

Style is as style does

STYLE & SENSIBILITIES



ED NAKFOOR

The occasion of my eighth-grade student awards ceremony was a prophetic one. I was named best dressed, or "Mr. Saks Fifth Avenue" as the certificate officially declared.

Perhaps it was my intense study of *The Preppy Handbook* and subsequently taking stock of my closet to ensure I'd pass muster in even the preppiest of circles?

I still remember the checklist. Red, lime green and light blue cotton slacks? Check. Coordinating fabric belts? Check. Madras shorts? Check. The purple and green Polo shirts received as a birthday present at a red lead Wandbreaker with its rich plaid lining? Big check, indeed.

In those days, shopping included stops in the boy's department at Saks or Jacobson's, plus my favorite of all, Hughes & Hatcher, which was located in downtown Birmingham, and where once inside, the clothes had to compete with an old-fashioned cage elevator for my attention.

Four years at Brother Rice and a part-time job in the credit office at Saks Fifth Avenue that saw me through college and graduate school required a new perspective on dressing. I quickly developed an affinity for natty sports jackets, patterned dress shirts and vests, and smart-looking ties, while my white bucks were gently cleaned with an emery board when scuffs marred their appearance.

My closet also matured thanks to a motorized tie rack and my very own shoe shine kit (no more riffling through my father's closet in search of his).

Working at Saks for nearly a decade certainly sparked an interest in all things retail and undeniably shaped the path of my future 9-to-5 life. It was a valuable education, talking with store executives, practicing *détente* in all matters of customer service and seeing how department managers displayed their wares.

Rightly so, doodles in my high school and college notebooks took the shape of my own dream emporium, each department carefully placed and cleverly named. Similarly, I plotted a first-rate shopping district for Anytown, U.S.A.

No surprise then that my graduate studies essay explored the effectiveness of image advertising campaigns for the then-belleaguered for industry. I'm sure mine remains

the only master's paper at Wayne State University with more references to *Women's Wear Daily* than traditional scholarly journals.

And today, the draw is as strong as ever. Display windows never fail to catch my attention, although I'm usually looking with a critical eye rather than searching for something to buy. Even when traveling, my itinerary includes time wandering through shopping areas to identify the good and the bad. What stands out? Which stores merely blend into the background?

These questions apply not just to retail shops but also to each of us. Do we have a definable, singular style? Or, are we merely just one of the crowd? Do we dress to impress without taking a good long look in the mirror?

Every morning we have the option of either dressing well or being well dressed. I opt for the latter. And yes, there is a difference.

Lots of folks dress well. In fact it's quite easy to do. They turn out in the hottest names in fashion, wearing labels like badges of honor. Or worse, they go overboard and are awash in the season's "it" colors or patterns. Yet plaids and stripes, or slim fitting trousers, for that matter, are not for every body.

Style, then, is really up to us, about dressing to the time and place. We can be well dressed on weekend mornings waiting in line at the neighborhood diner without sacrificing comfort. Just replace the faded workout T-shirt and well-tread gym shoes with a wrinkle-free henley and Merrell slip-ons. Or go for a 70s-inspired track suit. Plus, there's no hard and fast rule that says Old Navy cargo pants and a J. Crew argyle roll neck can't be paired with Prada Sport boots when going on a dinner-and-a-movie date.

Style is amorphous and always evolving. It's confidence and comfort, with a dose of casual coolness. It's having the courage to occasionally wear a tie to the office despite the casual day-is-every-day dictum. It's never about being a sartorial snob, nor is it simply about what we wear.

No, style is much more than that, like letting the parent with a squirming child step ahead of you at Starbucks. After all, your cellular phone fits neatly into your pocket.

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Better sooner than later

Support local charities, get ahead of the holidays at upcoming shopping events

Take a big bite out of your holiday to-do list. Erase all memory of crowded shopping malls and lengthy check-out lines.

Approach the holidays with cheer and equanimity, not fervor and anxiety.

There's more than one reason to get a headstart on holiday shopping; there's no debating it's a good idea every year.

That's why so many early bird shopping events, most of which benefit local charities, pop up long before the Thanksgiving bird arrives home from the grocery store.

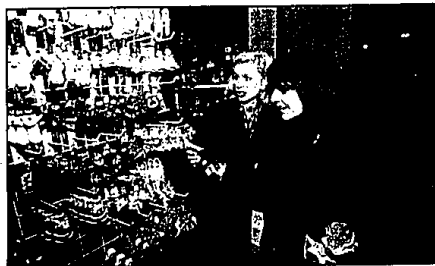
This year, local charities need individual support more than ever. With so much support directed to the American Red Cross and funds set up to aid victims of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, many community non-profit organizations are seeing a decline in donations.

Several charity shopping events are slated for next week.

The annual **Kingswood Giftrama** features more than 50 merchants and artists from across the country displaying wares in the hallways and classrooms of Cranbrook's Kingswood School.

The specialty gift show, which runs Nov. 9-11, benefits Cranbrook schools and opens with a champagne reception from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. Nov. 9. Reception tickets are \$75. Gift show admission is \$6. Gift show hours are 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Nov. 10 and 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Nov. 11. For tickets and more information, call (248) 645-3555.

The **Third Annual Holiday Shopping Extravaganza**, slated 7-10 p.m. Nov. 11 at Twelve Oaks Mall in Novi, benefits the Boys and Girls Clubs of Southeastern Michigan. The organization provides daily programs and services to more than 17,000 local youths, and the Farmington Family YMCA.



Holiday hunting: Shoppers look at ornaments at the annual Kingswood Giftrama. The specialty gift show is slated Nov. 9-11 at Cranbrook's Kingswood School.

Extravaganza shoppers will be privy to exclusive sales and promotions, go home with a gift bag and have a chance to win door prizes, including one of two shopping sprees worth \$1,500. Advance tickets, which are tax-deductible, cost \$25 per person. To reserve a ticket, call (248) 473-1400, ext. 31.

The **Volunteer Council of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra** presents its annual **Nutcracker Luncheon and Boutique** on Nov. 8 at the Troy Marriott.

More than 30 boutiques will tender holiday gift items starting at 10 a.m. Lunch will follow at 12:30 p.m., with a performance by the Detroit Symphony Civic Orchestra String Quartet.

Tickets are \$45-100 and benefit the council's efforts to support the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and preserve Orchestra Hall. For tickets, call (313) 578-5154.

On Nov. 10, **Parisian** at Laurel Park Place in Livonia will host its **Charity Day Sale** to benefit numerous non-profit organizations in the community, including

Habitat for Humanity, **South Oakland Shelter**, **Volunteers of America** and **Active Friends of the Homeless**. Slated 6-10 a.m., the event raises funds by having participating charities sell admission tickets. Ticket holders receive a 20 percent store discount during the private sale and are eligible for hourly prize drawings. Complimentary gift wrapping and refreshments are included.

Tickets are \$5 per person. For a list of participating charities from which to purchase tickets, call Parisian at (734) 953-7610.

Simply Shopping, a benefit for the **Make-A-Wish Foundation** is set for Nov. 8 at the Somerset Collection in Troy. Hosted by the Troy Chamber of Commerce, the all-day event begins at 9 a.m. with a breakfast at Saks Fifth Avenue featuring a guest speaker from Lancome.

Lunch, valet parking, post-shopping hors d'oeuvres, prize drawings and complimentary gifts and services are included. Tickets are \$50. Call (248) 641-0031.

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