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# Style

How to get it, keep it, make it your own.

Helen Villa Connor  
illustration by Walter Tabayoyong

**S**ome women seem to be born with it. Princess Michiko of Japan, Baroness Dunn of Hong Kong, Yook Young-Soo, the late wife of former South Korean President Park. It's not that they are world-class beauties but rather the way they move, the way they hold their smiles, the way they look. People naturally gravitate toward them.

Your style reveals your personality and lifestyle. It's reflective of your thinking. With a small investment of time and effort you can cultivate it to your advantage.

"The two most important gifts you can give your children," someone once wrote, "are roots and wings." You can apply this philosophy in developing your own personal style.

### The "roots" of personal style:

These three premises will help you establish a firm foundation for yourself.

- Beauty belongs to everyone, and we can learn to see our bodies' unique beauty through the language of art.
- Every woman wants a style that is recognizably her own.
- Aspiring to beauty and creativity gives us psychological health and a sense of well-being.

As you allow your personal style to take root and sprout, be conscious of the four elements that make it up:

- Your appearance.
- Your personality.
- Your lifestyle.
- Your creativity.

It's a rare woman who doesn't consider at least one of her physical features unattractive. That's why each of us has individual style needs, and that's why it's important to see yourself as uniquely beautiful.

### Understand your unique appearance:

I created the following paradigm to help appraise your body-art element by art element—so that each of us can find out our Body's Design Pattern from an artist's perspective. And viewing yourself as art helps you to have a positive attitude toward your body, without self-criticism or comparison to others.

The formula: Line + shape + proportion + body particularities + scale + color + texture = your body's design.

Regardless of age, size, shape or color, apply this to your body and then to your clothes. This way you can't blame your body if the clothes don't look appealing. Blame it on the fabric.

Line defines your body type and facial features. It shows you how to choose fabric that complements your body, and to select prints and accessories that enrich your features.

In art a line is straight or curved. Remember this to determine whether your body type is skeletal, molded, muscular or a combination.

The skeletal body is defined by straight lines, the molded body by gentle curves and the muscular body by taut curves. The body type determines your fabric choices. (A1 thru A3)

Now apply the line technique to your facial features. Necklines, prints and accessories can be used to augment the body's natural beauty. (B1 thru B3)

Repetition creates a rhythm that whisks the eye over the complete visual presentation of yourself, the same way we view art.

Remember the following:

- Shape defines the body's basic form. It determines the clothing silhouette that complements you and allows you to create alternative silhouettes that will enhance your appearance.
- Body particulars identify your unique features. They show you how to highlight or camouflage them.
- Scale defines the size of bone structure, facial features and body form. It helps in selecting accessories, clothing construction and styling details.
- Color identifies your natural hues and helps you choose garments that match your skin tone, and personality.
- Texture identifies your skin and hair patterns. It helps you select clothing and accessory textures that will create the desired effects.

These rules apply universally. The coloring of our skin makes us look great in neutrals like black as a background for other color patterns.

Our skin tone variances determine the contrast between skin and hair. The browns of our eyes have subtle variances but they tend to be darker, so we must also consider the whites of our eyes. All these direct our use of color.

The vividness of bright colors depends on personality, character and mood. To execute this well you need to know yourself. It's especially important this season because of the profusion of colors available for your wardrobe.

**Your innate creativity: The "wings" of personal style**

Recognizing your own pattern is a pleasant experience. It brings into sharp focus your uniqueness. It is when we confuse style with fashion that we lose sight of our body's special design. Sure, fashion is fun and exciting, but it is only about clothes.

Most of us no longer blindly follow fashion. In fact, the days of fashion for fashion's sake are gone, especially for busy career women.

But style extends far beyond fashion. Style is your expression. Picking specific garments will reveal the essence that lies within, and that personal flair is as distinctive as a signature.

Understanding your body's design pattern will help you to make the most of off-the-rack clothes. It will help you be you.



(from l to r) A1: Molded curves are complemented by fluid, draping fabrics. A2: Muscular curves are enhanced by taut fabrics, but not as to restrict freedom of movement. Generally, curvy body types should only use taut fabrics cut to follow the body's natural slopes. A3: Skeletal bodies are heightened by taut fabrics tailored for long, linear lines. If you want to use drapey fabric, wear it in abundance.



(from l to r) B1: The dress' straight neckline repeats the horizontal in her eyebrows and bangs. And each vertical strand in her bangs echoes the pleats in her dress. This creates a harmony between face and clothes. B2: Jacket collar repeats the jawline curve and the decorative buttons reflect the undulations in the cheeks and jaw. B3: The earrings' bow curve imitates the arc in her eyebrows and mouth. The necklace replicates her jawline curve, while its beads echo the size and shape of her iris.

*Helen Villa Connor is a personal design consultant and co-author of The Triumph of Individual Style, distributed in the U.S., Canada and in the British Commonwealth under the title Timeless Beauty. The book has also been adopted as a textbook in many design colleges.*

