

PULSE

August 23, 2007 • Vol. 2, Issue 17

IT'S A
S-T-R-E-T-C-HBY DAISY VILLA
prbiz48@aol.comDesign for Each:
own your beauty,
love your style

My friend Shirley and I were talking last week. She has been reading my articles and suggested I write something on beauty that would encourage women who are unhappy with their bodies, with the fashion and beauty images displayed by the media, and the clothing choices from fashions designed for that "ideal" body. The notion that self-acceptance and self-confidence are important ingredients when it comes to experiencing one's beauty and personal style continues to plague women despite some of the changes in body image attitudes we have thankfully seen.

I always look to professionals and experts for my research. I realized that I have a professional and expert in my own family, my sister, Helen Villa Connor, an award-winning personal design/wardrobe consultant. Since the early 1980s, Helen has written about and taught that every woman can achieve her personal style through the discovery of one's unique language of beauty in what she calls your body design. She is the innovator of the Body's Design Pattern Paradigm which is the foundation of the book she co-authored, *The Triumph of Individual Style* (Fairchild Books, NY). For five years when I lived in California, I worked for my sister and her partner, marketing and doing publicity for this landmark book.

More than a decade has passed since working with my sister. I now have the pleasure to present her original work and ideas to Middle Tennessee.

How did you come to believe that we don't all have to look alike?

Helen: Creativity is the heart of personal style; self-acceptance is its soul. The more contented the soul—that is, the more you esteem yourself and honor your body as beautiful—the stronger that creative pulse will beat, and the more life you will give to your personal style—that is what I wrote at the beginning of Chapter 8 of *The Triumph of Individual Style*. I was fortunate that my parents taught us about self-acceptance; it is a learned attitude. Ideally learned early on in life.

I was four years old when our parents chose to immigrate to America. Growing up in a traditional Filipino family, education, respect, talent, and character development were prime values. I have never won a beauty contest, but I don't remember a time our parents criticized our appearance or physical qualities. On the other hand, our mom taught us the importance of dressing well: she is only 4'11" tall but always took pride in her personal style and appearance as much as in her intelligence and talents.

Our home was filled with beauty: all kinds of music, dancing, beautifully prepared food for the many guests; there was art and the tools to create art, travel, books . . . I came to realize that if given a chance, people naturally move toward the human needs for creativity and beauty. We experienced early on that we don't have to look alike; we are each unique. In my work as a personal designer, I chose the language of art to guide today's woman to see beauty in herself; to redefine beauty and style for the individual; to restore her humanity in the world of fashion. It's very freeing.

The language of art has always been the language of style. Seeing the body from the artist's perspective, as a work of art, a combination of line, shape, proportion, body particulars, scale, color and texture, is what I call your body's design pattern.



How did you come up with the Body's Design Pattern Paradigm?

Helen: There have persisted so many flaws and inconsistencies in various schools of thought in fashion, beauty and style. Remember the "you are a season" craze?

The turning point was when I realized I had to begin by analyzing each body separately from clothing, then choosing clothing and accessory designs that are in harmony with the Body's Design Pattern. This led me to create a clear "learning path" (a tool from my educational publishing background) that is found on page 3 in the book. The overview of this learning path is three simple steps: from art to body to clothes.

Knowing the elements of art leads us to find those elements in the body, thus defining your Body Design, which leads us to select clothing that are in balance and harmony with your Body Design. As a writer, student of language and a lover of art, I understood the power of language to transform the way we see things. Behind the Body's Design Pattern Paradigm, I formulated three premises that distilled my life-long beliefs about beauty and style:

Premise #1 Beauty belongs to every woman, and she can learn to see her body's unique beauty through the language of art: Line + Shape + Proportion + Body Particulars + Scale + Color + Texture = Your Body's Design

The act of seeing the human form through elements of art helps us to rediscover that each of us has an instinct for what looks beautiful on us—when we see it, we know it. No matter where you are on the style development path, this premise challenges us to acknowledge our unique beauty and then to back this intuition with conscious attention—to only look for, to design, and to buy clothing that are in harmony and have a vibrational match with one's Body Design.

Premise #2 Every woman desires a style that is distinctly her own and can achieve this by honing and exercising her innate creativity. Your Body's Design Pattern + Your Creativity = Your Personal Style. I contend that each body form asks for certain aesthetics and conventions of dress that are in harmony with that unique body as well as the persons' personality and lifestyle. I teach how the four stages of the creative process meshes with the development of a signature personal style.

Premise #3 is the overarching philosophy of my work: Striving for beauty and creativity in our lives is healthy, as it leads to a greater sense of well-being, self-acceptance, and self-esteem.

The language of art can transform the way you look at your body so you can have fun developing your unique personal style. Rare is the woman who is not dissatisfied with at least one of her features, but I have seen time and time again how quickly people can experience their bodies positively—without self-criticism and without comparison to anyone else's body—when they see their Body Design through art.

Explain briefly the elements of art in the Body's Design Pattern.

Helen: Briefly, the element of line will inform you by helping define your body type and facial features, show you how to choose fabric drape that relates to your body type and prints and accessories that relate to the line pattern in your facial features.

Shape defines your body's basic shape, and proportion shows you how to choose tops and bottoms that bring balance to your presentation.

Body Particulars identify your special features and shows you how to camouflage or highlight them depending on your body comfort zone.

Scale defines size of bone structure, size of facial features, and apparent body size and shows you how to

choose accessories, clothing construction and styling details.

Color identifies the colors you were born with and shows you how to choose clothes that are in harmony with your natural coloration and your personality and inner beauty.

Texture identifies the pattern of your skin and hair and shows you how to choose textures in clothing and accessories that create the effects you want.

These elements and principles are universally applicable. One example is the element of line as applied to the voluptuous or plus-size woman—there are only two elements that set her apart:

1. Line as it relates to the body contour, which is usually curved.
2. Scale as it relates to her body size, which is usually larger.

Line in art is either curved or straight. Using this simple concept about line, every woman can determine her body type as skeletal, molded or muscular body type, or a combination of these. For example, the voluptuous woman is generally all curves in her body's contour (molded body type) therefore, you rarely see the straight lines in her body that are created when the understructure of bones show. Molded curves must have fabrics that are relatively fluid and can drape over those curves. Muscular curves relate best to fabrics with a little more tautness but not so taut that lacks movement. Body type leads to fabric choices.

Personal style considerations for any body type are: Having correct fit on the body, using the highest quality fabric as possible, wearing clothes with the appropriate "personality" for the individual and the occasion.

It is when we confuse style with fashion that we lose sight of our body's own special design. Fashion is about clothes. Women should not be blindly following fashion. Style is about the person who wears those clothes and her ability to choose for herself from the now well-stocked marketplace. Style is her inimitable way of putting herself together to enhance her body, express her personality, as well as support her multifaceted lifestyle. My hope is for every woman to be the "triumph of style" that they were meant to be.

"For thou didst form my inward parts; Thou didst weave me in my mother's womb I will give thanks to Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Thy works, and my soul knows it very well."

— Psalms 139:13-14

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