it will take you to complete each element and then add another 25–40% more time to account for delay. You never know when you might be faced with a family emergency, a personal crisis, health issues, or the learning curve for complex or time-consuming techniques.

Once you have all these questions answered, ask yourself: "Is this project do-able?" If the answer is yes, then you can proceed. If the answer is no, then you

can go back to the drawing board and re-frame your design. Perhaps it needs to be simplified to save time or money. Perhaps in your research you discovered that a more affordable solution can be purchased, or that materials and supplies are much more expensive than first imagined.

Preparing a design brief may seem like a lot of extra work. But if you take the time to plan your next project, it may save both time and money! Best of luck on all of your costuming adventures!

Dawn Devine aka Davina is the author of more than a dozen books on belly dance costume and design. She co-authored the recent *Becoming a Belly Dancer: From Student to Stage* with Sara Shrapnell, Alisha Westerfeld, and Poppy Maya. Her best-selling *Embellished Bras* and latest title, *Zills: Music on Your Finger Tips* are available on her website or through Amazon. Her upcoming project, *Pose: A Dancer's Guide to Making The Most of Their Photos* will be available summer 2019.



Dawn Devine ~ Davina

Visit my website:
www.davina.us/blog/books/

On Etsy:
www.etsy.com/shop/DavinaDevine

And my books are also on Amazon:
www.amazon.com/Dawn-Devine/e/B0052AOPR2/

davina@davina.us

text and message 916-300-32142