

Street Style Scene in Detroit

runner

A Conversation with Leigh Miller

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Street Style Scene in Detroit is a new column published by Runner Magazine that observes and highlights contemporary fashion trends in Detroit; the first piece for the column will debut on Monday, August 28, 2023. Here, we present our brief conversation with the columnist Leigh Miller about her interest in fashion, her experience working within the industry and the significance of street fashion as an essential element of culture.



Runner: Thank you for your interest in working with Runner Magazine to highlight street fashion in Detroit. You mentioned that you have done street fashion columns in the past too. When you were doing this, were you working with a specific publication?

Leigh: Stoked to be doing a column and working with Runner Magazine! Previously I ran a column when I lived in Chicago for a minute, and when I came back here I did, and still do freelance events for Metro Times, but those aren't really as fashion-focused. I shoot street style photos and details I'll put on my Instagram but honestly haven't had, as far as Detroit street style specifically, an outlet for stuff I've just done on my own until now for, like, a while.

Have you always been interested in fashion?

Yeah! It sounds cliché or whatever but I legit remember playing with paper dolls and making outfits for them with my grandma when I was like three, as well as watching classic Hollywood movies, my grandma pointing out the clothes, playing dress up, and looking at vintage magazines, fashion photo books/shoots, and illustrations —so really not that much has changed in a way, except now I just look for that on people with shooting street style, like the interesting details or something that catches my eyes, or if I'm seeing a pattern in people wearing a similar style or color, or making/re-purposing my own things. Honestly, my brain, like, sees things through colors and patterns; It's kind of like a language, and like, fascinating because people like (both consciously and unconsciously) send signals and codes through dress/patterns and my brain is like weirdly specifically geared towards seeing that.

Did you go to school for fashion? Or did you go to school for something else? If so, what school did you go to?

Yes and no—I went to School of the Art Institute of Chicago for a year, and then College for Creative Studies (here in Detroit) after that. SAIC is, or was when I went there, like kind of multidisciplinary mostly so I went for just like “art” but I took fashion a class while I was there that was the main part of my second semester, as well as being involved with their Fashion Resource Center, and separately, running an events/street style column I started with the school's publication. I was also doing photo there, but then transferred to CCS here in Detroit where I was briefly an Ad major, and switched over to a Photo Major/Fashion Business (focusing on trends) Minor which honestly was one of the best decisions I made because it also allowed me to do photo work for their Fashion/Fashion Accessories Department which was really great hands-on experience that I kind of niched (if I'm using that as a verb right lol).

Do you have a particular interest in street fashion vs. high fashion or couture? They seem like two different worlds and in my opinion, street fashion often captures the most contemporary mindsets of people who are directly impacted by so many things like economic, political and social circumstances and there is a lot of innovation in street fashion that influences trends that end up in high fashion later on. What do you think about the relationship to street fashion and high fashion? It's sorta like a chicken and egg question...

Tbh both! But differently? Street fashion is like what people do practically to a degree with what they have or what's available, it's very like real because it's a snapshot of the time, people or person, and area. I'm really fascinated like from documentary x art perspective (like, societally and from, like, textile/design as well as photographic archival standpoint), and how (NY Times Photographer) Bill Cunningham especially made moments and style a narrative but also every day art.

But high fashion is like instead of taking what exists and what you see, making something that will be seen and making it exist—couture is definitely less practical, and very deliberate. It's an art piece in craftsmanship and design when it comes to couture runway stuff, it's really wearable art pieces. What's really interesting (being a nerd here), is what used to happen was, like, a trickle down effect historically where what came out on the runway or in films would be en vogue, the next thing, and then be translated to ready-to-wear and department stores, and then be seen on the street and influence the "every day" person styling, making, or buying their clothes. Now, though, street-wear and "the average person" inspires runway...which then does trickle back to like smaller brands and ready-to-wear and fast fashion and the like...which trickled back to street style and more trends. But also simultaneously still some stuff comes from just runway influence too...trends/how trends start is in like a non-linear space right now with so much more digital access, so yeah, really, more chicken and egg than it's kinda ever been since people have been like paying attention to that kind of thing...To me, when I cover runway shows personally I think the show and attendees area both equal parts of what's on display and "trending."

Are you from Detroit?

I live in Detroit, and my family all is from here, but I grew up in the suburbs.

Is there anything specific about the street fashion in Detroit that you would want to highlight in this column?

Something that stands out to me that I still think about was, like, right after I moved back from Chicago (2015?) I think it was W Magazine ran a short editorial on Detroit fashion, shot here, and I remember being excited to see it...but I found it didn't really reflect what was happening or what Detroit of 2015 felt or looked like nor how people around like midtown or even the nearby suburbs dressed, people and the city IRL looked way cooler. I remember feeling like it/there wasn't good representation of the vibrancy that is here, not to mention design aspects so uniquely Detroit and history. (Detroit wildly was legit major retail and shopping destination, for fashion retail and fabrics, with multiple department stores such as Hudson's, Crowley's, and Himelhoch's, to name some—it's always interested me and like wonder-struck me with photos of elaborate store window displays).

What I'd like to highlight is that Detroit is so vibrant and has such a unique look to people out and about as well as with events. It has incredibly unique architecture and spaces which I love to shoot as a backdrop, and I really want to highlight how much is happening both in around and on people here, something I feel is often overlooked. There has been and now is still so much going on here, and I see so many cool-looking people, sometimes trend-setting before it's become a more mainstream "thing," and I just really want people to see that "something."

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