

# nostalgia

By Janelle Brown

**A GUY THING**  
ARTHUR ELGORT'S  
PHOTOGRAPH OF  
NAOMI CAMPBELL  
IN A GRAY FLANNEL  
SUIT BY KARL  
LAGERFELD, *VOGUE*,  
AUGUST 1993.

## all about pants

It's unanimous: Both here and abroad, designers sent out phalanxes of streamlined jacket-and-pants pairings as fall's favored uniform for work. While the neutral palette stays strictly in the menswear department, the silhouette has shifted to a softer, more feminine line, often anchored with a small-fitting waist. Photographed by Arthur Elgort

Getting a jump on fall, Karl Lagerfeld's gray flannel suit hits the season's high notes—the double-breasted jacket is long and loosely tailored, the pants equally slender. Another sign of the times: The paired-down underlayer, a simple black turtleneck. Jacket (about \$1,400), pants (about \$600), and turtleneck (about \$60). See 17th Avenue, 1 Madison, Village, this page, Arlene for Hubert & Co. (Paris, most stores, see in this issue)

## the men's club

**T**he jeans that I wore during my sophomore year of college, in 1993, did not belong to me. They belonged to a male friend who lived across the hall in our bohemian co-op, just north of the UC Berkeley campus. Faded Girbauds, the jeans were baggy even on his six-foot frame; to fit me, all of five foot four, the pants had to be rolled up a half-dozen times and aggressively belted. This ensemble was completed with burgundy Doc Martens and one of the countless striped bodysuits—the unfortunate variety that snapped at the crotch—that I kept stuffed in my chipped dresser drawers.

The look may have been closer to clown than couture, but it was perfectly appropriate for my nocturnal lifestyle, which mostly consisted of staying out all night dancing at underground parties in dusty warehouses and then staggering bleary into class the next morning still smelling of smoke. Anyway, high fashion did not exist at Berkeley, one of the last collegiate bastions of post-hippie Leftism. One didn't spend money on expensive clothes: That was to be spent on the important things, like feeding orphans in Cambodia or buying white-chocolate mochas brimming with whipped cream at Caffè Strada. Instead, one shopped at thrift stores—there were several, including the

Remembering a college romance, Janelle Brown relates how her sense of style emerged from a questing heart and the pages of *Vogue*.

seminal Wasteland, within two blocks of campus—for grunge uniforms, or perhaps at one of the sage-scented boutiques selling handwoven ethnic garb. My classmates might have been rich as Croesus, but you'd never know from the rags we all wore.

Fashion for me had always been anti-fashion. When I was growing up in Atherton, an affluent suburb of San Francisco,

in the late eighties, the only way to rebel against the wholesome Laura Ashley-meets-Ralph Lauren aesthetic favored by most of my preppy peers was through my wardrobe. I became an indie-rocker and a fashion chameleon, ricocheting across whatever rock-'n'-roll aesthetic was currently on repeat in my CD player—whether mod (striped Mary Quant tights, black miniskirt, MADNESS concert tee) or Bauhaus-era Goth (purple lipstick and a lacy black fifties housedress) or sixties folk (Mexican serape, crystal necklace, and patched jeans). At UC Berkeley, I settled into a new musical movement—the incipient rave scene—and a wardrobe of baggy jeans that was one part hip-hop, one part lollipop. It was not a grown-up look, but what was? I had never related to what I saw in fashion magazines, which I read less for inspiration than as a way *nostalgia* >66

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## HIS PANTS, HER LIFE

of visiting a bizarre foreign country. The fashion industry was finally losing its thrall with eighties-era power dressing—the aggressive shoulder pads and neon, the feminine pouf skirts and gilt, looks that had left me cold—but the new American sportswear in the pages of *Vogue* still reminded me too much of what I'd left behind in Atherton.

And then I fell, hard, for a man I met on a dance floor at four in the morning. He was an athlete and occasional model, exotically half-Chilean and half-Japanese; nine years older than I, he had already scaled Mount Kilimanjaro

and visited Chichén Itzá. He seemed to find my free-wheeling youth beguiling, and we talked and danced through countless nights, starting at underground clubs and ending at early-morning afterparties. Besotted and naive, I chose to downplay the fact that he also happened to have a live-in girlfriend.

It was my first real adult affair, I decided. And if I was the other woman, well, that was all the more romantic, an episode from *Madame Bovary* or *Jules et Jim* (before the tragic endings, of course). That vision, however, didn't include sitting alone, dressed to go out, hours after he was supposed to arrive; or showing up at a party only to find him there on the arm of his girlfriend. I descended into the ego-destroying insecurity that comes with semi-unrequited love. The endless hours spent in my room, waiting for him, gave me plenty of time to examine myself in the mirror and find myself lacking.

I looked at my wardrobe critically and saw it through new eyes. It was a closet of perpetual adolescence, and I realized that I needed to start dressing like an adult if the world (read: He) was to take me seriously. Complicating matters, in the fall I would be leaving for a year in London, a city that I sensed would require a more cosmopolitan outlook than dogmatic Berkeley. It was time to go shopping.

Fortunately, a fashion moment had finally arrived that I could embrace. In May, Linda Evangelista appeared in *Vogue* in a loose button-down shirt with hair chopped above her ears, an androgynous gamine in pinstriped Comme des Garçons pants. Three months later, Arthur Elgort shot Naomi Campbell and Christy Turlington in nothing but menswear as they sauntered through a blurry city landscape, themselves in sharp focus wearing Calvin Klein military peacoats and Dolce & Gabbana cuffed trousers, newsboy caps, ribbed turtlenecks, and heavy boots. Minimalism had arrived in its black-and-white glory: effortlessly sexy and urban and chic, without being the least bit girly.

There was a defiance in these clothes that I could relate to: a sort of asceticism, free of frippery and frills, that said, "I don't care what you think" (I recalled Marlene Dietrich, coolly inapproachable, in her *Morocco* tuxedo), which was the message that my increasingly wounded heart wished it could send to the man jerking me around. And androgyny still had that rock-'n'-roll edge, reminiscent of an electric Patti Smith on the cover of *Horses*, photographed by Robert Mapplethorpe in suspenders and a black blazer tossed carelessly over her shoulder.

The look was, in a sense, a more sophisticated take on the classic boyfriend shirt. And if my boyfriend wouldn't lend me his—if, in fact, he had another girlfriend who had prior claim—then I would just buy my own. At a thrift store, I located a pair of vintage men's pin-striped trousers (ones that actually fit) that lent me the illusion of lean height. From the bins of used Birkenstock sandals at Wasteland I retrieved a pair of stacked-heel lace-up boots much like the ones Naomi Campbell wore. They were a size too big, but I just wore them with two pairs of socks.

**SHIRTING THE ISSUE**  
THE WHITE SHIRT, SHOT BY STEVEN MEISEL, INSPIRED THE AUTHOR TO UPDATE HER COOL TOMBOY LOOK. *VOGUE*, MAY 1993.



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I began collecting button-down white shirts and soft plaid driving caps, a shrunken gray wool vest, an army of peacoats—not the longed-for Jil Sander or Helmut Lang originals, since those were not only out of my budget but also Berkeley inappropriate, but similar versions culled from local thrift stores. I cropped my hair into an abbreviated bob and felt liberated enough to almost not cry when, even after he finally moved out of his girlfriend's apartment, I still found her underwear in his bed.

The final addition was a London Fog trench in heathered gray as I left for Europe—a coat that I wore through an equally gray, damp winter in London. Those stacked-heel boots made a wonderful racket on the cobblestones as I clattered about in exquisitely fashionable heartbreak, waiting for him

to call and beg me to come home. He didn't. As solace I discovered Harrods and Brick Lane, the British Museum and a moody, romantic city—that blurry urban landscape of Elgort's fantasy—where even your average woman dressed smartly on the subway, and none hid in baggy jeans.

All this time later, and my favorite pants are still black menswear-style trousers, though my original vintage pinstripes are long gone, and I've forsaken the driving caps altogether. But the man I haven't spoken to in twelve years, not since I returned to America and his half-assed apologies and discovered that I no longer felt compelled to listen. The clothes may have been only a crutch, a costume intended to disguise my self-doubt with the sophisticated mien and independent attitude that I spied in the photos, but something of their personality rubbed off on me just the same. □