

STYLE

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Celebrities blog on passion for fashion

With online fashion diaries, celebrities are allowing us intimate access to their lives and wardrobes. But what is in it for them? And how far will the trend for style voyeurism go?

BY ALICE FISHER
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON

Do you know that celebrities make your brain react in a particular way? When processing an image of a famous person endorsing a product, there's a burst of activity in the medial orbitofrontal cortex. So if you look at a picture of Kate Moss in hot pants, this neural response suggests that you're accessing all the positive associations you have about Moss and transferring them to her shorts. This was reported by the *Journal of Economic Psychology* last month, and reading it was kind of a relief. No wonder we want to buy so many things, because you can't look at anything fashion related at the moment without seeing a celebrity. They have colonized the catwalks and the front rows; their clothes jostle on shop rails against those created by designers.

The new trend is to move online and open up: celebrity wardrobe diaries are the next big thing. Presenter Alexa Chung and models Daisy Lowe and Rosie Huntington-Whiteley are just a few of the names who've recorded each day's outfit for a month on vogue.com's Today I'm Wearing, which averages 50,000 hits a day.

Last month Courtney Love launched What Courtney Wore Today, which presents a rapidly growing gallery of current and archive photos all captioned by Love and her small army of blog helpers. Love has shared, through her bloggers, everything from the lack of credit on her debit cards to the worst row she had with ex-boyfriend Edward Norton.

"Today I'm Wearing works brilliantly," says Dolly Jones, editor of vogue.com. "Street-style blogs proved that voyeurism is the way to go with the Internet. Our challenge was to maintain an exclusive allure but make fashion accessible. So rather than Rosie Huntington-Whiteley shot by Mario Testino, you get an image texted from her direct. They're still alluring, but they're in their own bedrooms." Style diaries are an obvious step for celebrities. The Internet has revolutionized fashion in recent years, making new trends a daily occurrence and letting anyone with broadband enjoy the seasonal catwalk shows. While style blogs have played a huge part in this democratization, personal diaries featuring the blogger's own wardrobe have proved particularly inviting, which means that they gather large online fan bases.

Blogs such as Jane Aldridge's Sea of Shoes, Rumi Neely's Fashion Toast, Susie Lau's Style Bubble, and Katie Mackay and Joe Sinclair's What Katie Wore have all shown the impact that snapped self-portraits teamed with well-written captions can have. What Katie Wore started as a challenge from Sinclair, digital director for a PR firm, to his girlfriend, who works in marketing, to wear a different outfit every day for a year. She easily managed this goal about eight months ago, and the blog continues because of its popularity. There's something oddly compelling about the albums of images — you'd be surprised how quickly you can start to care about a complete stranger's wardrobe.

This personal involvement is something Jones thinks

appeals to her celebrity bloggers. "[Socialite] Olivia Palermo obviously loved her fashion; Daisy Lowe was more quirky, jumping round her bedroom in funny poses. They can present themselves however they wish." That was the motivation for fellow blogger Courtney Love. She launched her site because when she googled images of herself there were "nine pages that were fucking me at my worst."

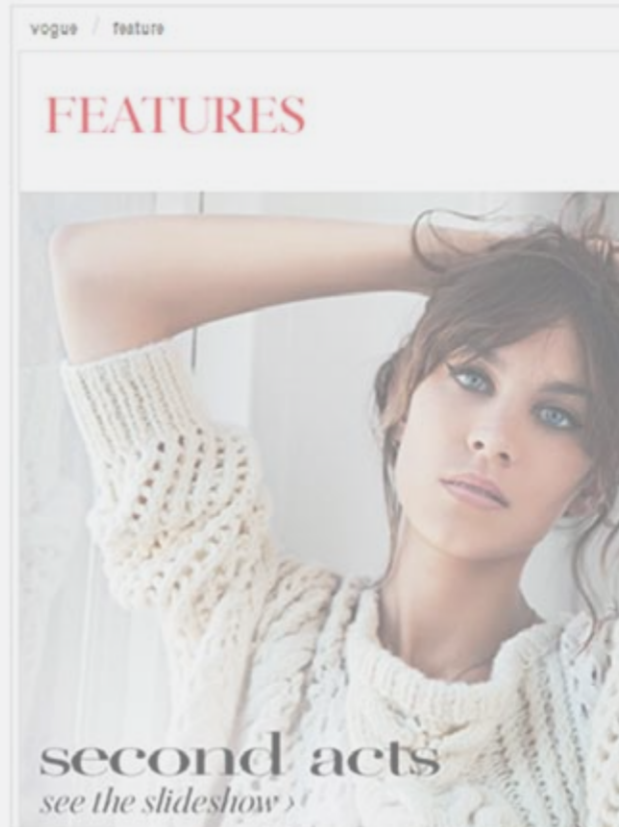
Celebrity blogging also has obvious rewards. "Two things motivate celebrities: more fame and more money," says Sinclair, who writes What Katie Wore. "A daily blog can answer these two ambitions relatively well. On a less cynical note, it's a powerful way to build a personal dialogue with the celeb's fan base."

There's ego, too. "The navel-gazing aspect is probably there," admits Love. "It is kind of vain." Sinclair agrees that "writing and posting pictures of yourself online forces the author to tread a fine line between solipsism and narcissism." But while these clothing diaries won't ever be logged alongside Samuel Pepys' or Ralph Waldo Emerson's work, they say something about our times and the way we look at ourselves and each other. It may be a bit of a guilty pleasure, but there's something fascinating about watching these women and their daily changes in dress and location. As Dolly Jones says: "We all get up and wonder what we're going to wear. To see someone else do it is quite interesting." And if you get hooked, remember it's not your fault. Your brain is wired to respond to celebrities and their clothes. Fact.

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SEPTEMBER 22



British presenter Alexa Chung arrives for the British fashion house Burberry's show at the Chelsea College of Art and Design in London, on Sept. 22, 2009.

PHOTO: EPA

SEPTEMBER 13



Alexa Chung arrives at the 2009 MTV Video Music Awards at Radio City Music Hall on Sept. 13, 2009, in New York City.

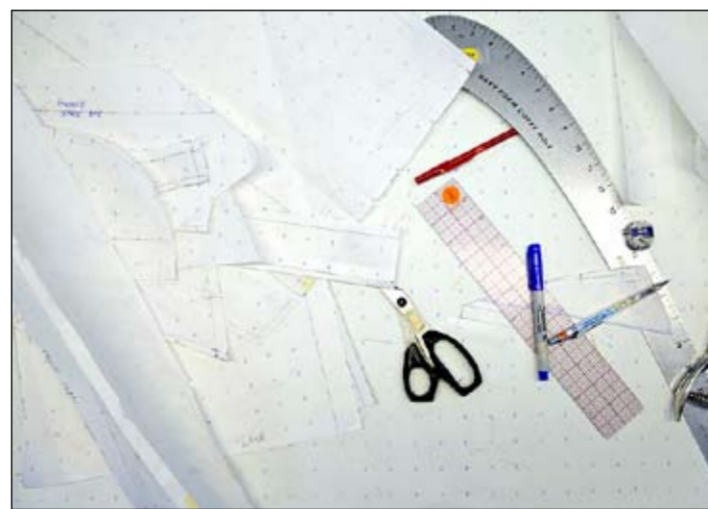
PHOTO: AFP

| FASHION |

Leaving nothing on the cutting room floor

Pioneers of zero-waste fashion design are beginning to see their ideas taken up by schools

BY STEPHANIE ROSENBLUM
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, NEW YORK



Tools sit on the work table of a pattern designer at a fashion studio in New York.

PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

You wear organic T-shirts. You hang your clothes to dry. You recycle your unloved suits and dresses.

But frankly, that's just the tip of the green iceberg.

Today's truly fashion-forward have a more radical ambition: zero waste.

That may sound more like an indie band than an environmental aspiration, but it's a new focus of top fashion schools.

Zero-waste design strives to create clothing patterns that leave not so much as a scrap of fabric on the cutting room floor. This is not some wacky avant-garde exercise; it's a way to eliminate millions of tonnes of garbage a year. Apparel industry professionals say that about 15 to 20 percent of the fabric used to produce clothing winds up in the nation's landfills because it's cheaper to dump the scraps than to recycle them.

A small but impassioned coterie of designers has spent the past few years quietly experimenting with innovative design techniques, and

some of their ideas are starting to penetrate the mainstream.

Next month, Parsons The New School for Design — which inspired a generation of would-be designers through the television series *Project Runway* — will offer one of the world's first fashion courses in zero waste. The book *Shaping Sustainable Fashion: Changing the Way We Make and Use Clothes*, by Alison Gwilt and Timo Rissanen, zero-waste pioneers, will be published in February by Earthscan. And an exhibition of zero-waste fashions, curated by Rissanen and another zero-waste designer, Holly McQuillan, will be held in New Zealand next spring and in New York the following fall. Also in March, an exhibition, No Waste/Zero Waste will open at the Averill and Bernard Leviton A + D Gallery in Chicago, part of Columbia College Chicago.

"Clearly this is an idea whose time has come," said Sandra Ericson, founder and director of the Center for Pattern Design, which studies and educates students about historical and

current trends in pattern making, in St Helena, California.

It has taken a while to reach the US. Nearly every leading zero-waste or less-waste designer hails from another country, including Mark Liu, Julian Roberts and Zandra Rhodes in England; Susan Dimasi and Chantal Kirby in Australia; McQuillan in New Zealand; and Yeohlee Teng, who is working in New York but was born in Malaysia.

Among those instrumental in pushing for change is Rissanen, a ruddy-faced Finnish designer who is Parsons' first-ever assistant professor of fashion design and sustainability. He is teaching the new zero-waste course with Scott Mackinlay Hahn, a founder of the organic fashion label Loomstate, who, along with a colleague, will provide insights into actual business practices.

The goal? To create jeans that are as close to zero waste as possible but that are also good looking — no easy task. Rissanen, who is completing a doctorate at the University of Technology Sydney (his dissertation is

titled, *Fashion Creation Without Fabric Waste Creation*), knows this firsthand. Previously, he owned a menswear label called Uvsu.

"I basically had to learn to design again," Rissanen said of his initial forays into zero waste. "The first year and a half was a lot of trial and error."

"A lot of error," he underscored, looking bashfully at the floor of a workshop at Parsons and chucking. "But that's how you learn."

One way to eliminate waste is to create a garment pattern — with gussets, pockets, collars and trims — that fits together like a puzzle. Such designers favor certain cutting techniques with names like the "jigsaw cut" (from Liu) and "subtraction cutting" (from Roberts). Rissanen put his on a blog, zerofabricwastefashion.blogspot.com. Another method is to simply not cut the fabric at all, but drape it directly onto a mannequin, then tuck, layer and sew.

But these techniques have not made much headway with large manufacturers. "They're all sort of

dipping a toe," said Simon Collins, dean of the school of fashion at Parsons, "but they find it hard to commit."

That's partly because of the costs and existing infrastructure. For example, the standard fabric width for commercial denim production is 152cm wide. Using a different width might change how much waste is generated, but it would also require re-engineering a supply line. And while sustainable design does not necessarily cost more, overhauling a factory is obviously expensive. Loomstate, for one, has backed away from a big production of denim until it can do so more efficiently, Mackinlay Hahn said.

Even as schools like Parsons teach the next generation of designers to make sustainability a core part of their creative process, few brands or retailers are powerful enough to bring about a supply line reinvention.

An exception is Wal-Mart Stores Inc. The US' largest retailer has used its power to change the items sold on its shelves, telling suppliers that it would proffer only fluorescent light bulbs (which use up to 75 percent less electricity than incandescent bulbs) and concentrated liquid laundry detergent (which uses 50 percent less water). In 2008, the retailer set forth a long-term goal of zero waste in all its stores. Yet even for a behemoth like Wal-Mart, that goal is far from being realized.

Fashion labels striving for zero waste have an added dilemma: not sacrificing style for sustainability.

"If it doesn't look good," Mackinlay Hahn said, "it's not going to sell."

Students in the new Parsons class will be asked to figure out how to create zero-waste jeans without compromising style.

"Jeans are one of the most wasteful and polluting garments that are made," said Collins, citing not only

the unused fabric, but also the dyes added only to be washed out again, the energy used to transport the denim all over the world, the packaging, and the gallons of water used by consumers to clean the jeans. "And of course it's one of the staples of everyone's wardrobe."

Students in the class will explore how to change the way jeans are made and cared for, from sourcing fibers that have not been exposed to pesticides or fertilizers, to how frequently consumers wash their denim. The top design will be manufactured at Loomstate's California factory and sold next spring at Barneys New York.

In some ways, zero waste is not new. Throughout history, consumers have had to adopt similar practices, such as rationing during wars, when women fashioned new outfits from old ones. Also, classic hobbies, like knitting and quilting, can be zero-waste endeavors.

Indeed, Rissanen became interested in the concept about six years ago, when he was studying 19th and 20th-century designers like Madeleine Vionnet, a French dressmaker known for her use of the bias cut, whose work suggested that zero waste was possible. Additionally, his family has always gravitated toward what one might charitably call sustainable practices. Or as Rissanen put it: "I'm from a very thrifty family."

In the second half of the Parsons class, students will try to make jeans more sustainable in their post-retail life. That means rethinking how jeans are cared for and, eventually, disposed of. The students may, for instance, establish a campaign encouraging consumers to use less detergent and to wash denim in cold water.

"We're offended by 15 percent waste in fabric," Collins said. "We believe in great design. But we don't believe in wasting clothes."