

What Do Your Shoes Say About YOU?

Sometimes, what you stand in can reveal to the world what you stand for. Kim Reyes does some sole-searching to find out how.



FROM LEFT: Leather pumps with metal heels, Loewe; metallic snakeskin platforms, Gucci

“The shoe that fits one person pinches another,” Carl Jung, the founder of analytical psychology, once said. “There is no recipe for living that fits all cases.”

I used to believe that you could tell a lot about a person by looking down. A self-professed shoe addict, I imagined that somehow, even subconsciously, shoes could reveal the nuances of your character. Then, as my collection grew, I began to ask myself what my coveted footwear was unveiling to the world about me. And I panicked.

In the psychology of shoedom, you've got the power-hungry pump-wearers and the stiletto-teetering drama mamas. There's the flirt in strappy sandals and the down-to-earth girl in sensible flats. Shoe Psych 101. So where did I stand?

If your shoe collection is anything like mine — and if you've made it this far with nary a head-scratch, then I surmise it is — a quick scan of the contents of your psychological shoe make-up would diagnose you with Multiple Personality Disorder. Some of my revealing contrasted identities include black and silver biker-style Balenciaga booties playing footsie

with a pair of suede Louis XIV-inspired Dolce & Gabbana heels, in turn rubbing up against a perfectly non-practical pair of never-been-worn mirrored Fendi wedges. Illness? What illness?

Face it ladies, you're showing symptoms, too. But as most of us admit to our shoe schizophrenia, changing our footwear like it's illegal to wear the same pair two days in a row, it also follows that we're running out of ways to define ourselves by our feet. Does wearing this season's Dior tribal statue-shaped heels make me a voodoo-wielding shaman? Are the colour-blocked patent sandals at Hermès meant to invoke the Lego-playing halcyon days of my youthful naiveté? And don't even get me started on all those porn star platforms ...

Inevitably, it won't matter if you've got on Roger Vivier's sexy python stilettos or a couple of burlap sacks tied around your ankles (I'm looking at you, Rick Owens). It will all come down to one thing — standing on your own two feet.

Months ago, no one would've looked twice at a pair of nondescript leather Baydan shoes, but as soon as they were hurled at former US president George W Bush by an Iraqi journalist during a press conference, the Ducati Model 271 oxfords suddenly became more than just shoes — they were a political statement.

Not that I'm encouraging any kind of footwear flinging — though if you were to conduct

an experiment, I'd bet Gucci's chunky spring platforms could do some serious damage — but the Bush incident was a superb illustration of how shoes can become emblematic of something more than just sartorial taste.

Do you think Cinderella asked Fairy Godmother for shoes made of cold, hard glass? It wasn't just luck that brought her to happily-ever-after — talk about a woman who suffered in her soles (storybooks always skipped out on the part where Cinderella nursed her blisters). Losing that slipper was the best thing that could have happened to her! As she'd say: no pain, no gain.

On the other hand, life was relatively painless for Marie Antoinette (that is, up until her fateful execution). Spending the nation's fortunes on extravagances that included two new pairs of shoes a week while her countrymen starved, the young queen kept her head held high until her very last breath. She stepped up to the gallows in opulent two-inch heels and, according to legend, used them to “accidentally” step on the executioner's toes. For those who understand the power of shoes, that says more about her unrelenting attitude of superiority than “Let them eat cake” ever did.

While we're not living in a fairytale or in 18th-century France, it goes to show that sometimes, shoes aren't just about what you wear on your feet, but more importantly, the steps you take in them. And until Louboutins become acceptable artefacts for carbon-dating, we'll just have to rely on our own intuitive practices of shoe-dressing and stepping to express to the world who we are, from the bottom up.

The best way to do that? Listen to your Jungian instincts — the shoe that pinched you yesterday might just fit you today.

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hen it comes to style advice, most of it is full of “don’ts”: don’t wear this, it’s not flattering; don’t wear that—you don’t have the body for it. The underlying message might as well be: don’t bother because it’ll make you look like a circus freak for being too short, too tall, too busty, too flat, too curvy or too straight.

I’m not denying that some silhouettes, patterns, hemlines and shapes work better on certain body types than others. But what I’m advocating is for women to break out of their style comfort zones, tackle the “don’ts” head-on, and realise they are not forbidden from these looks just because someone else says they can’t make it work.

At one of *BAZAAR*’s fashion events, a rather petite lady in her 30s approached me after I had given a presentation on the trends of the season. She was a platform heel shorter than me and was seeking advice about what kinds of clothes a woman of her height should wear. After talking with dozens of women that evening, I was in a zombie-like state of fashion jargon and began giving her a laundry list of items that style gurus would usually tell the vertically-challenged among us to stay away from. Calf-length skirts? A definite no-no. Cropped pants—don’t even think about it. Maxi dresses—you’ll look like you’re melting. Big patterns? Honey, what are you smoking?

I watched as her face, once full of enthusiasm and excitement, suddenly dropped like a facelift in reverse. At that moment, I realised: who am I to be telling other women what not to wear? Here I am, barely tall enough to ride the grown-up rollercoasters at Universal Studios and yet I never veer away from trying a style that I think looks chic or modern just because of my height, or lack thereof. Some people have told me that working at



Dries Van Noten
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Why I Don't
DRESS
FOR MY

BODY

TYPE

Tackling trends is never easy—especially when style mantras dictate that you don't have the body shape to pull them off. Kim Reyes wonders if the rules for dressing to flatter your figure are outdated and overrated

a fashion magazine gives me free reign to break conventional fashion rules and wear whatever I want because it’s part of my job, but I disagree—I think every woman should have that right, whether they work in fashion, finance or farming.

Last year, when designers started showing drop-crotch pants on the runway, I knew that was a trend that in style theory people of my, ahem, limited stature should stay away from, making my legs look shorter and my already bulging hips wider. But I tried on a pair anyway and fell in love with the way they draped. I loved the silhouette they created when paired with a soft cashmere tank and a strappy heel, which helped to balance the look. On the other hand, this season’s kitten heel trend? One look and my bulky calves vehemently exclaimed, No, thank you. You have to choose your battles.

As much as style sources preach about trends, it’s not about blindly following them—it’s about playing with looks and directional pieces to see what works for you. And sometimes, it even means sacrificing the appearance of an “ideal” body image (the ridiculous concept of which shall be saved for another piece) for a silhouette that suits your style and makes you feel comfortable in your own skin. If you try something on, look in the mirror and like what you see, that is more than good enough.

The bottom line is, you don’t always have to believe traditional rules of fashion that say you can’t wear a certain trend because of your body shape. If you don’t try it on for yourself and experiment, you may be missing out on potential looks that can help define your signature style. Next season’s Louis Vuitton dresses sport plunging necklines and hemlines that end mid-calf. Style rules would tell this busty five-footer to stay away, but the fashion warrior in me says, bring it on. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY: DAN LEGGA



ALEXANDER The GREAT

Lee Alexander McQueen, 1969 – 2010

Fashion maverick, troubled genius, iconic visionary. In a personal tribute, Kim Reyes mourns the loss of the most inspiring fashion talent of this generation

I have a confession to make. I was not born a fashion person. I did not fawn over magazines or models, handbags or hemlines. For me, fashion was no more than a passing interest in frivolity.

I don't remember the first time I heard about a designer named Alexander McQueen, but I do know he was the one who changed the way I saw fashion. In 2002, I watched a video entitled *The Bridegroom Stripped Bare*, a rare peek into the design process: McQueen using cuts, fabric, string and paint to transform a suit-wearing groom into a (somewhat terrifying) bride. As he cut and draped, splashed white paint on a live model and gagged him with a tie, those images astounded and haunted me.

His vision of what a garment could be was both unsettling yet poignantly beautiful. Fashion through McQueen's lens was no longer frivolous. This was living, breathing poetry.

His famously theatrical catwalk shows were equally poetic. From models battling snow, rain and fire to walking on water or flying, every McQueen show was a cinematic spectacle of fantasy and dramatic dreamlike visions. Sometimes, the visions veered nightmarish—models blood-stained like abuse victims, in clownish make-up or antlers, or confined in get-ups that resembled torture devices—but there was always an inherent visceral beauty in McQueen's extremes that made clear both his extraordinary showmanship and his impeccable skills as a tailor and designer.

But as usually happens to envelope-pushers who dare to be different, the "enfant terrible" pissed people off. He was lambasted for being offensive and misogynistic. He even mooned his audience at one show. "Fashion is a big bubble," he once said, "and sometimes I feel like popping it."

People often speak of his work as escapism. For me, it was the opposite: his work was my way in. He made me see the world through avenues I was afraid to look at. He forced me to challenge my own ideas of femininity and beauty. Ultimately, he made me believe in fashion—as an accessible art, as a sign of our times, as a vessel of creativity and originality through which genius could transpire...and inspire.

Though we shed tears that he chose to leave us in his prime—even as his label lives on—he has left us with no shortage of unforgettable images: the floating hologram of Kate Moss; a life-size chess match with model pawns; Shalom Harlow being spray-painted by robotic arms—a moment McQueen himself admitted made him cry.

They were moments of such sublime beauty that they transcended fashion. His clothes were divine, but it was the complete manifestation of the McQueen vision that offered the world glimpses of something greater—the timeless power of art, the limitless capacity of human imagination, the stuff dreams are made of.

He was the consummate artist and a true genius. He leapt without looking and without fear. His work had the power to give fashion meaning. To me, he gave it a soul. He will never take a runway bow ever again, but I know his visions will haunt my dreams forever. ■

"Fashion is a big bubble, and sometimes I feel like popping it."



Alexander McQueen
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