

## **'Show that you are one with the people'**

*Borre Akkersdijk – of ByBorre – on the New Habit for the Dominicans*

**Suppose Saint Dominic would send his brothers and sisters into the world today, with the same message he did 800 years ago, what would they look like? That was the question Borre Akkersdijk started with.**



*Borre Akkersdijk*

“No was my first thought. Religion is not something ByBorre would like to be associated with. But the more research we did on the Dominicans and their habit, the more excited we got.

After all the negative press in the past years, I associated the Church with the abuse of trust and power. Yet through our conversations with Dominicans, we discovered that the Church is also about something completely different: being connected, respecting your fellow human beings as well as materials.

### **Stand out or not?**

During our research we came across many themes we recognized in our normal designing in ByBorre. These themes felt very logical to us, they are or will be part of our own collections. For example: the Dominican Order made their habits of materials that were at hand. They chose undyed fabrics in lighter and darker shades, for the habit and the cloak (Cappa). Another fact are the layers of the habit, which refers beautifully to combining a limited number of items in your wardrobe, that can be used for many occasions.

When Dominicans walked the streets, they wanted to act normal, not drawing too much attention to themselves. And – ironically – this is exactly what happens nowadays, because a person in a habit is a curiosity. We wanted to go back to the essence of the message of the habit: we are one with the people around us. That is why we made an almost ‘normal’ collection.

We tried to figure out both the story of the Dominicans and of the habit. Which materials do they use nowadays and in the past? How is the habit made? How do people wear it, in The Netherlands and in various parts of the world, where climate and culture is different?

### **A collection of clothing pieces**

One of the things we found out is that most Dominicans wear the habit over their ‘regular’ clothes. In the past they would only use the habit itself. Apparently something is missing for the people who want to wear the habit now. That is why we chose to design this collection of items, which is both a habit and a regular clothing staple.

We wanted to make the habit more flexible. Dominicans are used to wear the habit or not. With this collection of items you can alternate and combine pieces however you like. The New Habit became a collection of several clothing pieces, suitable for young and old, men and women. It gives you a lot of options, but it is always a unity and matches perfectly.

### **International idiom**

Our inspiration for the patterns comes from different parts of the world. Dominicans are an international Order, the new habit needs to work everywhere in the world. This shows in the form language of the different pieces. For example, the tunic can remind you of the djellaba. We did not design the new habit for one culture specifically though, so every culture will recognize it and combine it to something personal. You can make dozens of combinations with the designed patterns.

The design is very functional and user friendly. We included many pockets, which can be easily reached. We also added a hood to provide shelter from the rain, but which can also be adjusted to serve as a space for contemplation and prayer.

### **Functionality first**

Through the centuries the colors white and black became meaningful to the Dominicans. Yet in our design the functionality of the habit was more important than esthetics. Thus we started by seeing what kind of undyed fabrics and colors were at hand. In designing we did use black and white, but to a lesser extent than the current habit.

The new habit is everything but a fashion collection. It is the essence of a wardrobe: basically you would not need anything else. The pieces are basic and functional, they are made with what is at hand. But if you combine them, they create their own unique Dominican form language.

The patterns of the new habit are openly available and can be produced locally with the fabrics at hand. Therefore they will suit the circumstances in which they are worn. In the cold and wet climate of the Netherlands we would use more technical fabrics – water resistant and dirt reluctant – in Africa one could use different materials and finishings.

### **Soberness and togetherness**

I would like to see people who feel connected to the Dominican Order wear pieces of this collection. In this way they can share in carrying out the vision of the Dominicans: using less, living simple, being together and communicating all of this through what you wear. Personally, I would not become a Dominican, because I am not religious. But I do think these values are important. Moreover, some of the pieces in the collection I would like to wear myself.

We hope the project evokes discussion, especially within the Dominican Order. We hope they see that their appearance and the matching story can be a part of their message, even though they neglected it somehow, since the original design 800 years ago. We hope it inspires them in that way.

We also hope that people outside of the Order would like to wear pieces of the collection, thus sharing in the Dominican mission. How great would it be when the Dominicans eventually start their own label, with this collection as a foundation?"

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*Because of the celebration of 800 years Order of Preachers, the dominican family in the Netherlands organized a year of various meetings with 'benevolent strangers', people they usually do not meet up with in the very secularized Dutch culture.*

*The idea behind this is that both parties can get wiser in an honest encounter, even when they don't agree on issues. Saint Dominic himself once talked all night long with an innkeeper, about faith and his cathar ideas.*

*The innkeeper converted, so the story goes, and Dominic started to build his community of educated mendicant brothers and sisters - a novelty in his days.*

Website of the campaign: [www.800jaardominicanen.nl](http://www.800jaardominicanen.nl)

Website of the Dominican Family in The Netherlands: [www.dominicanen.nl](http://www.dominicanen.nl)

See also: [A 'New Habit' for the Dominicans \(m/f\)](#)