

If This Stetson Could Talk, John Wayne's Stylistic Legacy

In a time where it's 'cool to be (and dress) cowboy' again, John Wayne's style and legacy live on.

By: Julia Dondero

Stetsons down Hollywood Blvd.? Only in John Wayne's Hollywood. The Academy Award-winning actor and pioneering western-lifestyle figurehead brought authentic Western style and values to silver screens across the world, for generations to observe.

Known for his numerous movie roles and cowboy-coded mantra, Wayne's silver-screen success has been synonymous with values and styles from the Western way of life for generations. Appearing in 175 films, over an astounding 50 years, arguably none are more beloved than some of the most iconic, classic Westerns of all time, including 'True Grit' and 'Stagecoach'. Accompanying his film work, was his timeless style. Reflecting the image of raw Americana, Wayne's style told a story all on its own.

Currently located in the historic Fort Worth Stockyards, John Wayne: The American Experience breathes life into his historic legacy, drawing fans to his symbolic style and stature. Like his manuscripts themselves, the permanent displays of his style serve as powerful representations of his values and promotion of the cowboy lifestyle.

The romanticization of cowboy culture can be traced back to one blue-eyed, sharp-shooting Iowan— John Wayne. Long before Wayne's signature, Stetson glistened in the California sun, Marion Robert Morrison set out on a path paved with hard work and integrity.

By 1945, tractors had officially outnumbered plow horses on farms, and urban city centers had controlled the headlines. World War II was still at the forefront of many Americans minds, and many were craving a feel-good, upstanding charter in Hollywood that reflected their hardships and values.

Ah, the 'Golden Age' of film production. During a time of flourishing film production, a young man named Marion Robert Morrison stumbled into the world of film and fame as a true act of fate. As a football player for the University of Southern California, in exchange for football tickets, the young man found himself working on a prop crew in Hollywood. Turning the heads of established directors like Raoul Wals and John Ford, Morrison soon found himself by a new identity— John Wayne.

Starring in his first film, *Men Without Women* in 1930, the household name would go on to be one of the most recognized actors of his time, leaving a lasting impact for generations to come.

For over 40 years, Wayne starred in pioneering films like ‘Stagecoach’, ‘Sands Of Iwo Jima’ and ‘True Grit’, Wayne hung his picturesque Stetson on his namesake creating films that embodied ideals of the American West. With this impact, Wayne created a legacy embodying traditional values of the Western way of life and romanticizing the Western way of life on silver screens globally.

It was also during these pivotal early years of his career, that he developed a style as statement-worthy as his work. ENTER JOHN WAYNE QUOTE

No need to tell the ‘Duke’ to cowboy up. It was the role he was born to play.

Defining the outlaw lifestyle, Wayne created a lasting legacy built on the pillars of freedom, individuality, and courage. This mantra transposed time and screens, making him and his fashion one of the most influential leaders of the Western way of life.

Identifiable by his distinctive gravelly voice, unmistakable drawl, and cat-like walk, Wayne defined the look of the American Cowboy on a national stage. At the core of his work and his identity, was his infamous closet of western wear and cowboy-cool looks.

Vice President of John Wayne: The American Experience Amy Shepard, explained Wayne’s impact on the preservation and promotion of Western culture is stronger than ever.

“After building the John Wayne: The American Experience museum in the Fort Worth Stockyards, we have seen the impact he has made on so many lives. It’s sometimes emotional to see families feel connected to him because they invited him into their homes on TV screens. His legacy brings everyone together” explained Shepard, who has worked closely with the Wayne family for decades to preserve John’s values.

His style reflected the cowhands who rode before him, as well as those who would later follow in his footsteps. Known for his perfect culmination of authentic style and personal touches of tasteful fashion, Wayne created a new image of the American cowboy.

Trademarked by his silver-belly Stetson, the Academy Award-winning actor was known for looks that were as strong and distinguished as his values. Paying tribute to the West and its heritage, Wayne painted a picture of the cowboy that would transcend continents, screens, and decades.

Shepard explained his style was the perfect culmination of new and old, creating a noteworthy brand while staying true to many stylistic aspects of time-period ranchers.

“He first started to create his style in the 1930s. He focused on quality and simplicity, while also incorporating rich colors and quality pieces like his leather boots or bandanas” said Shepard.

These accessories were the perfect personification of a character larger than the silver screens. Fashion has the power to convey values, and tell stories without a word, and that’s just what Wayne did through his careful selection of on-screen wear.

The Duke worked closely with several legendary Western costume designers including, Luster Bayless. Known for designing for many of his most famous looks, including his academy-award-winning role in ‘True Grit’, his design for this costume is trademarked by his deep maroon bandana in authentic range wear. In unison with his core values, Wayne focused on the authenticity and quality of his costumes.

Records from the John Wayne: The American Experience museum tell the story of the significance of Wayne’s holster in the 1960 film ‘The Alamo’. Wayne worked closely with designers to rate the most authentic and functional holster possible. Down to the details of where a gun holster would sit, or the stitching on chaps, Wayne was dedicated to looking and playing the part of American heroes with integrity and accuracy.

“People are drawn to his authenticity and integrity. He stood for stability and security, if he said something he meant it, and that is what has continued to draw people to his legacy” said Shepard.

From his early, silent movie days to his first leading role, titled *The Big Trail* (1930) to his touching final farewell as J.B. Books in *The Shootist* (1976), the Duke captivated fans with his prototypical Western dress.

Crafted with care and precision, Duke’s wardrobe was designed with a romantic eye for the cowboy lifestyle and a flare of Hollywood dramatics in mind. According to an interview with Duke’s son Patrick Wayne on the John Wayne: an American Experience website, “A peerless level of professionalism factored into Duke’s Hollywood career lasting for over 50 years. “He was very sensitive about how he’d look on film,” notes son Patrick Wayne. “He was a big man and wanted a certain look. Certain things made him look bad, and he knew that—certain colors and certain cuts.” Opting to wear a vest over a shirt, for instance; and when wearing a cavalry uniform, rather than don a jacket, he would just wear a double-breasted shirt and suspenders. Jacket collars were typically positioned up and, adds Wayne: “He always wanted to wear a hat so light wouldn’t cut through his eyes.”

Through careful observation, these costumes were also crafted with the accuracy of a true cowboy. As the owner of 26 Bar Ranch, located in Eagar, Arizona, Wayne himself was a cowboy

to his core, with a strong loyalty to and an affinity for sharing the Western way of life with others. This authenticity flowed from his attire to his portrait of many western characters.

Aside from his many roles as emblems of Western americana, Duke is also best known for his symbolic collection of cowboy hats. Shaped to fit each role he played, these hats told a story all on their own. According to the John Wayne an American Experience, Wayne's selections ranged from high-crowned and Cavalry-inspired hats, to the classic pinched-front variety with curled-up sides. Totalling over 80 hats, the Duke's staggering collection reflected not only his personal style, but the popular styles worn in various periods. For example, the light gray felt Stetson with a skinny leather hatband that Duke wore in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962) is known as the Gus style, featuring a high crown that slopes towards the front. By contrast, the well-worn tan Cattleman-style hat worn in several pictures, including *McLintock!* (1963) and *The War Wagon* (1967), is a unique variety with a low crown, a curled brim, and a leather chin strap. Custom made by Stetson, these felts were made with the finest beaver fur felt and gold details.

Many of his costumes can be viewed at the John Wayne: An American Experience. The award-winning exhibit chronicles Duke's life in a multi-media space spanning over 10,000 square feet, located in the historic Fort Worth Stockyards, Texas.

If Wayne's Stetsons could talk, oh, the stories they'd tell.

Leaving behind generations of stories told on and offscreen, showcasing the heart of the Western way of life, and promoting it to viewers globally. Shepard reflected on his lasting impact, "People are drawn to his authenticity and integrity, It keeps his legacy timeless and is something that will never go out of style."

As an early 20th-century farm boy from Iowa to the big screen, John Wayne, better known as 'Duke' left a lasting impression on many aspects of American culture and the romanticization of the American cowboy. From his style to mantras of respect and hard work, Wayne embodied the lifestyle values on and off the screen.

In a world of continued urbanization, Wayne's legacy and stories of the West will carry on for generations. Much like his larger-than-life impression on not only the Hollywood film scene but the global image of what it means to be a cowboy.