

Carrie McCarthy & Danielle LaPorte

STYLE STATEMENT

Live by your own design.



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style, noun

1. The way in which something is said, done, expressed, or performed.
2. A quality of imagination and individuality expressed in one's actions and tastes.

*Handwrites letters with a fountain pen.
Dragon tattoo under tailored suit.
Collects teapots. Gathers people. Captures ideas.
Deeply sensitive. Highly ambitious.
Business card: heavy paper stock, embossed, black on white.
Tango lessons. Hip-hop. Laid-back.
Conservative. Craves order. Country.
Fried blonde hair.
Matte finish.
An old farmhouse on ten acres.
Never diamonds. Never imitation. Never late.
Wears only silver, only white shirts, only new.
Skinny-dips every chance she gets.
Vacations in Vegas.
Carries Red No. 7 lipstick in every handbag.
Hates parties. Loves to be noticed.
Saffron robes, black habits, a white sari.
Monogrammed cuff links. Family plaid.
Mellows out with the Grateful Dead. Prefers Mozart.
Big smile. Honest eyes.*

What Is Style?

It's everything.

Writing style. Speaking style. Leadership style.

Fashion. Art. Architecture. Athletics.

Style is the way you say it, the way you do it, the way you live it.

Sometimes it is an appearance. Sometimes it is an attitude.

Style is the lighting of life. It accentuates, delineates, and conceals.

At its best, style reflects the soul.

THE STYLE YOU SEE

As sure as we breathe, we style. We've been doing it naturally for millennia, with tribal markings and family plaids, gemstones and silicone implants, mausoleums and urban sprawl. Before there were designer labels, there were coats of arms and portrait painters. Our belongings and adornments announce social rank, the God we worship, and political affiliation. Like the plumage of birds or the patterned wings of a moth, our fashion choices are made to attract a lover, to command attention, or to blend quietly into the background.

History is punctuated with fashion and décor Style Statements. When she cut off her hair and showed up for battle in men's military garb, Joan of Arc made it clear that she would go the distance for her country and her God. They questioned her sanity, but her patriotism was inarguable. The Emperor Shah Jahan styled the ultimate statement of affection for his beloved deceased wife when he built her an exclusive resting place. Twenty-two years in the making, the Taj Mahal is one of the most magnificent symbols of devotion and craftsmanship on Earth.

Fashion can be superficial, but style as an expression of personal truth is never without meaning—in fact, it's the alchemy of the physical plane. Fashion designer Coco Chanel's cultural influence was so strong that she was named in *Time* magazine's list of the one hundred most influential people of the twentieth century—in the company of Winston Churchill and Albert Einstein. Entire industries and generations are defined by their ideas of cool. The top-ten and bestseller lists may seem like flimflam, yet they are anything but.

The shape of our creations—from buildings and cars to textiles and neighborhoods—reflect the disposition of the collective psyche.

Style does not hint at what's going on in a culture; it shouts it out with billions of retail dollars, civil movements, and social boundaries. Style is a phenomenal force that is as persuasive as political will and organized religion. It is a currency—of fashion, of technology, of ideologies—that has birthed nations. Style arouses emotion, triggers deep instincts, and changes people's minds.

Looking through the rearview mirror, it's easy to spot the big messages in history and pop culture. But look closer, into your own backyard; read between the lines of your life; examine the pattern of your thoughts. What shape do you take? What is the texture of your mind, the soundtrack of your days? What is your Style Statement?

The self is our life's goal, for it is the completest expression of that fateful combination we call individuality.

—CARL JUNG

THE STYLE YOU FEEL

It's not about the fashion; it's about the passion. Some personas reveal and some conceal. You can be consistently inauthentic and outwardly successful. But the point of defining your own Style Statement is to affirm an identity that reflects the real you. In her book, *The Substance of Style* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), cultural critic Virginia Postrel sums it up brilliantly: "Identity is the meaning of surface. Sometimes...statements of identity are inadvertent, and occasionally they are false. But in the age of aesthetics, they are inescapable. Effective surfaces, whether for people, places, or things, reveal layers of identity and association while preserving a fundamental sense of self."

THE STYLE YOU ARE

Every choice we make is an expression of our beliefs. On a daily basis, we make material and aesthetic choices that tell our stories. Bold or subtle. Polished or rough. Secluded or central. We compose our identity with sensory messages and symbols. In effect, by conveying ourselves in a particular way, we tell the world how we want to be treated.

We are hardwired toward self-preservation. From the shape of our cells to the swirl of our fingerprints, each human is profoundly, almost incomprehensibly, unique. In all the aeons of time, among the trillions of human eggs that have been fertilized and babies born, there is only one you—microscopically remarkable, positively unrepeatable, original, and beyond compare. *That's style.*

Style Stretch: An Inquiry

Style Statements, along with sweet longings and life callings, are rooted in your subconscious. So it's time to warm up your introspective muscles and stretch out your creative bones.

Remember, there is no right or wrong answer. If you're torn between choices, either force yourself to choose (sometimes pushing yourself to make a decision offers valuable insights in these types of exercises) or skip it and go back to it later.

ASK YOURSELF WHY?

When you have completed the exercise, scan your choices and ask yourself this profoundly important question: *why?*

Why do you relate to *planner* vs. *impulsive*? Because it seems professional and responsible to you? Because you have a fear of the unknown? Because your mother disapproves of impulsiveness?

Why milk chocolate over dark chocolate? Because milk chocolate reminds you of sweet childhood memories? Because dark chocolate is bitter and too grown-up? Because it's all you've ever tried?

You don't have to record your answers, and you certainly don't have to ask why about every set of words. But if you can, start to put thoughts, words, and reasons to your preferences. Knowing why you're attracted to or inspired by or prefer something is the golden key to opening up your Style Statement possibilities.

READ EACH WORD PAIR, THEN CIRCLE THE WORD THAT YOU FEEL THE MOST CONNECTION WITH. TRY NOT TO OVERTHINK YOUR CHOICES. MAKE YOUR SELECTIONS FROM THE HEART. IMPULSIVENESS CAN BE ENERGIZING.

EITHER-OR CHOICES

Introvert / Extrovert

Matte / Glossy

Cabin / Condo

Handwritten / Typed

Off-white / Gray

Silver / Gold

Round / Square

Fight / Flight

Jazz / Classical

Answer the phone / Voicemail

Frugal / Spendy

Indoor / Outdoor

Heritage / Contemporary

Anxious / Chilled

Liberal / Conservative

Red wine / White wine

Trusting / Cautious

Gregarious / Shy

Milk chocolate / Dark chocolate

Live theater / New DVD

Morning person / Night owl

Leather / Lace

New York / LA

Oprah / Martha

Poetry / Gospel

Rustic / Retro

Coffee / Tea

Educated / Street-smart

Streamlined / Overstuffed

Cotton / Raw silk

Crystal / Carvings

Medication / Meditation

Follower / Leader

Rebel / Peacemaker

Clutter / Sparse

Tofu / Steak

Day timer / Memory

Chrome / Copper

Naked / Pajamas

Moody / Bubbly

Pencil / Pen

Nightly News / MTV

History / Pop culture

Diamonds / Emeralds

Direct / Subtle

Plaid / Stripes

Fur / Hemp

Fiction / Nonfiction

Tulips / Roses

Digital / Analog

Astrology / Astronomy

Soccer / Baseball

Politics / Philosophy

Picasso / Monet

Sexy / Ladylike

Piles / Files

Impulsive / Planner

Lone ranger / Team player

Smooth / Rough

Handshake / Hug

Sweet / Sour

Warrior / Magician

Romantic / Realistic



Su T Fitterman, June 1961

Mom. Writer.

Simply

SPIRIT: Simply is authentic and unpretentious. No-nonsense and never one for airs or embellishment, they are typically humble and modest. What you see is what you get. Simply loathes excessiveness, waste, and clutter—both materially and psychologically. Deception and personal politics irritate them on the deepest level. What's unnecessary is disheartening. Simply is a direct communicator. They express themselves clearly and candidly. They love to find out the story behind the story, get their point across, and be heard, and they won't back down from an argument. In fact, they can be incredibly persistent and stubborn, to the point of becoming entrenched. For better or for worse, they're great at cutting corners. Simply loves to find the most logical or ideal solutions—utility and purposefulness are at the top of their list. They are remarkably durable and hearty spirits. Simply has a keen way of knowing what's most important or essential in every dimension and deeply relishes the basic necessities and pleasures of life.

LOOK & FEEL: Clean, pared down, balanced. Basic, organic. Fundamental. Austere, plain. Open spaces. Well organized. Tidy. Can range from ultramodern and stark to sheer elegance. Never ostentatious or showy.

Crafted

ancestry, background, bequest, birth-right, descent, endowment, estate, fabled, famous, gift, heirloom, heritage, heroic, inheritance, legendary, lineage, mythic, nobility, origins, provenance, recognized, stories, supernatural, traditional

OBJECTS



CLOCKWISE: Garden bucket, Felco pruners, Blundstone boots, my son's jam, Grandmother's knitting needle pouch, *Appetite* by Nigel Slater, *The Bread Baker's Apprentice* by Peter Reinhart and Ron Manville, *Homegrown* by Michel Nischan, *The Anatomy of a Dish* by Diane Forley and Catherine Young, *A Blessing of Bread* by Maggie Glezer, toys that I knit—"Grit & Grace"

DISTINCTIONS

THINGS I LOVE: That my son leans toward happiness, that my daughter only asks quirky questions; planning the vegetable garden in January; tea and cheese scones with good friends.

BOOKS THAT HAVE DEFINED ME: *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, *The Complete Shakespeare* by Pelican Publishers, *Appetite* by Nigel Slater, *The Best Recipes* by Cook's Illustrated, *Home Cooking* by Laurie Colwin, *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee* by Wendy Mogel.

I AM INTERESTED IN: getting to the core. Preserving the unique and individual. Slowing down the speed at which my family lives. Making as much as possible from scratch. Midcentury ranchers.

MY JEWELRY: Don't wear any. I'm not into adornment.

MY FAVORITE FLOWER: Sweet pea. So honest and basic and lovely. And I have a thing for the euphorbia bush.

I AM MY BEST SELF: early in the morning.

I COLLECT: information. Dishes from Hycroft China. Tweed yarn. Children's stories.

I CRAVE: dark chocolate with no bitter aftertaste.

MY TRIBE IS: earthbound.

I AM IMPRESSED BY PEOPLE WHO: are honest with themselves.

YOU COULDN'T PAY ME ENOUGH TO: eat trans fats.

ARTISTIC WORKS THAT INSPIRE ME: The Hundertwasser House in Vienna, pretty much any knit designed by Kaffe Fassett, and the ranch home by Cliff May.

MY FAVORITE FORM OF PLAY IS: hiking in Palm Springs, particularly up Smoke Tree Mountain along Garstin Trail.

YOU'D NEVER CATCH ME WEARING: someone else's logo. I prefer to make my clothes.

IF I WERE BORN INTO A DIFFERENT CULTURE: I'm stuck here for now.

SIMPLY MEANS TO ME: capturing the essence of somebody or something in a way that is easy, a way that flows, a way that is true.

CRAFTED MEANS TO ME: capturing the essence of somebody or something in a way that is easy, a way that flows, a way that is true.