



Trashmagination Podcast #18 – Neck Ties and Dress Shirts

Welcome to Trashmagination, a podcast about reimagining trash. I'm Carla Brown.

One of my first jobs was at a textile recycling center where workers sorted donated clothes for secondhand stores. Do you know what type of clothing was consistently in the worst shape? It was dress shirts. The seams were rubbed raw with holes and stains. Most did not go to the secondhand stores, but were baled up and sold to mechanics as rags.

So today's episode is all about creative reuse ideas for dress shirts and neck ties. Father's Day is around the corner, and when I was looking at Father's Day cards, I noticed that many cards featured neck ties and dress shirts. That's a rather old-fashioned symbol for those cards. The Society for Human Resources Management does an Employee Benefits Survey¹ where they ask businesses across the US how often they allow people to wear casual dress. Many places allow it once a week, while others allow it every day. In 2014, only 19% of workplaces allowed casual dress every day, but that increased to 83% by 2016.

So what can we do with all that unneeded formal attire?

The first project I made with neck ties were crazy quilts. Crazy quilts are an American invention, a patchwork quilt where the blocks vary in size and fabric type and are joined by decorative stitches and embroidery. My friend Connie made me a crazy quilt pillow from neck ties. She liked to gather ties for very little money at estate sales.

I didn't go to estate sales. I put a note on Freecycle saying "WANTED: Neck ties – will pick up if you have at least 10." Most people gave me 40 or 50 ties.

It's easy to take apart neck ties. They are held together by a single row of stitching up the back. Inside is a thick piece of fabric. Often that fabric is stained because I think most people do not wash their ties. I washed my neck ties by hand because I was concerned the colors might bleed onto other clothing. If you did want to put them in a washing machine, I recommend putting them in a mesh laundry bag or they could get tied in knots.

Sewing neck tie fabric is challenging because the fabric is very wiggly. To prepare the tie fabric for sewing, I attached fusible interfacing. This is a mesh fabric that sticks to the other fabric when you iron them together on a low setting.

Once I was teaching a class on making quilts from neck ties, and I needed to process hundreds of ties quickly. I brought my ties and fusible interfacing to work. During our lunch break, my colleagues helped pin the ties to the interfacing, then cut them out so I could iron. It was like a giant game of Tetris where we tried to make the ties take up every square inch of the interfacing. It might seem like an odd thing to do with your colleagues, but it was fun! It's nice to take a break from your computer a lunch time.

¹ <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/business/biz-columns-blogs/cindy-krischer-goodman/article90019197.html>

Beyond crazy quilts, there are many quilts made from neck ties because the fabric designs are often very rich and colorful. You can see a bunch of quilts & other sewing projects made from neck ties at my Pinterest board for ties and dress shirts. <https://www.pinterest.com/Trashmagination/ties-dress-shirts-suits/>.

That's where I found the idea of an origami butterfly made from fabric [http://keyka.typepad.com/my_weblog/2013/04/origami-butterfly.html]. Check out the butterflies I made at my blog!

Another neck tie sewing craft that I admire is by Betz White, who wrote the book *Sewing Green* and many others that involve upcycling textiles. She designed something she calls a hip sling bag which involves four ties together and the skinny parts of the ties form the handles - <http://blog.betzwhite.com/2011/06/craft-show-saturday.html>.

Other projects on my Pinterest board for neck ties and dress shirts include:

- wine totes from ties - <https://www.thegirlcreative.com/necktiewinetote/>
- For Christmas – A popular craft is to make a Christmas tree skirt from ties – on the floor below a Christmas tree, or Good Housekeeping made a wreath from ties - <http://www.goodhousekeeping.com/holidays/christmas-ideas/g1943/christmas-wreath-projects/#slide-2>
- For Easter - If you wrap an egg with a silk tie and boil it with water and vinegar, it transfers the pattern of the tie on to the egg. (<http://www.marthastewart.com/1058086/silk-tie-dyed-easter-eggs>).
- For Halloween – a pumpkin from orange & brown ties - <http://lisawearystitches.blogspot.com/2011/10/posh-pumpkins-tutorial.html>
- If you have little kids is to sew a snake toy where the head is made from the wider end of the tie and you stuff it.
- Upcycling designer Tiffanie Threadgould offers a video on how to make a small purse or gadget case from a tie:

Finally, you could transform your non-fashionable, too-wide tie into a skinnier tie. There is a business that does this called "Skinny Fat Ties." The owner says it takes about two hours to re-make a tie. (<https://skinnyfatties.com/>)

Now let's switch gears and talk about dress shirts:

- **Dress Shirt Pillow** – Pillow design made from a dress shirt where you keep the collar, pocket and button up area - It's like they are hugging the person who wore that shirt. This is nice with a soft flannel shirt too.
- **Dress Shirt Cuff Chain** – You can cut off just the cuffs from dress shirts and attach them like a chain. This can be a decoration wherever you might hang a garland or banner.
- **Dress Shirt Cuff Purse** – super quick – the button holds it shut – Nice gift bag for small item or cash - <http://cfabbrisdesigns.com/craft-projects/trick-up-my-sleave-coin-purse/>
- **Shirt Sleeve Wine Bottle Holder** – Sew off a section the length of a wine bottle – Put a ribbon at the top.
- **Bow Ties from Dress Shirts** – Ashley Dedin will take your favorite dress shirt with its worn out collar or cuffs and make a bow tie from it – popular for weddings so everyone has matching ties – Company is Aendee (pronounced A-N-D) <http://www.aendee.com/>.

Finally, I want to mention artists who used ties and dress shirts in their work.

- **Kaarina Kaikkonen** – A Finnish artist who does all sorts of interesting things with shirts. She strings clothing in long lines in public places. She creates a gradiated landscape based on the fading colors of the shirts. She makes things that look like insects from dress shirts. I watched an interview where she mentioned that her dad passed away when she was 10, and she often wore his shirts as a young teen so dress shirts have a lot of meaning for her. (<http://kaarinakaikkonen.com/>)
- **Sherri Lynn Wood** – Since 2002, Sherri has made passage quilts, which are quilts she makes from the clothing of people who have passed away. She talks about how the process can be therapeutic for the family and friends. Sometimes she facilitates a workshop where friends and family of a deceased person make one or more quilts from their clothing, even if they have never quilted before. (<http://www.passagequilts.com/>)

- **Derick Melander** (mell-AN-der) – New York artist Derick sculpts with carefully folded and stacked secondhand clothing into layered sculptures that can fill a room. He plays with gradients of color as the clothing items blend into each other. Volunteers help fold the thousands of pieces of clothing. (<http://derickmelander.com/>)
- **Guerra De La Paz** – This is the name for two Cuban artists who work together - Alain Guerra and Neraldo de la Paz. They make sculptures from clothing. (<http://www.guerradelapaz.com/>)

So here's a checklist of activities inspired by this podcast:

- **Let me know if you have made any project from ties or dress shirts** – I'm always looking for more inspiration – trashmagimation@gmail.com.
- **Ask your family and friends for their ties and dress shirts** – Instead of giving your father a tie for Father's Day, offer to take an unwanted tie out of his collection, and make it into something fun.
- **Have a great Father's Day!** - My husband and dad have both supported my creative reuse through the years, even if my dad teases me sometimes for the items that I collect for my projects.

So until next time – may you see trash as just another source of art in your life.

Additional Relevant Resources for this Podcast

- My blog about working at Recycling Together - <http://trashmagimation.com/recycling-textiles/>
- My blog about sewing crazy quilts from ties - <http://trashmagimation.com/sewing-crazy-quilts-from-mens-ties/>
- 5 last minute Father's Day gifts made from ties - <http://www.ecouterre.com/5-ways-to-recycle-an-old-necktie-into-a-last-minute-fathers-day-gift/>
- Necktie Quilts - <http://quiltinspiration.blogspot.com/2014/06/necktie-quilts-for-dad.html>