



What is the Formula for Fashion?

It's a Mathematical Formula: Mix of Style + Clothes = Fashion

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An interview with Richard Renda

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TD: What trends are you seeing for the 16-30 year old youths in the USA ?

RR: If we were doing this in the year 2000 where the economy was better and the administration was better, it would be easier to do. Because of the state of the economy people are trying to work with the budgets they have. It's not as easy to do. The one thing I have noticed today, especially in everyday living, when I look on the subways or the street, the laymen or the everyday student, whether they are 20 or 28 ... today it is more about what can they wear and throw in the washer, iron it, and make it work. The state of the economy with regard to disposable income is not readily available to do as much dry cleaning. If you want to look good and keep things looking fresh that requires dry cleaning the garments. And today for many people it may not be a top priority in their budget. In today's climate people do what is necessary to get by. Which as we can see also includes not dry cleaning everything or as much as before and maintaining a Wardrobe that requires less dry cleaning instead. Again that is all because of today's economy and the cost of living. For example, I used to dry clean all of my black jeans all the time. Black jeans will fade after a couple of washings. They will go to that charcoal grey look. To dry clean a pair of jeans today can cost as much as \$6.50 -- you do that several times and you can buy a new pair for what it costs you to clean them. One could

keep jeans looking perfect for much longer, as much as 2 years, when you dry clean them. The price of dry cleaning has gone up so much its not affordable for kids to do this.

TD: So, I have heard Fashion stylists tell celebrities that they do not have to wash their jeans all the time, Anderson Cooper got ridiculed for the fact that he had the habit of not washing his jeans. What advice do you have for people on this? What's the right thing to do?

RR: I hate to say this...but I am going to say it, its personal preference. If you want to go out and look like a slob, then fine, do whatever you want. Not only don't wash your jeans, when you take your clothes off place them on one pile on a chair and let them pile up for a couple of weeks and get wrinkled. See how good you look after that. Although, there are some fashion designers who make antibacterial material for people on the go with no access to clothes laundering. It actually works. It was Francois + Marithé Girbaud who first did this in fashion for denim.

TD: Did you see in Milan, protesters just stormed the runway of Roberto Cavalli's show due to the process used to manufacture the denim in his show?

RR: It depends on how conscious you are about the world. Do you just care about yourself or do you care about who and what is happening to the person who is making the fabric? There are processes that people are complaining about that are killing the people who are making the materials. But does the person who is wearing the product really care about that in the end or are they even aware of it? I think it is more about your look and how you look. For me personally as a photographer and professional fashion stylist for a long time, when I go out into the world, I look at people from the bottom up. I look at their shoes. If they are ratty then they probably do not care very much about themselves. They are not paying attention to how much clothes can reflect their own personality. I have always been taught by the women around me for the past 30 years it's the clothes that make a man, or a woman. They do not have to be really fancy clothes, but they have to look good. It makes you shine. That's what it's all about. The more you shine the better you feel as a person. Also there is something a designer, Geoffrey Beene, told me a long time ago that I will never forget. He said, "First impressions are most important." When you go somewhere, no matter where it is, a business appointment, a job interview, or going to a club -- what you are wearing is the first impression they will get of you. How does your hair and make-up look? They are the first things that hit their eyes. We live in a very visual world. If you think that none of that matters, then you are only fooling yourself. We do live in a very visual world.

TD: Where do you think the youth of today are getting their info from as it pertains to fashion and what recommendations do you have for them on where they should go for information ?

RR: This is an interesting question because there are two sides to this coin. Some of them are getting it from the streets. Some are getting it from magazines. A lot of it from input on TV, at shows, events (i.e. the Oscars, the Golden Globes) so they can get a sense of

what is going on. A lot of what I see is from the own individual person. They decide on their own what looks good. If you have a good sense of style, that works ! If you understand composition, that works. If you understand what it takes to make you look good, then that is what it is all about. If you do not have a clue and you are just walking out there with your ego -- which I hate to say, but your ego of "I know what it's all about", which is not the case ... you are not going to have any idea of what quality is all about. For example, there was a time where I thought I knew enough about clothes and the different styles of clothes. But the knowledge to know what a really good flannel shirt was, or good cotton, or a great fabric, or a ratty acrylic makes a big difference. There was one time where I was given a coat and I really didn't want another coat. I really didn't have room for it. Living in the city there are constraints on space. But when I saw the gift and its quality immediately I put my hand under the lapel of the coat -- I did not know at the time what I was feeling was an Armani, and to the touch of the hand it felt like it was a bathrobe ! It was a coat. You must learn about material. If you care about the way you look, go to the stores, taking your input from the streets, reality shows and the magazines, and put your hands on the materials. Do that a couple of times and you will be more experienced. You will see how that material plays in the design process. Some materials react better in design than others.

TD: Let's talk about colors.

RR: Colors are another big deal, depending on the season and the person. Ten years ago there was a person in the fashion industry who made the statement, "Anything goes." This is still true today. But if you watch society around you and your circle of friends you will see that "Not anything goes." People tend to go into a flow. If everyone is wearing fall and winter, where people are wearing tans and muted tones, everyone flows with that. If you are wearing a hot pink you are going to stand out like a sore thumb. Unless you have the strength to carry it, it won't work. You will feel uncomfortable. And, someone will take pictures of you. We live in a digital age and no mistake is left unnoticed. You will get nailed on a photo and ridiculed for what you are wearing.

If it's about seasons like spring and summer, you can do brighter colors or something that stands out because there is more color on the street and around you. When you are in winter, in cold weather countries, you want to be in black, tans, greys, low key colors to match your surroundings. Softer colors that are a bit muted. If it makes you happy it's good. People will see you, remember that. So if you are dressed ridiculous or like a slob, someone will use that picture and you may not like what they have to say. Always put your best foot forward. Take your collective knowledge and allow your wardrobe to evolve. Some of the things you like from 2 or 3 years ago keep them in your closet. Those things that are old, not getting used, or look like hell, get rid of them. Evolve your own existence.

TD: The whole evolution comes in where maybe they started dressing crazy-fun and then evolve into preppy, edgy. I went thru that when I was younger.

RR: It's all about what stage you are in your life. Not what age, what stage. Look at Zelda Kaplan she was 95 years old and always wore the boldest colors you have ever seen in your life. But like what you are saying at the age of 20 or 25 when you are going to a club, when Baby Phat was the "club look" ? When you are 28 you may still feel some of that but it may be different, more subtle. When you start working, your job may dictate your look in the end. So you have to go with the flow. Go with what the times are. What you wear is a display of what intelligence and knowledge you have. Like I said before, take your "collective knowledge" and see what works best.

TD: What do you think is next, the next step in fashion for youths?

RR: The younger generations are based on what goes on in school. By the time they are 25, 30, 35 you're out of school and into what is going on in society, what you will do at work, what you are going to do at night. Again, look at what the designers are producing. Michael Kors this past season did a nice job of creating a collection that has a nice range of garments for everyone. Cutting edge garments and conservative garments. Everything looked clean. It really is about how much you care about what you look like. Go out and pick up magazines. See what the designers are creating. If you cannot afford that designer at least you have an idea of the look. When you are in a store you will have a better sense of what you like and what is happening in fashion.

TD: I give that advice to men all the time when they say, "I do not know how to dress." I tell them. There is media all around you. On the web, newspaper, subway, magazines, etc., look around you. As you see more you will learn more. The look is being sold to you already. If you go into a store or boutique (this goes for men and women) and the other people in the store are not your age, your probably need to go elsewhere to purchase your looks.

RR: Unless you are looking to do something awkward, for example.

Walk into J Crew. Their audience is 20 to 35. Whether or not the quality is good may be a matter of opinion, it's economically affordable. You get what you pay for ! Always remember that. If you realize that you won't be disappointed. When you go in there, there is a range of looks. Kind of conservative, kind of low key, but there is stuff in there that will definitely work for the 20-35 year old. If you buy a pair of shoes that cost \$50, you may get two seasons out of those shoes if you are lucky. If you save your money and buy a really good pair of shoes that cost you \$500 they will last 20 years.

TD: NO DOUBT! The GUCCI boots I have on right now are 25 years old.

RR: They look like they are two seasons old and knocked around a bit. Quality looks good. Younger kids are trying to get forward in life. Are you living at home, or the dorm, urban or suburban area? Do you have closet space? Your wardrobe has to be reflective of your living environment. If you are going to buy a pair of \$800 shoes that you will have for 25 years, be sure to have somewhere you can store them properly. Everything interacts with everything else. Knowing that, you become all the wiser. When you are 20

years old and you begin learning about fashion, by the time you are 25 and 30 you will be way ahead of everyone around you. Keep building. You will know how to look good, how to present yourself in the right way. Take pride and integrity in yourself. Pay attention to things when you are young. Get the collective knowledge and you will become very wise. There are so many “stylists” out there who pretend they know what they are doing and they don’t have a clue. Young stylists at 20 and 30 go out there and think they know everything. Compare that to someone like Andre Leon Talley who has been doing it for over 30 years and there is no comparison. How can they say (the young stylists) that they know what they are doing? They do not. If they want to learn they need to go to the stylists who have been around for 20 years or so and learn from them. They are not stuffy and want to teach new stylists.

TD: But the problem is, these young stylists are so arrogant they would never go to someone like Andre to learn. They think they know more than him. I constantly tap the “masters” to learn from. One must never stop learning. If you do, it’s over.

RR: The one thing I did as a stylist and in the industry I read magazines all the time. Not an online fluffy website with throw away news. The print magazines content; Vogue, Harpers Bazaar, Esquire, GQ. They would have put knowledgeable people on it. So it’s reliable content. When I go to an event and I am with an art history major, they know the history of the shoes, garments, what era it came from. They understand that platform shoes were not made to look cool but actually allowed people to be above the puddles and deep water on the streets. Everything has a history. Know where to look for the information. If someone says to you today what’s cutting edge – know what that really is. Look at someone like Falguni and Shane Peacock from season to season. There are many fashion designers that should be cutting edge (names not mentioned) and they are not. They are being very conservative because this is what the stores they are selling to will buy. That is not going to make you or the next generation have style. If you look at the generations that have gone forward, from the 1940’s the 50’s and the 60’s, whether it’s the 40’s with the big suits, the 50’s with James Dean when there was the black leather jacket and rolled up T-shirt, and into the 60’s with the colors - flower power, purple striped jeans with the bell bottoms, and going into the 70’s you got that more disco look with girls with flared dresses and guys with vests -- each era has an evolution. When it comes to style it really starts with the 20 and 30 year old market. The guys who are wearing their pants down by the top of their thighs with their underwear sticking out think they have a hip look. When I look at this, as we are in 2013, I look at this and think to myself: “these guys are so behind the times.” We did that when we first started Spin Magazine’s fashion section and department in the mid 1990’s and that was Grunge. When you are doing this today in 2013, you do not realize how dumb you look. It’s not because you look bad in the clothes, it’s because the style you are wearing is so old. You are wearing a look that is from 1995. People did this during a time when a lot of “street stuff” was going on. People wore their clothes like this because they hid their guns in them. Today, we have moved into a new millennium. What makes you look good? It’s not wearing your waistline by your thighs with your underwear hanging out. Go buy a belt, take pride in yourself ! It’s very important for people in their 20’s and 30’s to take pride in how they dress. You are the trendsetter that will set the pace for the next

generation moving forward. When they see that you have evolved in your look, as they go forward ... they want to evolve. You do not want to wear in 2050 what was worn in 1950.

TD: Let's talk about denim washes. As it pertains to personality and design

RR: Denim is kind of interesting. Fashion has this whole sense of high style. I like to talk about clothes, not just fashion. Think about the farm worker vs the factory worker vs the kid going to school. Denim has a lot of applications. Denim when it's new and fresh looks great! There are so many washes today; bleached, stone washed, it's all about personal preference. When you are putting yourself together always ask yourself: do I feel good about myself, do I look good? I have a pair of jeans that have a wash in them that is made to look like they are wrinkled. I never wear them out in public, only at home relaxing or in the local neighborhood. If it's for school you want it soft, dressed down, but looking neat. If you are going to a club you want a denim skirt that might be a pink stone washed silk denim, something bolder. If you want to go to the movies with your friend, the washed out denim could work. Different washes can define your body line as well. A well fitted pair of jeans will draw your eyes to that person's shape. A bad pair of fitting jeans, you turn your head away instantly. Sorry no one is paying attention to you. If you want to shine, look good. Make sure the fit is right. Ask yourself, "Where are you going?" That will define what you select. What cut do you want, a boot cut, a slim cut, a straight cut? Know what works best for your body. Always look in the mirror. If it looks good ... then go with it. If not, change it. Think about what to wear with something like denim jeans. A tailored shirt, a nice suit jacket, there are lots of possibilities.

TD: Let's talk about Accessories for both men and women. What are the trends and what's working?

RR: They are very interesting. Let's deal with women first. Many think men do not wear accessories but they do. For a woman it's all about what you have available, what is your budget. Accessories can be anything from a beautiful ring, amazing necklaces, beautiful bangles, or earrings (hoops, pierces, and hanging). Accessories include everything. Whether it's the belt you are wearing, the shoes you are wearing or the handbag you have. You must decide what you are comfortable with and what looks good on you. Some people are comfortable wearing a lot of metal around their neck. Some cannot handle that. Some prefer a rawhide like hanging necklace. Anything works today. Whether it's a lizard or dragon shaped brooch or something more typical, don't be afraid to wear it. Anything iconic looks great on a lapel. If you are proud to wear it, it shines on its own. Some will wear things just for shock value. Like people who show up at fashion week and dress wildly just to get their photo taken by some photographer in the plaza of Lincoln Center at Mercedes Benz Fashion Week. They actually look silly. But there are also some that actually look good, put together. Accessories are not about shock value. They should polish the look, something that adds to the look. Take a girl in a beautiful blouse with no earrings, necklace, rings, etc. may not be the best look. Add some accessory and it could complete the look and make the person look that much better. Big and gaudy accessories never really look all that great. Unless it's some amazing stone by

some amazing upscale Jewelry designer. You want things that accent your look. Look in the mirror and test things out with and without accessories. Look at your neckline, look at the dress you are wearing and make sure they accent your look appropriately.

Men's accessories can be a watch, a gold link bracelet, an ID bracelet, a great wallet, nice shoes, a necklace around their neck that is tucked in. After work they can pull that necklace out for an evening at the club. Depending if you are from the inner city and you like to wear 6 large gold chains around your neck, it could still work with your look. Belts are important for men. Accessories are more important than most men think. A tie is an accessory. A tie clasp is an accessory. A scarf is an accessory. Ascots or pocket squares people should wear more of. Be creative and confident with your accessories. It depends on what you want. If it was 20 or 30 years ago, a man carrying a bag was weird. But today guys have the ipod, the ipad, cell phone, etc. So the use of a man's bag, like a pocketbook is to a woman, is very common and acceptable. We walk around with gadgets. So we need something to carry these things in and look good. What works for you? Take an extra 5 to 10 minutes just on your accessories and this can transform your entire outfit. A nice pen slightly sticking out on the outside of your suit jacket pocket when you enter a room is a great way to show an accessory. During a business meeting when you're done using it and you put it away, do not put it away in that pocket. Put it in your inside pocket. It was just there to make a statement that you were there to do work when you walked in the door. Application in function, application in statement, application in style. Ask yourself, "what am I going to wear today?!!" When you want to go out you want to look good.

In closing, be yourself but always have a sense of Style. People try to understand what fashion is. There are great people in this industry that I know like Ruth Finley who has been doing the fashion calendar for 65 years and Eleanor Lambert who had great influence in the fashion industry from 1940. Eleanor has passed away but her influence still lives on. And they would agree on this. What is fashion? "When you mix clothes with style: you get Fashion !" It's a mathematical formula. Mix style with your clothes. Now ... you are fashionable.

An interview with Richard Renda: Editorial Director / Executive Producer ... Stylist & Company and Totally Cool © Broadcast Programming. Aka: "Front and Center of The International Press Corps." [www. TotallyCool.org](http://www.TotallyCool.org)