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Wired and Laced—The Future of Fashion and Technology

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The future of fashion patents is always changing and evolving. On February 7th, some of the industry's key players discussed hot topics in fashion and technology, a fascinating intersection of two worlds that seamlessly combine art and scientific innovation. The panel, hosted by Fordham University, featured several interesting speakers, a well-heeled crowd, and a wide range of information to interest the lay-person as well as the practitioner.

Ariele Elia and Emma McClendon, curators of a recent exposition at [The Museum at FIT](#) on the history of fashion and technology, provided a brief history of fashion patents, from the earliest patents to some of the newest, some for products yet to be released. Several notable examples from the past include the zipper, the Jacquard loom, synthetic dyes, and Lycra. These inventions are all commonplace today and can be found at any chain retailer, but several generations ago, the fashionable elite were just being introduced to the ease of zipping oneself into a dress or pair of pants. Today, some designers choose to incorporate the old and the new, such as created a computer-generated ombre design that is later woven on a Jacquard loom.

Currently, we are seeing fashion designers experiment with technology in increasingly complex ways, as computers become smaller and people become more dependent on technology for their everyday needs. Fashion designers like Liz Salcedo, founder and CEO of [Everpurse](#), are taking our basic needs and combining form and function. Ms. Salcedo, who presented her work at the panel, is in the process of obtaining a patent for her line of purses and other accessories that will charge a cellphone while the phone is sitting in the bag. The charger itself will be totally hidden from view, allowing a stylish and possibly expensive handbag to be very functional.

Other recent fashion patents include [Google Glass](#), as well as possible spinoffs using prescription lenses, [Fitbit](#) and an upcoming collaboration with [Tory Burch](#), the [Nike Fuel Band](#), and Apple's recent acquisition of the iWatch trademark in Japan. Leah Buechley, a professor at MIT, recently created the "Lily pad," basically a programmable computer that when integrated into a dress, was used to sense the pollution levels around the wearer. Users [can program](#) the wearable technology to react in various ways to light and temperature.

One of the most exciting new tools for designers is 3D printing. Iris Van Herpen is one of the leaders in this area, creating beautiful 3D-printed garments that are [futuristic but eminently wearable](#). 3D printers allow designers to create complex designs, print hard and soft at the same time, and exactly replicate garments that once might have used hand needlework. Labor-intensive creation has been replaced by computer-aided design. The results are nothing short of astonishing. But just like the creators of zippers and synthetic dyes, new designers are trying to combine functionality and beauty to create something gorgeous but usable by the average consumer. The future combinations of fashion and technology look vibrant and exciting.