

GRADUATE COLLECTION / AW 26



SALT & IRON

A graduate collection on erosion & endurance

DESIGNER

Rowan Aldous

PROGRAMME

BA (Hons) Fashion Design

YEAR

Class of 2026

COLLECTION STATEMENT

coast · industry · cloth

Concept *statement*

I grew up on a working coast, where the sea takes things apart and the shipyards put them back together. This collection lives in that argument — between what erodes and what endures.

Salt & Iron began with two materials that behave like opposites. Salt softens, bleaches and eats; it rounds every hard edge it touches. Iron holds, braces and structures — until it doesn't, until it rusts into the same warm oxide as the cliffs behind the harbour. I wanted a wardrobe that carried both at once: garments that look built to last and worn to comfort in the same breath.

The tension is the point. A tailored iron-grey coat is cut with the ease of a fisherman's smock. A raw canvas dress is dyed with rust so it reads as

both new and long-weathered. Nothing here is pristine, and nothing is precious. The collection is about the dignity of things that have survived their own use.

I kept asking a single question at every fitting: does this look like it has a history? If a piece felt too clean, too resolved, I put it back on the coast — over-dyed it, salt-washed it, let the seams pull. The result is a collection that is quietly structural and openly worn, industrial in bone and coastal in skin.

“I wanted clothes that look built to last and worn to comfort — in the same breath.”

Inspiration & *research*

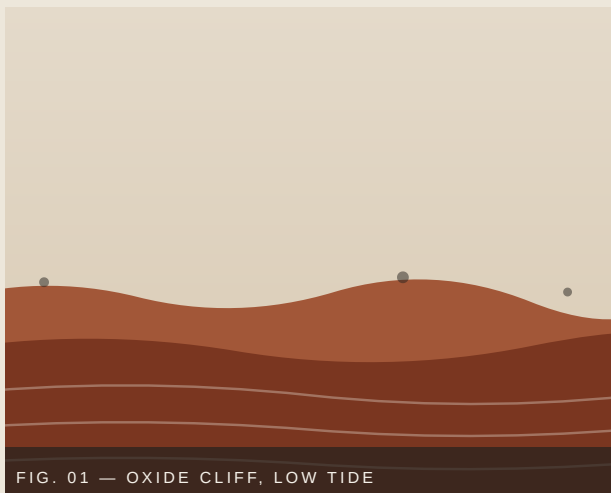


FIG. 01 — OXIDE CLIFF, LOW TIDE



FIG. 02 — HULL PLATE, OXIDISED (SAMPLE)



FIG. 03 — WORKWEAR SEAMS



FIG. 04 — SALT-WASHED LINEN

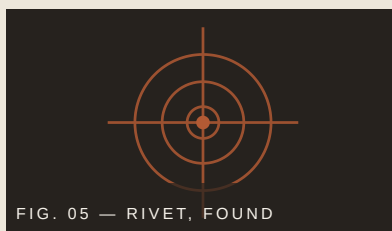


FIG. 05 — RIVET, FOUND

Shoreline. Two months of tide-line walking: bleached rope, salt-stiffened canvas, driftwood worn to bone. I logged how salt lightens indigo and stiffens weave — a natural finishing process I later reproduced in the dye studio.

Industry. The disused shipyard gave me iron: riveted plate, oxidised gantries, the exact oxide-

to-charcoal gradient a hull takes as it weathers. That gradient became my colour spine.

Archive. Historic workwear — smocks, deck coats, riveted dungarees — for its honest utility: patch pockets, felled seams, room to move. Function I could erode without losing.

Design *development*

I started with the deck coat and let it erode. The first toile was rigid and correct; I kept dropping the shoulder, softening the chest, and lengthening the back until it moved like a smock but held like tailoring. Every silhouette in the collection is a negotiation between that structure and that ease.

The croquis below trace the through-line: an iron spine of tailoring gradually flooded by coastal volume. By the fourth iteration the garment had stopped looking designed and started looking survived — which is exactly where I wanted it.



MARGIN NOTE — SHOULDER

Dropped 4.5cm across four toiles. The point was to lose the tailored apex without losing the coat's authority.

MARGIN NOTE — HEM

Curved, weighted with a folded facing so it swings and settles like wet canvas rather than hanging flat.

MARGIN NOTE — SEAM

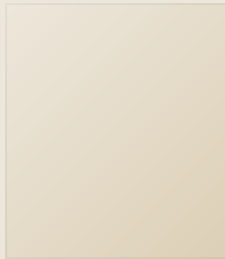
Felled and left proud, rust-dyed after construction so the stitch line reads as a scar, not a detail.

Across the collection the same logic recurs: begin with an honest, structural garment; find the one place it can soften; and let that softening flood outward until the piece feels lived-in. Development, for me, was less about adding and more about the disciplined erosion of everything that looked too new.

Materials & *colour*

Every cloth in Salt & Iron is chosen for how it takes a finish rather than how it looks new. Raw cotton canvas is the collection's backbone — stiff, honest, and eager to accept an oxide dye that ages it a decade in an afternoon. Against it I set salt-washed linens that have been literally soaked in brine to bleach and stiffen the weave, and iron-grey wools with the dense, protective hand of a deck coat.

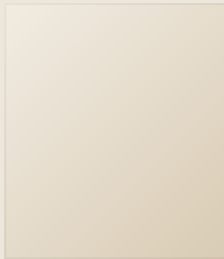
The palette is a single weathering gradient pulled straight from a rusting hull: raw canvas at one end, deep iron charcoal at the other, and the whole warm spectrum of oxide in between. I over-dyed almost everything by hand so no two panels are identical — the collection should read as one weathered surface, not a set of flat swatches.



01

Raw Canvas

Undyed cotton duck. The honest ground the whole collection is built on.



02

Salt Wash

Brine-soaked linen. Bleached, stiffened, coastal — light that has been left out in weather.



03

Oxide

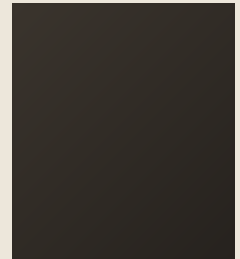
Hand rust-dyed cotton. The exact warm patina of a weathering hull plate.



04

Brine

Deep over-dyed oxide. Where salt and iron have worked longest on the cloth.



05

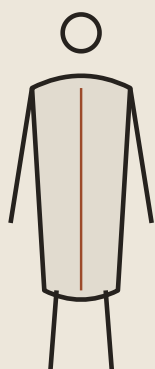
Iron

Dense charcoal wool. The structural spine — tailoring's authority, a coat's weight.

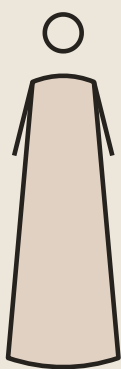
Finish is the design. Rust-dyeing binds real iron oxide into the fibre, so the colour is the corrosion, not a print of it. It keeps ageing gently after the garment leaves me — which feels honest for a collection about endurance.

Restraint in colour. Five families, one gradient. Holding the palette this tight lets the cut and the cloth's hand do the talking, and keeps the whole line-up reading as a single weathered object.

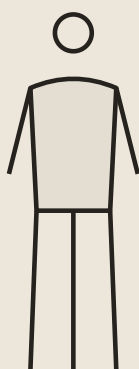
Collection *overview*



LOOK 01
Iron deck coat



LOOK 02
Rust canvas dress



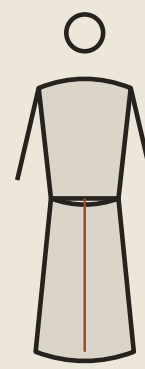
LOOK 03
Smock & wide trouser



LOOK 04
Brine over-coat



LOOK 05
Salt-washed layer



LOOK 06
Iron tailoring, coastal
volume

Looking back, Salt & Iron taught me that a collection is finished not when it is perfect but when it is honest. I spent three years learning to control cloth and one final year learning when to let go of it — to let salt and rust do work I couldn't do by hand. The pieces I am proudest of are the ones where I stopped short.

If there is one thing I want a viewer to feel, it is recognition: that these clothes have a history even though they are new, that endurance and erosion are the same story told from two ends. That is the coast I grew up on, and it is the wardrobe I wanted to make of it.

“Everything that lasts has been worn down first.”

ROWAN ALDOUS — SALT & IRON