

## Bode Well: Menswear Meets Antique Textiles

American Menswear Designer, Emily Adams Bode is receiving much attention for her use of antique textiles where the feminine and the masculine are harmoniously blended. Fashion, and especially menswear, is witnessing a revolution where the materials used and classic styles are key. People are saving to buy well-made items that will stand the test of time and could even be future heirlooms. Looking on the Bode website – [bodenewyork.com](http://bodenewyork.com) shows many designs listed 'Sold Out' – this emerging designer is clearly offering what people desire.

In 2016 she launched her brand, quickly making antique, vintage and deadstock textiles coupled with boxy silhouettes referencing American workwear her signature. The first female menswear designer at New York Fashion Week: Men's, she has made presentations there since 2016. Hers is a boyish look that is timeless where shapes from different eras demonstrate her love of history. Not trend-driven, her functional, yet relaxed silhouettes give attention to her textiles. She is acutely aware that men shop, and wear clothes differently to women and enjoys the irony of using historical and domestic textiles, typically made by female hands, for menswear. Streetwear and sportswear have tended to dominate this sector of late, but Bode presents a distinct, sometimes folkloric aesthetic - one that sensitively fuses the female and the male.

Outerwear – coats and jackets, 'collegiate' style sweaters, shirts - short-sleeved 'Bowling Shirt' style, trousers (or 'pants' to use the Americanism), shorts – rugby style, and accessories – scarves, hats and bags are sold at Bode's flagship store, 58 Hester Street in Manhattan's Chinatown, Lower East Side that opened November 2019. She also sells worldwide, both in physical stores and online, such as Browns, MATCHESFASHION, Moda Operandi, Opening Ceremony and Bergdorf Goodman.

Raised in Atlanta, Georgia, Emily Adams Bode was taken around the area's vintage fairs, flea markets, thrift shops, antique stores and auctions by her mother and aunts, where she developed a taste for all-things old – objects that have a history and that tell a story. Summer vacations spent in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, where both her parents were born, proved rich pickings for textile treasures and Emily Bode began to collect American quilts, patchwork and embroidered fabrics, attracted by their hand work and variety of colours, textures and patterns. A favourite haunt of hers is the Brimfield Flea Market, Massachusetts, proclaimed 'America's Oldest Outdoor Antiques Flea Market'. Family connections to the Nice area on the French Riviera, and to Paris have also yielded textiles and clothes from *brocantes* (second-hand shops), *vide-greniers* (attic sales) and *les puces* (flea markets). She also rescues deadstock materials, destined for landfill. Time-worn, damaged, torn and stained textiles are kindly mended and restored to live a second life. Quilts are only cut up to salvage if they are not of historical significance and fabric swatches are used to patch. She has amassed a huge collection from which to be inspired and to work with directly. Nothing is wasted - Emily Adams Bode promotes sustainable fashion by building on what she has always done – collecting, communicating and sharing.

In 2008, Emily Bode moved to New York to embark on a dual BFA/BA Degree in Fashion Design – Menswear and Philosophy at The New School, Parsons School of Design and Eugene Lang College of Liberal Arts respectively. Her philosophical

understanding of the connections and relationships people have to clothes has resulted in collections that speak to the customer in a way that goes beyond merely covering the body but evokes emotions and attachments – food for the soul.

Her experience grew by working for others - Ralph Lauren, known for his love of old America, was an ideal place, and she was employed in the 'Rough Wear' department sourcing fabrics for vintage-inspired collections. At Marc Jacobs' 'Special Projects' she worked with their excess fabrics, turning them into items such as boxer shirts and keychains.

From her trove of materials – American quilts, patchworks, blankets, coverlets and grain sacks; French bedlinens, tablecloths and curtains she started by producing one-of-a-kind garments, repurposing and recontextualising such precious textiles. Most of her garments are made in New York, outerwear being tailor-made, while quilts are replicated by skilled crafts people in New Delhi.

Being a female designer for men allows a divergent approach - she enjoys designing for others, rather than for herself, recognising what men now want from their clothes. Personal narratives, story-telling and provenance are fundamental to her collections that are frequently inspired by oral histories and garment labels state their history with 'This shirt is made from...'. Her Fall/Winter 2018 collection was titled 'Dear Homer', honouring an antique quilt dealer - a former Harvard-educated botanist called Homer who she regularly buys from. Lookbooks continue her themes by being photographed for example, in locations such as a family friend's barn in upstate New York where time-worn props set the scene.

Her Spring/Summer 2020 collection was her first runway show and her first time at Paris Fashion Week: Men's, taking her collections to an international audience. Against a background of gilded splendour, male models wearing ballet flats moved slowly down the catwalk, instead of the typical briskness. Warmly received, this enabled onlookers to focus on the exquisite fabrics and reflect on the experience. The circus theme connects to family ancestry - Albert Bode, founder of the Bode Wagon Company provided transport for US circuses on tour, namely the Ringling Brothers and the Barnum & Bailey Circus. Bode's designs conjure up ringmaster outfits where vertical stripes use silky, shiny 1970s horse ribbons, awarded to the rider and their steed. Flamboyant in their colours, textures and patterns, these are still eminently wearable pieces. Textiles show decorative quilting, patchwork, appliqué, embroidery and print. Scarves accessorise and lend fluidity to the ensemble.

In June 2019 Emily Adams Bode won the Council of Fashion Designers of America 'Emerging Designer of the Year' award, consolidating her talent. Bode collections implant meaning and laud sartorial histories that contest the constant change and relentless pace of contemporary fashion. Temporality and speed are challenged here as Bode foretells an optimistic future.

**Sarah E. Braddock Clarke**

1,000 words