

GEAR Fashion

Combining involute curves and body curves, merging factory and fashion, Winzeler Gear has transformed one of its products into gear *haute couture*: Winzeler Gear has created a plastic gear dress.

"I was trying to come up with something unusual to create a theme for our 60th anniversary party," says John Winzeler, the company's owner, "and that related to our already successful gear jewelry campaign."

Started in 1997, that campaign was a series of elegant, black-and-white photographs of a fashion model wearing rings, earrings and bracelets—all made from plastic gears. The understated ads graced the pages of *Auto World*, *Design News* and *Machine Design*.

The new gear dress consists of many, many, many copies of one plastic piece, a small, square part with a star-shaped internal gear spline. The part is used in a gear-clutch assembly, which itself is used in an actuator motor, for providing lumbar support in automobile seats.

Located in Harwood Heights, IL, a Chicago suburb, Winzeler Gear manufactures precision-molded plastic gears for the appliance, automotive and business machine industries.

Winzeler Gear's latest piece of gear fashion was created by a Chicago fashion artist, Cat Chow. Winzeler describes Chow as an artist who's trying to decide whether she's a sculptor or a fashion designer—"She's working in wearable art."

Commissioned last summer to create the dress, Chow toured Winzeler Gear's factory and took home a variety of plastic parts, including the part with the internal gear spline. As she recalls, the square part's star-shaped space intrigued her—"It added another dimension."

Chow obtained about 1,500 copies of the part to make the dress. She linked the

parts together to create small swatches of "fabric" to see how they would hang on a woman's body as dress material. The parts were held together by jump rings, small nickel-plated, brass rings that are used in jewelry making.

One of the parts weighs almost nothing in a person's hand, but a dress of them weighs a lot on a woman's body. Winzeler estimates the dress weighs about 10 pounds—"It's a little bit on the heavy side."

In addition, the dress's weight limited its length. Chow originally talked about it being a long dress. But, a long dress would have had structural problems. Chow estimates that a long dress might have weighed as much as 20 pounds or more; the dress would have been too heavy for its rings to hold together, and for its wearer to stand up.

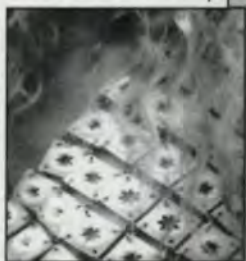
"It became a short dress," Winzeler says.

In creating the dress, Chow turned the square parts so they looked diamond-shaped. Turning them allowed her to create the dress's V-neckline, its front and back V-hemlines and its V-shaped sleeves. She explains that creating the V-cuts "accentuates the part itself."

"It made it more interesting to have the part turned the diamond way," Chow says about the dress. She adds that turning the parts also broke the fabric's rigidity, gave the parts more depth and made the dress more exciting.

Winzeler says he commissioned Chow to create a dress because of his "interest in fashion." His interest was what acquainted him with Chow's work. He'd seen her work in Chicago, at the Museum of Contemporary Art, where he serves on the museum's permanent collection committee. In spring 2000, he saw three dresses created by Chow in a museum exhibit.

Months later, Chow's new gear dress was featured at a fashion show—at Winzeler Gear. The show was part of the



Worn by fashion model Tiffany (right), Winzeler Gear's plastic gear dress is made up of small, plastic parts that feature star-shaped internal gear splines (above).



company's anniversary party, held Oct. 20.

That day, the main aisle in Winzeler Gear's factory became the runway for the fashion show. Professional models wore the gear dress and other dresses created by Chow. The dresses included one made of o-rings and another made of a single 100-yard-long zipper.

"When we do a commission, we do not want to stifle the artist's creativity," Winzeler says. "We commissioned her to do whatever she wanted."

Since the party, the dress has been shown at some trade meetings. Also, Winzeler expects to display the dress at upcoming plastic shows. It's currently displayed in Winzeler Gear's lobby, along with pictures of the gear jewelry.

Like the jewelry, the dress may become part of a Winzeler Gear ad campaign. Winzeler has already started to work on plans for such a campaign.

The campaign's purpose? "To make sure people remember who we are," Winzeler says. He adds that whether people like the campaign or not, they will be talking about it. "A business-writer friend of mine calls it 'womp': word-of-mouth potential." ❊

Tell Us What You Think . . .

If you found this article of interest and/or useful, please circle 340.
If you did not care for this article, circle 341.