

SPARK

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THE
CELEBRATION
ISSUE

IN THIS ISSUE

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SPARK

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

“Let yourself be silently drawn by the strange pull of what you really love. It will not lead you astray.” – Rumi

Life has a funny way of sneaking up on you. Five years ago when I moved to California for fashion school I could never have dreamt I'd be where I am today. I've come to realize since then that life is about taking chances, learning from your mistakes and truly connecting with something worth living for.

Since then, I've had so many life changing moments, in so many big ways. I attended UT and discovered a part of myself I hadn't met yet. I met and became engaged to the love of my life (who happens to be the most supportive man I have ever met.) But, neither of those huge, celebratory moments could have happened without the culmination of millions of tiny moments – I decided to apply to UT on a whim after hearing the UT fight song for the first time at a football game I had snuck into with my brother, Eric. (Nudge) I fell in love with my fiancé the moment I realized he was halfway across the world and I couldn't imagine my life without him. (Nudge, nudge)

As I walk across that stage on May 17 and down the aisle this winter, I will be over the moon excited to celebrate these new eras of my life, but I know that I'll really be celebrating those tiny, silent moments. For it's the moments that you are being silently drawn toward what you love that are really worth celebrating.

So here's to you, Spark readers. Here's to celebrating those moments in your life where you feel on top of the world. Here's to celebrating those quiet moments when something strange pulls you toward what you love. It will not lead you astray.

Cheers,
Chelsea Dunivan

Chelsea Dunivan



Editor's Obsessions

KEEP COOL

This summer I'm excited to celebrate the end of the school year in some 50s vintage style. The lighter the fabric and higher the waist, the more likely I'll wear it!



1
Everything about this outfit is working – from her awesome head wrap adorned hair style to her high waisted flowing skirt.

2
Update your sunnies this season – with some vintage flair.

3 & 4
The high waisted swimsuit bottoms – universally flattering and oh so chic.

6 & 7
The Texas heat can be seriously brutal! But it's easy to keep cool and cute by tying your hair up into a top knot and securing those flyaways with a low maintenance head wrap.

5
A bright maxi skirt can be thrown on over a swimsuit and paired with a loose tank on the go.

8
Ditch your heavy jean jackets in lieu of a light, sleeveless chambray. Oh, and make sure to tie it high on the waist. Duh!

— PERSPECTIVES OF PUNK —

JONATHAN OCHART:

The Met Gala held this month at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York boasted an interesting theme: “Punk: Chaos to Couture.” Although somewhat unorthodox for an event hosted by Vogue magazine and Anna Wintour (her style screams anything *but* punk), guests served some major styles that sent me into ecstasy. Here are my top picks from the annual ball, where the who’s who of New York and fashion gather as one. Let’s just say these looks inspired me to dress a little more punk the next time I go for a strut downtown.



What was she thinking?

Vogue editor-in-chief Anna Wintour donned a floral Chanel dress to her own event, and although it suits the spring season, I can’t see the connection with punk. Painted flowers in white, pinks, reds and yellows remind me of Celine Dion’s soft, sunny voice, not the clamorous tones of the Ramones. Beyoncé Knowles, Coco Rocha and others, however, took the theme to heart and looked fantastic.



Beyoncé Knowles might have served as honorary chairwoman of the event, but she looked nothing short of a queen in this Givenchy gown. What else would you expect from designer Riccardo Tisci? The baroque/punk fusion flatters her voluptuous silhouette, as the train resembling an exotic animal rug steals the show. She nailed the punk theme with her glam rock ensemble.



As if I didn't fawn over Madonna enough, she took the punk theme literally – and she worked it. The pop singer also chose a Givenchy look, opting for a plaid jacket featuring studs, chains and leather appliques. Mixing the piece over fishnets and hot pink stilettos by Casadei transports me to the '80s, when punk ruled the radio, while her black Cleopatra-esque wig mirrors that of Uma Thurman in "Pulp Fiction." Well done, Madge, well done.



Sarah Jessica Parker delivered sex *and* punk in the city with her tasteful Giles Deacon dress. The couture look seems straight out of a romantic painting, as the watercolor-like print mingles with the black feather hat – talk about a harmonious balance of punk and style. Props to SJP.

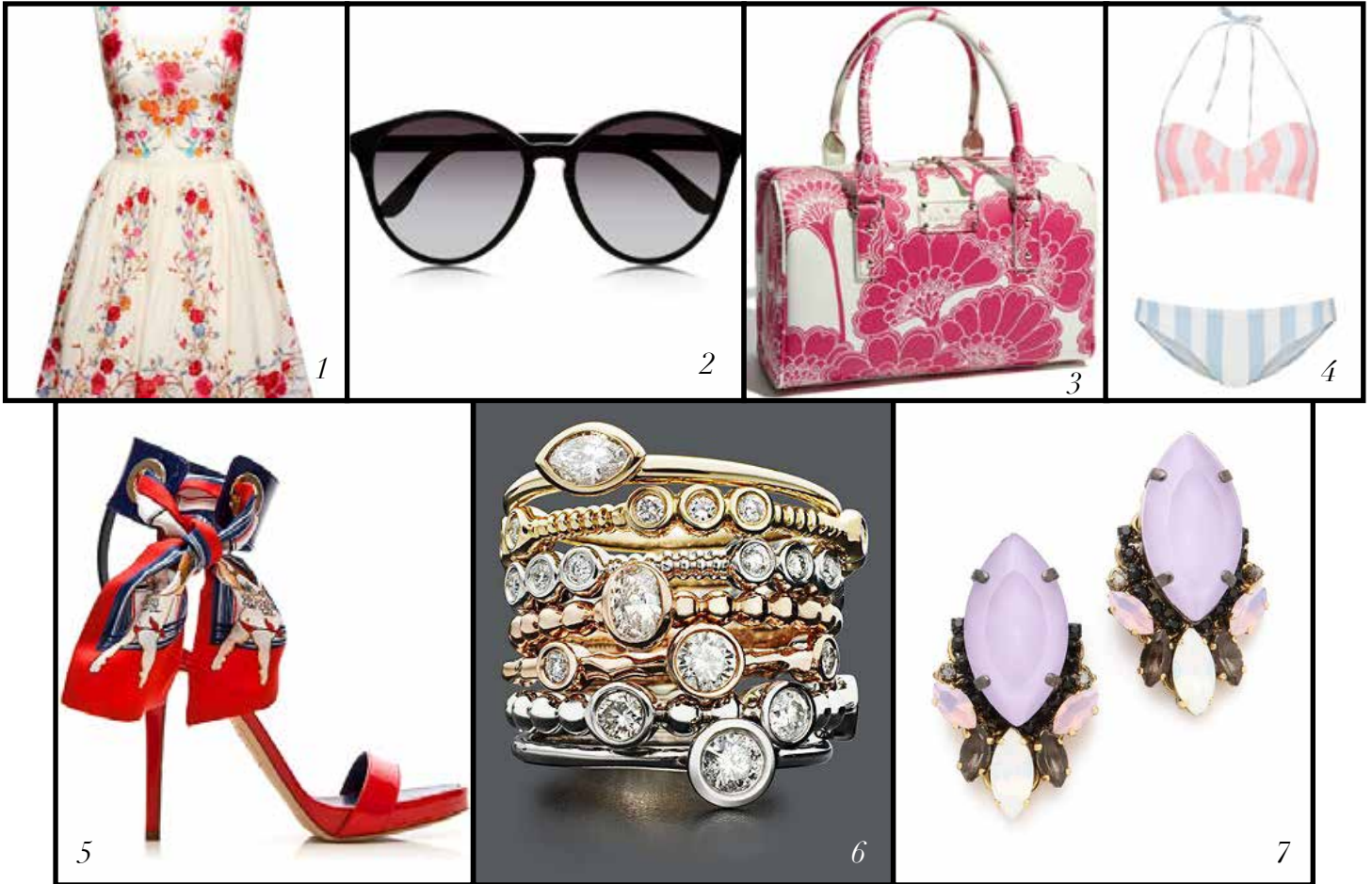


Supermodel Coco Rocha walked in wearing a leopard print dress with gilded ornaments. The form-fitting ensemble by Emanuel Ungaro is punk perfect – that little side slit adds extra edge and appeal.

EVERYTHING SUMMER

ELIZABETH JONES:

As summer gets closer, I find myself becoming drawn to bright colors and patterns. I'm usually a very "solids" type of girl, but lately I've been eyeing a lot of bold, summer-y patterns to expand my wardrobe.



1
I feel that a proper summer dress has to include florals! Floral skater dress from ASOS.

2
Summer isn't summer without cat eye sunglasses! I think they are a necessity during the season. Cat Eye Sunglasses from Stella McCartney.

3
All of my bags are either black, brown, or beige. But this colorful satchel has the right amount of pattern and color for me. Printed satchel from Kate Spade.

4
I'm even trying to integrate patterns into my swimwear, which is tough because I am so picky about patterns! Striped bikini from TopShop.

5
To me, sandals like these give off the "sexy, summer" vibe! High heel sandal from DSquared.

6
I know it's been going on for a while, but I'm just now getting into the two-toned accessory trend. Stackable rings from Macy's.

7
Next to watches, earrings are my favorite accessory. Colorful earrings can add the right amount of pop to any outfit! Cluster Earrings from Erickson Beamon.



SPARK STYLE

BY TYLER NEAL

Spark's newest style columnist tells students questioning their celebratory get-ups how to be the belles (and boys) of the ball this summer.

Q: What can I wear to be stylish at a 4th of July BBQ party, while keeping cool under the hot sun?

A: You can start with buying yourself a portable fan. Just kidding. There are several stylish options that you can buy this summer to keep you cool. Try a white off-the-shoulder or strapless dress. To keep it more interesting, find one that has cute details, such as sheer fabric or lace. One option in particular that you can try is the Diamond Shrine dress from Nasty Gal. Accessorize it with a silver necklace and floppy hat. If this outfit doesn't keep you cool, hopefully the BBQ party will be serving frozen margaritas.



Q: What do I wear to a boat party?

A: It depends on what kind of party we're talking about here. Are you talking about the kind where it's full of glitz, glamour and champagne? Or the kind where you and your friend end up taking off your shoes and chase tequila shots with the leftover hors d'oeuvres? Either way, I've got a nautical idea that would work impeccably. A polka dot tulip dress with pleats is cute, and be sure to use a belt to give it just the right summer flare. Enhance your shoe game by wearing a sexy pair of pink heels. The classic silhouette and feminine quality of the dress is a versatile combination that would be appropriate for any kind of boat party. Be sure to wear sunscreen too — it's always in style.



Q: I'm graduating soon and we're required to wear a black dress underneath our gowns. What kind of black dress should I wear? I don't want to be boring.

A: If you're into the latest trends, a fashionable idea would be to buy a black peplum dress from Anthropologie. The great thing about little black dresses is that you'll probably have another opportunity to wear it. Pair the dress with a pair of Kendra Scott earrings, such as the Elle in Red Tiger's Eye — it has a hint of brown that will look great in a sea of burnt orange, probably the least attractive color known to mankind. Congratulations and Hook 'em Horns!



Q: Every year, Texas Blazers has our annual event “Coats of Boats” — our equivalent of formal. I’ve already ordered my suit for the night but want some bowtie suggestions! Where can I buy some?

A: My good friend Anh Nguyen runs an online store on Etsy called “En Pointe,” and let me tell you, these bow ties are on point. There’s a Harry Potter yellow-and-navy bowtie if Hufflepuff is your thing and a galaxy nebula bowtie that’ll take everyone to Mars. The store is online though, so if you want a quicker option, visit New Brohemia in Austin. They have a wide variety of vintage bowties in every color you can imagine.



Q: I’ve got a wedding to attend next month. I want to be fashionable, but my friend is getting married in a super conservative church and I can’t show too much skin. Do you have any outfit ideas for me?

A: The Ruched Crossing dress from Anthropologie flatters any body type. The length is right above the knee — perfect if you want to respect the church’s wishes. It’s classic elegance done just right. The choice of grey gives your outfit neutrality, giving you freedom with your accessories. Have fun and stay classy, Miss Thing!



SPRING 2013: UNORDINARY TRENDS

By RACHEL SOLOMON

A lot of things happen in the world – some good, some bad. People get married, soldiers go to war, college students graduate. We cannot control our surroundings; we cannot control the future. But we can choose how we dress. We can choose to celebrate the good, embrace change, and face the unexpected, whether we decide to layer ourselves with tough leather or smooth silk. This spring, be the change you want to see in the world. Dress with courage, peace, compassion and strength. Match your actions with your outfits and express your individuality while letting some of these unlikely spring trends bring you and your sisters, friends and even enemies together.



Find Harmony in **CONTRAST**

Marc Jacobs cohesively paired opposing patterns and colors to create one chic ensemble. Take black and white and combine them like never before; introduce them to each other, and watch as they balance to become one while still maintaining their independence. For those days when you are feeling more edgy, take your inspiration from Alexander Wang and embrace cutouts – another one of this season's major trends.



Find Strength in the **POWER SUIT**

Few combinations are more powerful than that of masculinity and femininity. Even the most structured of suits is incapable of overpowering delicate layers underneath it. Pair a sheer cream top with a black or red blazer and feel yourself transform into something invincible – a being capable of facing even the worst of days with a quiet strength rooted in elegance. Never underestimate the power of even a touch of softness amid a structured outfit.



Find youth in **OVERSTATED RUFFLES AND FRILLS**

What begins as a few seconds quickly turns into minutes, then becoming hours and before you know it, a day has gone by. This is how we grow older, and it seems inevitable, uncontrollable. But what is under your control is your perspective – while you may become wiser, you can choose to hold onto your youthful innocence (if only for a moment). Let ruffles and frills serve as a reminder to wish on a lucky penny every once in a while and maybe, just maybe, believe that your wish will come true.



Find Inspiration in **PATCHWORK**

Life isn't seamless. Neither are patchwork dresses. But there is something liberating about stitching together mismatched parts to create a cohesive whole. Take after Erdem and Fendi and weave together parts of your life you never thought you could. Inspiration doesn't just come from unlikely places, but also unlikely combinations. Be brave, make mistakes and find the connections that make your life worth living.

TRANSFORMING BASKETBALL COURTS TO RUNWAYS

BY JONATHAN OCHART







The Frank Erwin Center near The University of Texas at Austin serves as home to the institution's basketball teams. When the pristinely polished court floor, hoops and scoreboards disappear, it becomes a concert space for billboard-topping singers ranging from Lady Gaga to Taylor Swift, Paul McCartney and more.

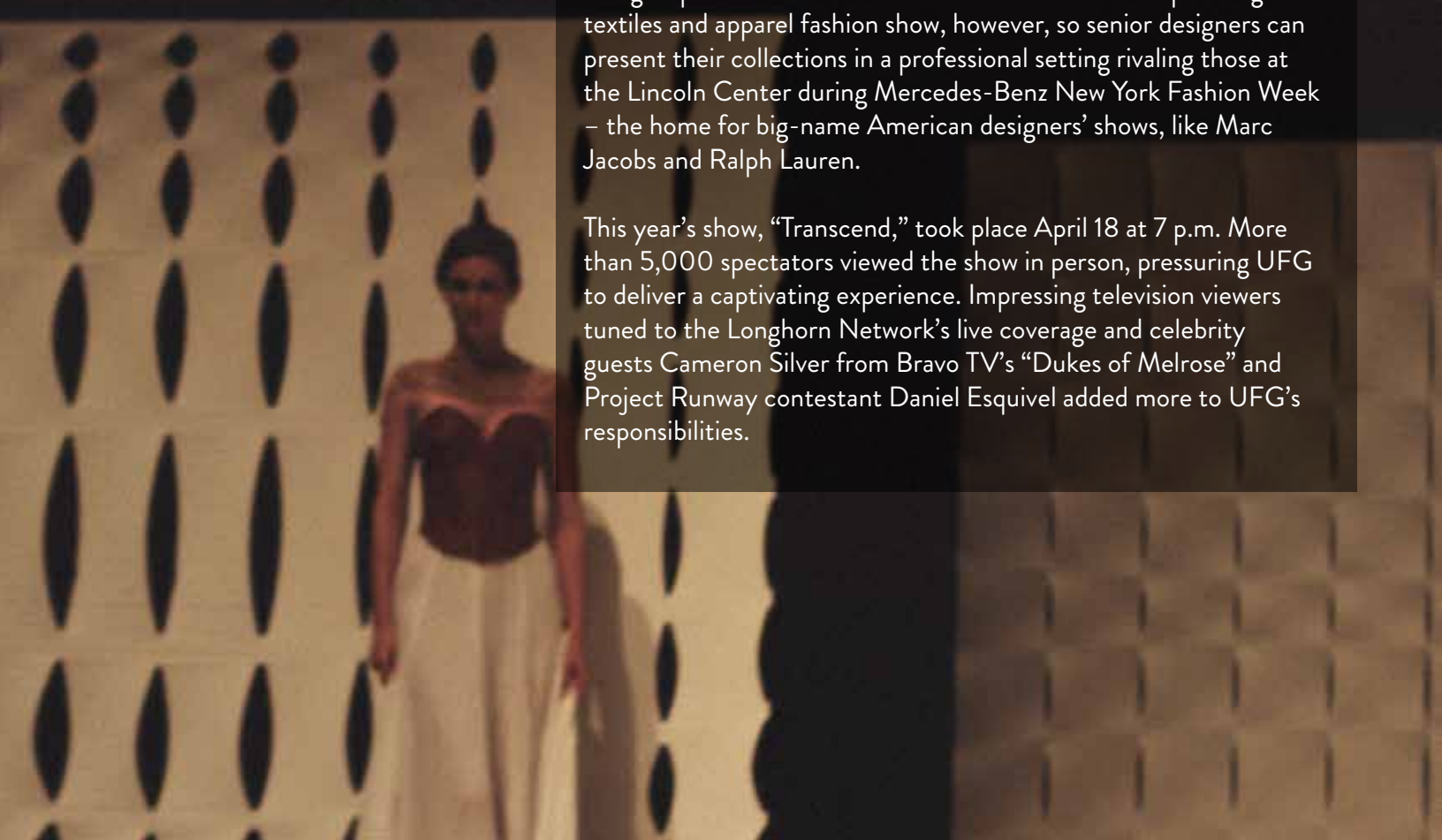
Once per year in April, however, the drum-like structure transforms into a fashion show venue complete with a runway. There, senior textiles and apparel students at the university reveal their clothing designs to the world in the largest collegiate fashion show in the United States.

University Fashion Group (UFG), a student organization at The University of Texas at Austin, coordinates the entire event each year with the help of three textiles and apparel professors: Eve Nicols, Ockhee Bego and Karen Bravo. Any student can join the group dedicated to providing members with exposure to the fashion industry.

From traveling to New York Fashion Week to assist designers like Timo Weiland and Lela Rose, working the Project Runway season finale, dressing models at local Austin designers' shows and bringing prominent speakers to general meetings, UFG members gain hands-on experiences to jumpstart their careers in the world of fashion.

The group of 156 members dedicates most of its time planning the textiles and apparel fashion show, however, so senior designers can present their collections in a professional setting rivaling those at the Lincoln Center during Mercedes-Benz New York Fashion Week – the home for big-name American designers' shows, like Marc Jacobs and Ralph Lauren.

This year's show, "Transcend," took place April 18 at 7 p.m. More than 5,000 spectators viewed the show in person, pressuring UFG to deliver a captivating experience. Impressing television viewers tuned to the Longhorn Network's live coverage and celebrity guests Cameron Silver from Bravo TV's "Dukes of Melrose" and Project Runway contestant Daniel Esquivel added more to UFG's responsibilities.



Planning a successful show requires months of preparing, and thanks to UFG's strict timeline and committees, the group created a spectacle that drew delightful gasps of awe – and that's reason for celebration.

Six main UFG committees spent countless hours from September 2012 through April to ensure the show's success. They include dressers; art and design; public relations; event coordinating/VIP; social media; and alumni relations. Each subgroup has a director and assistant director to manage members and delegate tasks.

First, UFG officers gathered in a meeting in September to think of a name for the show. After deliberating for a few weeks and weeding out potential titles, the group decided on "Transcend" due its brevity and definition.

The hands-on work arrived shortly after in October. Members began booking models, coordinating dressers, sending press releases to media outlets, gathering funds to bring the show into fruition, and designing the runway to bring the event to reality while transcending viewers' expectations.

Natalie Poche, a junior textiles and apparel student, directed the dressing committee as the model coordinator. In addition to finding males and females to model the seniors' designs, she matched each model to specific looks while managing her committee members dressing the models backstage.

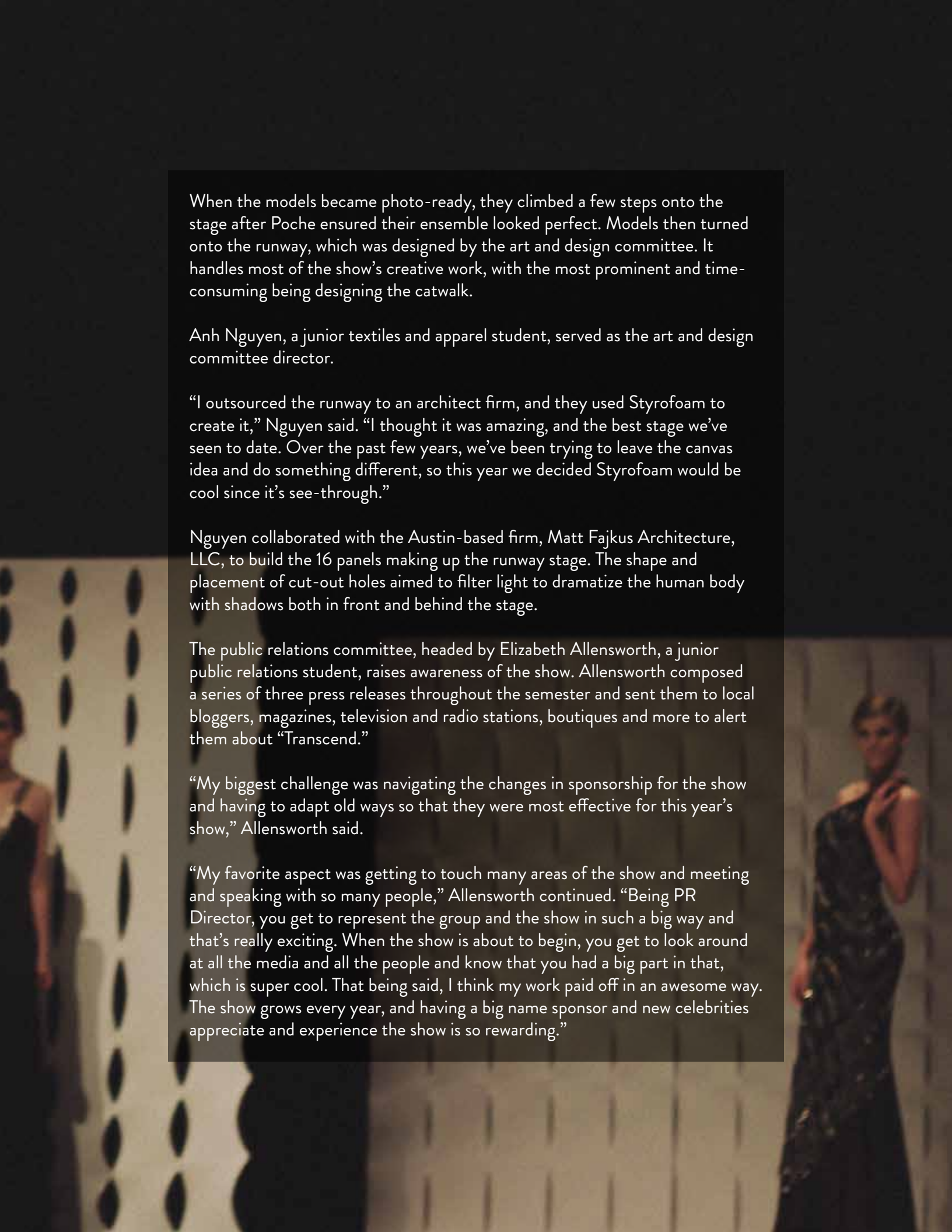
During "Transcend," about 20 dressers clad in black stood by in a tent behind the runway to ensure models wore the appropriate outfit and changed in and out of looks in time. Since some ensembles require fastening strappy heels, tying intricate corsets and zipping up back zippers, models needed a second pair of hands to dress completely and make it to the runway without ruining their hair and makeup.

"Getting garments organized for the show was difficult," Poche said. "From organizing the running order of which looks go first and numbering outfits to making sure each senior designer was happy was the hardest thing for me. Of course we want the designers to be happy, but it needs to work."

"I think the show was pretty awesome, because I know how organized the running orders were," Poche said. "We didn't have to yell for any models as we had in the past. I love my dressers and I couldn't have done my job without them. They did phenomenally. It was chaotic as they dressed different models at the fitting than at the show so they had to adapt the day of, but they read the dressing notes, learned about the new garments the day of, and I couldn't have asked for a better team."







When the models became photo-ready, they climbed a few steps onto the stage after Poche ensured their ensemble looked perfect. Models then turned onto the runway, which was designed by the art and design committee. It handles most of the show's creative work, with the most prominent and time-consuming being designing the catwalk.

Anh Nguyen, a junior textiles and apparel student, served as the art and design committee director.

"I outsourced the runway to an architect firm, and they used Styrofoam to create it," Nguyen said. "I thought it was amazing, and the best stage we've seen to date. Over the past few years, we've been trying to leave the canvas idea and do something different, so this year we decided Styrofoam would be cool since it's see-through."

Nguyen collaborated with the Austin-based firm, Matt Fajkus Architecture, LLC, to build the 16 panels making up the runway stage. The shape and placement of cut-out holes aimed to filter light to dramatize the human body with shadows both in front and behind the stage.

The public relations committee, headed by Elizabeth Allensworth, a junior public relations student, raises awareness of the show. Allensworth composed a series of three press releases throughout the semester and sent them to local bloggers, magazines, television and radio stations, boutiques and more to alert them about "Transcend."

"My biggest challenge was navigating the changes in sponsorship for the show and having to adapt old ways so that they were most effective for this year's show," Allensworth said.

"My favorite aspect was getting to touch many areas of the show and meeting and speaking with so many people," Allensworth continued. "Being PR Director, you get to represent the group and the show in such a big way and that's really exciting. When the show is about to begin, you get to look around at all the media and all the people and know that you had a big part in that, which is super cool. That being said, I think my work paid off in an awesome way. The show grows every year, and having a big name sponsor and new celebrities appreciate and experience the show is so rewarding."

Allensworth's committee members tabled on West Mall and in Jester Dormitory as well to pass out flyers, tell passerby about the show and raise awareness of the organization.

Thanks to the organization's efforts, various media and celebrities attended. Austin-based art and culture magazine *Tribeza* featured "Transcend" in its special events section, "Keep Austin Stylish" blogger Joanna Wilkinson published several photos and reviewed the senior designers' looks and CW Austin tweeted live information about the show.

The remaining committees assembled swag bags for VIP guests, updated UFG's social media sites with photos, tweets and Facebook statuses to provide followers with live news, hosted backstage tours and more to provide visitors a memorable evening.

Cameron Silver presented awards at the end of the show to seniors with the best designs while wearing a burnt orange bow tie and boutonniere created by former UT textiles and apparel student and Fashion Star TV show contestant, Ross Bennett. Silver tweeted "Congratulations to UT Longhorns on tonight's UT Transcend fashion show, y'all," expressing his and others' enjoyment of the show, raising UFG members' spirits.

When the show finished, members dispersed throughout Austin to grab some food and recover. They then met at the Madison on 5th Street downtown for an after party, where members, show attendees and their friends danced the night away to underground electro pop.

Throughout the year, when not planning for the show, members hold meetings every other Tuesday, where local professionals in the fashion industry speak about their paths to success. These individuals, such as Jessica Honegger, owner of fair-trade jewelry company Noontday Collection, offer information on internships and how to break into the competitive field.

Although "Transcend" is over, UFG officers already began thinking about next year's show. So far, no official name has been set, but they plan on 2014's show being even better than "Transcend." Whether stepping over obstacles or strutting down the catwalk, UT's fashion-forward students will slip on their running heels and wingtips to deliver the best show they can, regardless of what they may face.



THE STYLE INQUISITION, FROM VENEZUELA TO NEW YORK

BY JONATHAN OCHART





On a crisp, windy March morning at The University of Texas at Austin, herds of students swarm to their classrooms at the Belo Center for New Media. When the pedestrian crossing light flashes from red to white, the students fasten their paces to cross Dean Keaton Street in time. Clad in oversized T-shirts, thigh-length Nike shorts in neon tones and stocky, worn tennis shoes permit these students to run across without worrying about rips and tears.

One student, Ricardo Hernandez, wears an oxblood velvet blazer on top of a goldenrod sweater and gray fitted jeans. A faux black leather backpack hangs loosely on his right shoulder as ebony monk strap shoes from Zara envelop his feet. The UT journalism student can still make it across the street in time with the other students despite his many layers and dress shoes, however. Deciding to forego a belt liberates his waist, making it manageable to move swiftly.

As the day progresses after his morning classes, he ponders whether he should photograph his outfit for his personal blog, *The Style Inquisitor*. After all, it incorporated two fall trends. Fashion houses Yves Saint Laurent, Rodarte and Maison Martin Margiela, among others, infused oxblood colors into their fall 2012 collections. Monk strap shoes, praised for their smart, shiny buckles, found their way into major men's fashion publications from *GQ* to *VMAN Magazine*.

Ricardo chooses not to photograph his look; he says it resembles a previous outfit already featured on his site. Instead, he chooses to sift through mainstream style blogs, such as Leandra Medine's "The Man Repeller," for blogging inspiration. He examines what bloggers wear, how they style their outfits, their poses and discovers the latest fashion jargon. Medine recently posted about wearing brown chiffon underwear in public, a fashion statement Ricardo finds interesting. He'd never try it, though, but it leaves quite an impression – the sort of unorthodox impression that brings thousands of readers to a fashion blog.

Readers who frequent Ricardo's blog understand his penchant for injecting weekly posts with photos and occasional doses of verbosity. Each piece

captures his personal style with photos showcasing his outfits in various settings, along with text describing his current feelings and obsessions – fashion-related or not. Ricardo donned on a black asymmetrical motocross jacket he "resurrected from exile or whatever you would call a coffin of forgotten artifacts," denim shorts and a charcoal snapback in his post "Lingo," for instance. Another post, "Woodwork," spotlights a cream towel-like T-shirt he dubs "neo-umbrella garb" due to its water absorption abilities rivaling those of a robe. His closet shelters mostly minimalist, utilitarian and neutral clothes, as featured on his blog, because Ricardo prefers looking modest. Garish isn't an option.

The 21-year-old, originally from Venezuela, might never have discovered his love for fashion and writing if his family remained in its native country his entire life. He says if his family never moved to the United States, he definitely would not have learned English – the language he composes his blog posts in and later hopes to make a career out of.

A native Spanish speaker, moving to the United States at age 7 meant moving to another country and adjusting to another culture. Learning how to speak, read and write in English played a major role in not only integrating into the American lifestyle, but influencing his future career as a fashion blogger and journalist.

Ricardo spent his younger days in Puerto La Cruz, Venezuela – a port city famous for possessing one of the nation's largest oil refineries. The skinny, active and outgoing child constantly played with his cousins and siblings, from running up hills to buying candies at the bodega, especially pirulines.

Since few people in the city could afford cars, most Venezuelans had to walk from place to place. To survive the steamy tropical climate, they wore clothing commonly seen on the beach: sandals or comfortable walking shoes, cut-off shorts and loose-fitting, breezy T-shirts. Wearing the latest fashions proved irrelevant.

"Fashion was a completely obscure concept to me," Ricardo said. "In that kind of environment, fashion isn't really a normal thing."



Swimming in the beach with bright-colored Speedos and spending afternoons with family while dressed in blue overalls and tennis shoes came to a sudden halt when his father, Vicente Hernandez, decided to accept a job offer in Houston, Texas. The geologist thought working with Neuralog, a petroleum engineering firm, would benefit the Hernandez family in the long run. "I remember he didn't really ask the kids' opinion and whether we wanted to go or not," Ricardo said. "My brother and sister were hurt at the time, but it seemed like a good idea moneywise. It was a little shocking at first but I was so young I didn't really realize what was going on."

The Hernandez family moved to The Woodlands, near Houston, in 1998. Elegant abodes straight from a Better Homes and Gardens magazine lined every boulevard, where spotting a BMW, Mercedes-Benz or Lexus was common. Floral landscapes, frequently groomed oaks and man-made ponds contrasted the wild vegetation and beaches in Venezuela.

"I noticed how clean the streets were, how nice everything was," Ricardo said. "The Woodlands is like a bubble in Texas, and everything seems wealthy. It was great moving to The Woodlands, but it was daunting going to school because I couldn't speak the language."

Ricardo enrolled in Sally K. Ride Elementary School for the third grade. He clearly recalls the mascot, a spaceship, and not understanding English.

"My first day was hell," Ricardo said. "I came home and cried a lot. My brother and sister cried, too. I cried because I didn't know what was going on, but my brother and sister cried not because they were being bullied, but because no one would help them. The only thing I remember being great was my professors."

Ricardo's English teacher helped him settle into the new culture by asking classmates who spoke Spanish to provide translations.

Some classmates called him "Retardo" because he couldn't speak English as fluently as natives when he first began elementary school there. Incidents like these fueled his desire to learn English.

One ritual Ricardo practiced to learn English





Home of
WHISKEY
AT THE

ENTER

occurred nearly every day after walking home from school. When he arrived, he rushed to the television and pressed the power button. He then grabbed the remote and flipped through channels until the Disney Channel logo flashed across the screen. The pre-teen network's programs reigned as his favorite shows; they offered him an escape from an unfamiliar land, all while teaching him conversational English. With the channel set, he shuffled to the kitchen and pulled out a loaf of white bread, a bottle of ketchup and mayonnaise. Mixing squirts of ketchup atop a dollop of mayonnaise on each bread slice birthed salsa rosada, a pink spread common in South America. One extra ingredient that sometimes presented itself at the perfect time on Disney Channel – "Lizzie McGuire" – made the concoction even more palatable.

Grasping his neatly made sandwich, he planted himself on the sofa, growing roots for hours while watching shows ranging from "That's So Raven" to "Even Stevens." Wearing a Nautica brand T-shirt from Wal-Mart, usually a brown one with a small black stripe across the chest, Bermuda shorts and Sketchers made TV watching a relaxing getaway; it was practically pre-teen paradise.

Thanks to these afternoon delights, English class and reading Harry Potter books, he felt ready to enter the spelling bee in fourth grade after one of his teachers persuaded him. He won the preliminary competition, and was one of the last four students standing in the final round.

"I got the word 'chimney,' and for some reason I didn't understand the prompter," Ricardo said. "So I asked them to use it in a sentence. They said 'Santa Clause climbs a chimney to give children presents.'"

The fourth grader slowly spelled out G-E-M-N-Y. He heard a buzzing sound – a sound signifying incorrectness – so he walked offstage, entered the hallway outdoors and began crying. His mother, Betty Hernandez, consoled him alongside his English teacher, ensuring him everything would be fine.

From then on, Ricardo dedicated himself to his middle and high school studies, primarily focusing on his favorite subject: English.

"It gave me a chance to write," Ricardo said. "What I love about writing is that it gives you the ability to write about what you don't know in a way, to be something you're not, to somehow live in an imaginary world."

"Our family went through a lot coming here financially," Ricardo continued. "Once my dad got the Neuralog job, he lost it two years later because of the economy. We lost our house, and shuffled a lot between places. At that time, I was looking for something to pass the time - not necessarily to express my emotions and channel my 'depression.' Writing allowed me to keep going and going without getting tired."

"I was also coming from a family where my sister didn't go to school, and my brother wasn't

very dedicated, so I focused on school and got As in all my classes because I wanted to make my parents proud," Ricardo said.

During this period, Ricardo said, he had no interest in fashion. He never sifted through his mother's Cosmopolitan magazine resting on the coffee table; he never thought about delving into Vogue. Mindlessly throwing on bright surfer-inspired polo shirts, T-shirts and cargo shorts emblazoned with massive seagull and moose logos from Hollister and Abercrombie & Fitch proved simple and manageable. After all, everyone else at school wore the mall-exclusive brands to class on a daily basis.

Then, in 2008, his high school teachers began telling students to start researching colleges. Fascinated by New York-based TV shows, he studied the city online while lying in his bed and discovered New York University. After reading about the public institution's famed fashion programs, he decided to search "fashion journalism" out of curiosity on Google.

Then he stumbled upon Style.com.

Scrolling through the top women's online fashion magazine, which launched in 2000, altered his perception of fashion forever. Perusing through Sarah Mower's piece reviewing Hussein Chalayan's spring 2007 ready-to-wear collection inspired Ricardo to see fashion as an art, a worthy passion, a livelihood. Chalayan's massive sun hats fringed with lace resembled delicate jellyfish as crystal beads splashed across

carefully draped dresses in periwinkle and light, buttery yellows. His semi-avant garde looks would turn pointillist artist Georges Seurat's 19th Century Victorian ladies green with envy. They turned Ricardo red with excitement.

"I was so drawn to [Chalayan] because he showed clothes that moved," Ricardo said. "I then devoted time to researching the industry the next year and found how prominent the blogosphere was."

First, he followed "Style Scrapbook," a blog by a woman named Andy Torres that documents her personal style with photos. Then came Susanna Lau's "Style Bubble," a blog dedicated to her outfits, fashion show reviews and feature stories. Continuously adding blogs onto his reading list cultivated fashion knowledge within Ricardo's mind.

At this time, his closet mutated from a mall shop replica to a personal boutique. Gone were the days of Hollister and Abercrombie & Fitch; now, Ricardo frequented fast-fashion retailers Zara, H&M, ASOS, Van Heusen and Alexander Wang, among other brands.

The student maintained his blog-reading routine throughout the next few years. In the summer of 2010, he enrolled at Lone Star College, in the Woodlands, before attending UT. While studying for entry-level courses, he also studied acclaimed bloggers' writing and photography techniques. He relished how bloggers expressed themselves not only through writing or

photography, but clothing as well. With his interest in fashion, Ricardo could transform from a student blending in with the crowd into a student standing out from the crowd.

Pairing a crème fraîche tailored blazer with an ombré hoodie, for instance, played on the casual "college" vibe of wearing lonesome loose fleece jackets. Blogging about looks like this would provide him a two-in-one opportunity for communicating his sentiments and perspectives: first, as a college student pondering life, and second, as a college student building his personal style. He could practice his writing skills and English, which were simply added bonuses.

That semester, amid biology and government classes, Ricardo launched a blog of his own named The Style Inquisitor. He started off blogging about established designers' collections and reviewing their shows, similar to those published on Style.com. He kept the blog secret, though, as his family expected him to follow in his father's footsteps as a scientist.

June 29, 2010, marked his first fashion show review. Titled "Fall 2010 Chanel: Glamorous Ice Queen," Ricardo praised Karl Lagerfeld's collection featuring furs and leathers on an arctic-inspired runway. He wrote:

Well, how more Chanel could you get with beautiful furs covering the bodies of women like Coco Rocha and Sasha Pivovarova? Lagerfeld must have taken a summer sojourn in the icy corners of the Earth to have come

back with such an unexpected entry for the season's fashion lineup.

Although the blog served as an antidote to ail Ricardo's distress from attending Lone Star College rather than NYU, publishing reviews like this onto The Style Inquisitor for a few months led him to considering his blog "stale."

"Not everyone wants to just see words; people need a way to relate to you," Ricardo said. "So, I incorporated a lifestyle component to it. I began including photos of myself, talking more about my own interests and not just writing."

Rather than reposting photos from Style.com onto his blog accompanied by his take on big-name designers' shows, he began devising truly original content. One blog post photo shoot Ricardo clearly remembers took place in February 2011, after telling his family about the blog and his career aspirations, which they swallowed with difficulty after much discussion.

One winter day in the Woodlands, at the Hernandez home, Ricardo asked his mother to take a photo of him. Twenty minutes passed as Ricardo posed on the back patio in a taupe maxi cardigan along with a brown leather satchel. Oversized sweaters rampaged designers' collections at the time. Eventually, they trickled down into department stores where he fished one out from a clothing rack, providing him an opportunity to blog about a trendy, in-season piece. With legs hip-width apart, hands in pocket, right eyebrow





perched higher than usual as his concentrated glance faced the camera head-on, Ricardo tried emulating famed bloggers' looks. Despite his attempt to mirror Rumi Neely, a style blogger known for her eclectic yet natural poses, he felt out of place as his mother complained about the cold biting her gloveless hands.

"I was awkward posing at first - I just stood there," Ricardo said. "I remember also trying to be dynamic by jumping around but it looked unnatural. I don't like when I look posed. When you look at blogs like Style Scrapbook, Andy Torres just smiles at the camera and jumps in every single post. I don't like that, as compared to Fashion Toast. There, [photos] can be shots during a coffee run, and taken from a different angle. I wish I could take photos of me myself, but I can't. It's in the hands of people I ask to photograph me."

The Style Inquisitor's web traffic increased exponentially, from an average of 30 page views a day to 350, after Ricardo began posting photos of his own looks. His blog attracted larger audiences from around the world, particularly Europe, and his online presence gained prominence. With a portfolio of fashion show reviews and personal style posts, digital publications soon began stumbling upon his own blog and requested him as a freelancer. Writing fashion pieces for online magazines like INK and CHAOS became a monthly endeavor. Posting fresh content onto The Style Inquisitor became a daily responsibility.

That August, in 2011, Ricardo enrolled as a journalism student at UT. During the same month, after tons of photo shoots, blogging and freelancing, he received a call from Elle magazine. The female voice on the other line congratulated him, notifying the blogger that he was a winner of the Nokia and Elle Style Correspondent Competition he recently entered. The jovial student scurried to his computer, rapidly hit the keyboard and typed the news to notify his blog followers. The dream of becoming a legitimate style blogger and writer just became more promising.

Serving as a style correspondent for Nokia and Elle signified an all expenses-paid trip to New York City for fashion week in September to blog about various designers' shows. He would attend several events while using Nokia cell phones to update social media sites, helping promote the telephone manufacturer. Jetting off to the East Coast in a chestnut-toned sweater from the GAP, he felt comfortably chic.

Upon landing in Newark, N.J., on Sept. 7, Ricardo was promptly scooped up by a limousine that delivered him to Manhattan. The driver dropped him off in Midtown, in front of the Bryant Park Grill, where he met other correspondents and renowned style blogger, Bryanboy. Ricardo ordered an expensive plate of pasta as a film crew recorded the group indulging and asking the popular blogger questions. As part of the Nokia and Elle program, the crew also asked the correspondents about their blogging experience using Nokia

cell phones.

After dinner, Ricardo journeyed to Fifth Avenue with his new colleagues for Fashion's Night Out activities. Vogue magazine and the Council of Fashion Designers of America created the event in 2009 to help salvage the fashion industry during the floundering global economy during their respective fashion weeks. They attempted to attract customers to stores to purchase clothes by bringing celebrities and hosting large-scale events.

Scavenging through Bergdorf Goodman and other high-fashion department stores for clothing sales and complimentary canapés warmed Ricardo for what the week had in store. Throughout his time in New York, he attended shows by designers Phillip Lim, Derrick Lamb, Rebecca Minkoff, Alexander Wang, Thakoon and more. Out of all the shows, Olivier Theyskens' spring 2012 collection for New York label Theory impressed Ricardo most.

Upon entering the warehouse-like venue, The Style Inquisitor felt as if he stumbled upon an underground, secret location - a clandestine dwelling where fashion's glitterati gathered to view the Belgian designer's latest creations unperturbed. Bryanboy was in attendance, as were bloggers Rumi Neely, the Sartorialist and more. The Style Inquisitor basked in their presence, barely able to take in the trendy icons without fawning.

After finding his seat in the third row, he sat next to fellow Nikon and Elle correspondent

Cindy Ko, who decided to wear a Stella McCartney fur. The Style Inquisitor chose a more subtle look, opting for a navy blue blazer with white piping from Zara – he recalls the nautical trend being major that season, particularly for men. Prolific fashion writer Indigo Clarke, who has written for magazines ranging from Harper's Bazaar to Wonderland to Vogue UK, sat directly in front of him as her chocolate, pin straight hair flowed behind her.

And then the lights dimmed and the music played.

An electro house soundtrack boomed as models began ruling the runway. One by one, the human mannequins walked in front of metallic panels resembling aluminum foil, stepping onto the teal plaster floor in looks suitable for escapades down the Lower East Side. The Style Inquisitor scribbled his thoughts about the casual jackets, skirts and occasional jumpsuit in neutral tones of creams, blacks and blues onto his note pad. He noticed denim and leather's prominence, and took pleasure in the utilitarian aspect of oversized pockets perfect for storing the latest iPhone or Chanel compact while on the go. The Style Inquisitor's favorite look, however, consisted of loose-fitting black leather pants paired with a heather knitted crop top.

While jotting down words like "tweed" and "crop top," he noticed Indigo Clarke scribbling notes in front of him onto her notepad, too. He felt like he deserved that seat, working as a fashion correspondent in New York - not

just for that night, but forever.

After mingling with guests and snapping a few photos for his blog, The Style Inquisitor departed from the venue and reentered reality. He returned to being Ricardo, simply enjoying the city like a tourist admiring larger-than-life billboards on Times Square. But this was just temporary. Soon, he'd rush to more shows, arrive in his hotel room late at night and compose blog posts detailing their trends and repeat. Little sleep and free time failed to impact him negatively; now he knew for certain this was where he belonged.

He rapidly transformed his notes into text worthy of the fashion savvy's attention, and published his review onto the blog on Sept. 20, 2011:

Innovation was not lost this season, as Theyskens also presented the aforementioned wool/leather combination look in an inverted double, as seen on a model clad in both a black leather top and a knit/tweed hybrid jacket. It was obvious we had a doppelganger in our midst, and we weren't complaining. Similarly, no objections were raised against the sporadic moments of glamour experienced by the crowd as models strutted out in crystallized beaded vests, tops, and dresses, bearing sharp metallic tones and more understated silhouettes like...actually, they were all pretty striking.

After a few more days of visiting shows, writing reviews and attending after-parties, New York Fashion Week came to a sudden

halt. The Lincoln Center's return to a performing arts space connoted Ricardo's return to Austin.

"It was bittersweet, though I got what I wanted," Ricardo said. "I wanted a taste of what I could possibly do in the future and what my career could be, and I got it. But I was just in the beginning of college and I have a long ways to go. It's annoying when you do something you love and then it's taken away from you so quickly like that."

Anxious to relive his weeklong escape to the city that never sleeps, he applied to Condé Nast's summer internship program in October 2011. The New York-based magazine publisher, which boasts titles ranging from Vogue to GQ to Vanity Fair and the New Yorker, chose not to select him that year.

Ricardo's persistence led him to applying again a year later in October 2012. Within five days, he received an email from Samantha Storch of Condé Nast's human resources department requesting him to visit New York for an interview.

Determined to impress the publishing company in person, he flew to New York in the middle of the semester. First, after passing through the turnstile to enter the building near Times Square, he took an elevator up and sat in a lobby with other internship-hopefuls. One girl had the latest Chloé bag. Another girl freighted her belongings in the famous Céline tote.





Ricardo's hands were bag-free. But he felt confident as he walked into the interview in his tan Maison Martin Margiela for H&M blazer, Carolyn Massey for ASOS chunky knit midnight blue sweater and wool trousers. The same monk strap shoes featured earlier on The Style Inquisitor graced his feet. His fashion journalism experience and personality, however, contributed to his confidence the most.

"I thought I would be excruciatingly nervous, but I didn't feel a single thing," Ricardo said. "I was the calmest ever. I walked in, chatted with the people who seemed approachable, made some friends. I made sure not to try and be nervous, because I feel like they want people with personality. They don't just want another writer; if you're great but cold they won't hire you. You need a voice behind your writing."

Once the interview concluded, the editor from Women's Wear Daily, a fashion trade journal sometimes referred to as the "bible of fashion," told Ricardo he would find out if he was chosen by February 2013.

February came, and he heard nothing.

March passed, too, and despite the several emails he sent to the publisher's human resources department inquiring his internship status, the silence persisted. Every time a family member or friend asked Ricardo if he heard back from Condé Nast, and he said "no," he felt as if he was lying about interviewing in the first place.

Then April came along. Ricardo checked his email as usual and spotted a message from Samantha Storch. He got the internship, and would work as an editorial assistant for one of Women's Wear Daily's eye reporters starting in June.

"It still gives me goose bumps that I did not speak one word of English and went to a country where I didn't know how things operated," Ricardo said. "I've worked hard and made my parents proud, and now I'm getting to something I've dreamt of doing. I feel like now I'm taking big steps. I'm not there yet and have a long ways to go, but I feel like I'm in a good place. I just want to make my parents proud because they gave me a lot. I want to be published in a magazine and then be able for them to say 'see, my

son didn't end up being a geologist, but he became a journalist and is successful at it."

With the spring semester completed, he can now focus on minute details surrounding his two-month stay in New York. So far, he's certain that he'll be subleasing an apartment in Lower Manhattan near Chinatown and the Bowery. But what will he wear to the office? Who will he spend free time with during the evenings and weekends? How will he balance working, learning and living all in one summer?

Despite these uncertainties, Ricardo knows one thing for sure: a spot in his suitcase waits for a pair of trusty, dependable shoes. Ebony monk strap shoes with a smart, shiny buckle from Zara, to be exact. If they could trump Dean Keeton Street's pedestrian lights, cyberspace and the Condé Nast building's turnstiles, they could surely take on New York. The Style Inquisitor just needs to take the city slowly but surely, one step at a time.















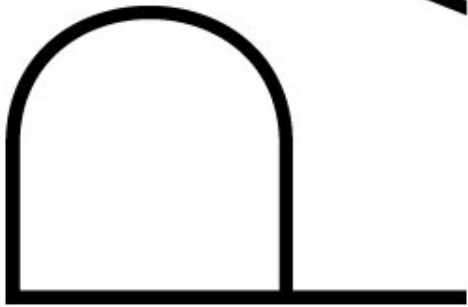
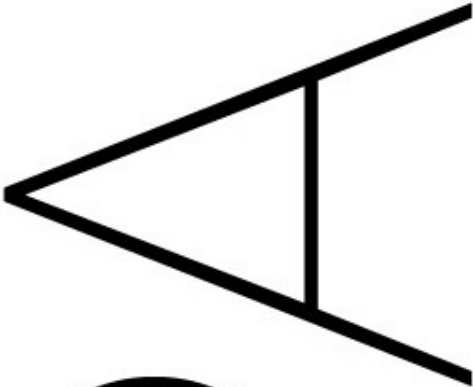
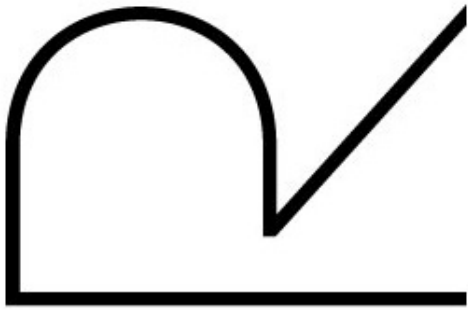
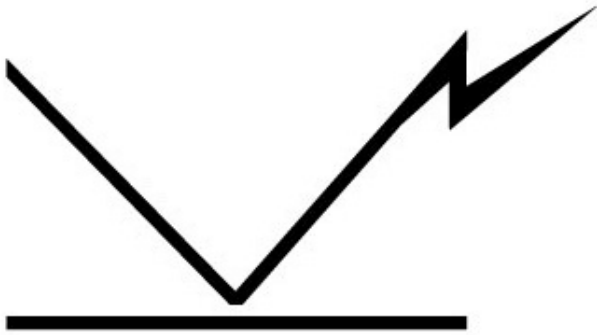












CREDITS

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