

## What is Style?

If you are like me, when you hear the word “style,” you automatically process it in a fashion context. However, style applies to so many other areas. Consider architecture, writing, art, interior design, music, teaching, et cetera. I cannot think of a single creative area to which style is not applicable. That must mean style is a creative choice. Think about it: creativity is all about freedom– and where there is freedom, there is choice. Okay, but what is this “choice” about? It is about what we want to communicate to the world. Fashion, music, and architecture are simply different vehicles to which we apply our style. It is almost like advertising. Think of how a movie might be promoted using billboards, commercials, and online advertisements meant to show people what they can expect from the movie. Similarly, we brand ourselves to manipulate how the world perceives us, communicating through what we wear, where we live, what we listen to; the list goes on.

There is a neighborhood where my best friend and I love to spend our time. In the warmer months, we stroll around its streets for hours, taking in each home and discussing our plans for attaining the same lifestyle as its owners. I became so familiar with the neighborhood that I would ask my family to drive through it on the rare occasion that we were all in the car together. Last year, during winter break, when my sister and I were back from school, and our brother was visiting home, I took us on a detour on our way back from dinner downtown. I asked my brother, “Ben, what kind of houses do you like?” My brother is probably the most stoic 25-year-old man there is, so I cannot say I was shocked when he said, “I like brick. It’s sturdy.” I pointed to a colonial with shrubbery decorating the lawn and English ivy creeping from either side

of the house towards its face. The brick was not too red, but rather a muted maroon. The entryway's trim featured a delicate design, and a beautiful, lantern-esque porch light. "Yeah, I like that one," Ben replied. Style speaks to the motivation behind our choices. For my brother, his future colonial brick house will speak to his tendency toward structure and stability, his love for history, and his respect for tradition. However, this would not be as obvious without details such as the English ivy or the porch light.

One key part of style is accessorizing and ornamentation. Something Iris Apfel teaches us is to buck trends and pick up the accessories. They help us to reinforce our niche by taking advantage of every opportunity to express it. Think about it, we even decided that our earlobes had enough space that they should be decorated. By seizing every opportunity to express ourselves, we further solidify our message to the world. Considering the thoughtfulness of accessorizing, let alone the application of style as a whole, it is safe to say that style is intentional.

I find the concept of style to be so special because of just how specific it can get. I mean, just consider the endless variations of the little black dress and how different they are from one another. As we go through life, our sense of identity grows exponentially stronger and is therefore reflected in our style. Make no mistake, style is still very much about aesthetics. Style is the *use* of aesthetics as a way of communicating who we are, who we want to be, what our values are, and why. In recent years, young people have been turning to preexisting aesthetics, using these labeled looks as a guide to create an image of their lives that they want to display, as they are still figuring out who they are.

One of the current favorites among young people is the “clean girl” aesthetic, which advertises simplicity and health. These girls have perfect skin, enjoy running, and love a good activewear set. The lack of dimension, mixing of colors, and accessorizing actually contribute to the look. When you spot a “clean girl,” you assume that you know everything about her; I mean, everything. She drinks lemon and cucumber water, listens to podcasts while she exercises, has perfect handwriting, has amazing focus when studying, has a nice kitchen with an island and marble countertops, tans easily in the summer, makes friends easily, sleeps in a full-sized bed with a fluffy white comforter, and gets along perfectly with her family– oh, and she always smells good. This girl is basically living the healthiest, happiest life you have ever dreamed of. Of course, these are all mere assumptions that she has convinced you of through her style. However, style is not exclusively about convincing others about who you are.

Personal style is also used as a way to affirm our own identity. One of the first ways we do this when we are young is merely by the silhouette and color of our clothes, used to affirm our gender. As we get older and get a sense of what we want for our lives, style is not only used to affirm our current identity, but to build upon it. You know the expression ‘fake it ‘til you make it’? Well, style can help us do just that; it is a method of convincing ourselves of a desired identity that we have yet to attain. Andre Leon Talley states that how we approach style is how we approach life. This is why my brother would like to live in a similar house to the one I mentioned earlier. It is also the same explanation for why I do not let myself wear sweatpants to class, no matter how exhausted, sick, or stressed I am. If I allow anything negative I have going on in my life to be reflected in my outfits, then I am allowing the same negativity to be reflected in

how I approach my day. In turn, even throwing on a simple combination of jeans and a sweater helps me to convince myself that I am feeling healthy, energized, and ready to be productive. I believe there is some scientific explanation for this (quick, someone do a study comparing productivity occurring between Saturday and Sunday of people who make a point to get dressed on the weekends to those who stay in their pajamas). The more we apply our style to every area of our lives, the stronger the message we send.