

Singapore

Esquire

01 2020



The pole vaulter

paul rudd

Ant-Man—and soon-to-be Ghostbuster—dishes on why he doesn't want to be known as nice, the pressure of classic remakes and the money he's owed.

Essentials of style

Why Elvis still matters on the 85th anniversary of his birth

"Fashions fade, style is eternal," declared the late fashion pioneer Yves Saint Laurent.

The legendary performer Elvis Presley, who was born on 8 January 1935, is one of those rare icons whose style influence has outlived their career.



Elvis Presley, the King of Bling.

The Memphis Flash, as he was known in his youth, continues to influence contemporary design culture, from pop stars and high-end fashion houses to street style. Walking through most major cities, it is hard not to notice the guys and girls channelling their inner Elvis, with Americana and rockabilly styles being constantly reworked and revived on the streets. "Even today, a distilled version of Elvis' look has filtered down into the wardrobes of many self-respecting teenage rebels," acknowledges the British menswear designer Joe Casely-Hayford.

Zoey Goto, author of the book *Elvis Style: From Zoot Suits to Jumpsuits*, takes a look at the King of Style's legacy and cherry-picks his most enduring style contributions.

BLING CULTURE

Elvis was born in a wooden shack in the Deep South of America and spent his early years living a hand-to-mouth existence. Having risen above his impoverished childhood and found monumental fame with his first number one hit by the age of 20, Elvis was able to finally indulge his taste for ostentatious fashion. He did this spectacularly in 1957 when he sported a sensational gold suit for the album cover of *50,000,000 Elvis Fans Can't Be Wrong*. The dazzling outfit, which cost USD10,000, was a forerunner to bling culture, where hip-hop stars use flashy clothing and diamond-encrusted jewellery to visually signal that they've hit the big time.

Designer Tommy Hilf agrees that Elvis was "the first white boy to really bling it up". What Elvis' blinding suit lacked in subtlety, it made up for in spectacle, communicating to the world that the poor boy from Mississippi was ready to take his throne as the golden boy of entertainment. A diverse range of entertainers including Tupac, Brandon Flowers and Justin Bieber have since sported the spectacular gold suit, whilst Versace and Costume National have also paid homage to Elvis' extravagant outfit.

It wasn't just with his clothing that Elvis splashed the cash. During his lifetime Elvis bought over 260 cars, many of which were gifted to friends and occasionally even strangers. In 1968, Elvis made his most extravagant purchase—a Series 75 Fleetwood Limousine, which he spent USD65,000 (the equivalent of almost half a million US dollars now) to paint it with 40 coats of crushed diamonds. There were also various private jets with gold-plated bathrooms and a mountain of bling jewellery that would be handed out to fans in the front row of Elvis' concerts, as if they were sweets.

Anyone who has visited Elvis' beloved Graceland mansion in Memphis can also testify that the notorious Polynesian-themed *Jungle Room* blows most offerings from *MTV Cribs* out of the water!

THE POMPADOUR

Even as a high school student, Elvis understood that hair was loaded with social meaning. While his fellow classmates sported the standard post-war short back and sides, Elvis set his sights higher and looked toward Hollywood's leading men such as Marlon Brando, Tony Curtis and the debonair Dean Martin for guidance.

Teenage Elvis lost no time in trying to coax his own hair into a greased, finger-curl quiff, falling seductively across his forehead, which caused controversy, as it was higher, slicker and wilder than his contemporaries. Elvis teamed his sky-high pompadour with a duck's-tail—achieved by combing the hair from the ears to meet and overlap at the back of the head so it resembled the back-end of a duck. The young Elvis also threw into the mix a pair of menacing sideburns, adding a dose of rugged Southern truck driver to his look. His long, greased-back style exhibited the same lack of conformity that would later be witnessed with punk mohawks and skinhead number one cuts.

When Elvis joined the army in 1958, he received the most famous military haircut of the 20th century when his trademark pompadour and sideburns were replaced with a standard G1 cut. The world's media witnessed the Samson-like spectacle, with many heralding it as a symbolic moment in the demise of rock and roll. "Hair today, gone tomorrow," Elvis quipped, as *Life* magazine took no less than 1,200 photos of the session. The haircut grieved his fans, causing some to shed tears at the sight of Elvis' fallen locks.

Essentials of style



As a fashion statement, Elvis' white suit is all about the Deep South.

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The showy and dozing style of Elvis inspired young performers like David Bowie. Facing page: the King in black leather for his *Comeback Special*.



Elvis' hair inspired a generation of teenage rebels globally, including the British Teddy Boys who used lashings of Beylecreem to imitate the slick, patent leather appearance of Presley's style. Elvis' timeless pompadour hairstyle continues to influence contemporary performers, with Bruno Mars (who, incidentally started his show business career as an Elvis impersonator) and Rihanna adopting variations of Elvis' rebel hairstyle. In recent years, the men's grooming brand American Crew has launched a range of products to help with achieving Elvis' legendary quiff.

GENDER-FLUID FASHION

When Elvis burst onto the scene in the mid-1950s, he managed to single-handedly change the way that America, and much of the world, dressed. As many Americans attempted to put the chaos of WWII behind them, they now faced a fresh set of anxieties with the rise of the Cold War era. A climate of conformity was created, which was particularly evident within men's fashion and the domination of sack suits from Brooks Brothers, teamed with club ties and penny loafers. The look was all about heritage, respectability and allegiance—and comply they did, with 70 percent of all suits sold in the late 1950s belonging to the Ivy League style.

Within this climate, it took courage to stand apart from the crowd. Elvis' image was seen as antagonistic as it so skillfully played

with gender stereotypes. His fondness for make-up—at which he was so adept he would often apply his girlfriend's mascara—and penchant for lace and navel-baring cropped shirts were seen as effeminate and highly suspicious.

Elvis also helped in liberating men to wear colours that previously had been considered exclusively for females, including bubble-gum pink clothing. "Back then, 'real men' wouldn't wear pink," says Hal Lansky of Lansky Bros, Elvis' favourite tailoring house in Memphis. Elvis continued to push gender boundaries throughout his career, famously making floral prints cool in the 1960s by wearing a red hibiscus shirt for the movie *Blue Hawaii*. Tropical prints continue to symbolise relaxation and leisure time, and the Hawaiian shirt has more recently been revived courtesy of Prada.

By the late '60s, Elvis' flamboyant, body-skimming jumpsuits opened the door for a new generation of male peacock. To be sexual, provocative and a little effeminate became accepted on both sides of the Atlantic, with young men rejecting the orthodoxies of standardised masculinity and experimenting with clothing previously reserved for women. Performers such as David Bowie took Elvis' jumpsuit silhouette to extremes, wearing spandex body-stocking catsuits designed to attract the erotic gaze, while Mick Jagger wore a white dress for a gig in Hyde Park, somehow leaving the stage every inch the virile male. "The

Air portrait photograph by Heritage Auctions, photograph by the Library of Congress

Essentials of style



and D&G have since flirted with the idea of head-to-toe denim and the consciously casual style continues to grace runways seasonally.

THE WHITE SUIT

Elvis understood the power of attention-grabbing white stage wear. As a young man, he had seen the local blues musicians in Memphis wearing brilliant white suits, which became illuminated on stage under the lighting. To ensure that all eyes were constantly on him, Elvis used this tactic for one of his outfits worn for hugely successful '68 *Comeback Special* television programme, where he stepped onto the stage wearing a dazzling white, Southern plantation-style suit. His subsequent wardrobe from the 1970s featured many white jumpsuits—as the stadium crowds by this point had reached into the multiple thousands, it was Elvis' best hope of still being seen by the fans at the back. As someone who didn't work with a fashion stylist, Elvis remained very much the engineer of his own image and the white suit was just one many of the style tricks that he employed over the years.

The white suit offers style over practicality and signifies wealth and power. It has historically been the uniform of fallen empires and tragic adventurers such as Howard Hughes and Jay Gatsby. Head-to-toe white clothing soon became a favourite with extrovert celebrities on the red carpet, while the high-street retailer H&M attempted to make this look accessible with a white plantation-style suit for its eco-conscious collection.

ROCK AND ROLL BLACK LEATHER

It remains one of the defining moments in Rock and Roll history—Elvis dressed head to toe in provocative leather, gyrating his way through the '68 *Comeback Special* concert. Having spent a number of years making increasingly bland movies in Hollywood, Elvis had found himself in desperate need of reclaiming his crown as the King of Rock and Roll and showing the world that he was still relevant.

Looking at Elvis on stage, dressed head to toe in slim-fitting black leather, it is hard to avoid the fact that he looks a little fetishistic. The Japanese fashion designer Atsuko Kudo, who designs stage wear for Lady Gaga, agrees that Elvis' leather costume is "a very powerful male fetishistic look. We all dress for sex appeal and attention, and this look does that in a very major way—he was like a peacock." The designer acknowledges that as this was Elvis' comeback performance, the pressure was on to "make a big statement and to dress in a way which empowered him".

Since Elvis wore the iconic '68 *Comeback Special* costume, black leather stage wear has become a tried-and-tested formula for entertainers looking to shed their former image like a skin and replace it with some rock and roll authority. Stars such as Suzi Quatro, Bono, Robbie Williams, Brimley Spears and Lady Gaga have also worn interpretations of Elvis' seductive leather suit, securing its place in fashion folklore.

flamboyance of Elvis' stage wear liberated men to wear clothes that were more outrageous than they had worn since the 19th century," acknowledges the Savile Row tailor Edward Sexton.

DOUBLE DENIM

"Elvis' legacy can really be seen in the enduring appeal of jeans and jackets," says the British *Esquire* editor Alex Bilmes. Towards the end of the 1950s, Elvis famously wore double denim—the pairing of a denim jacket with denim jeans—for his role in the film *Jailhouse Rock*. Dressed as a prison inmate in a fitted striped shirt, denim jacket and drainpipe jeans with thick, white stitching highlighting the seams, Elvis looked every inch the beatnik hipster.

Jailhouse Rock helped to cement denim's onscreen association with youthful rebellion, an affiliation previously evoked by Marlon Brando's portrayal of an outlaw biker, clad in Levi's 501 jeans in *The Wild One* and James Dean playing the frustrated, suburban teenager in his Lee 101 Riders jeans in *Rebel Without a Cause*.

In his off-screen wardrobe, Elvis tended to avoid denim as it reminded him of workwear and the poverty of his childhood. However, by endorsing a range of Elvis Presley Jeans for Levi's, and through his movie career that included many onscreen denim moments, Elvis had become, in the collective mind at least, the archetypal denim wearer. Design houses such as Calvin Klein, Chloé, Ralph Lauren

So how has Elvis Presley managed to remain a menswear icon 85 years after his birth? Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that although he may have dipped in and out of fashion throughout his career, he always retained his natural style. All that Elvis was—from his fondness for gravity-defying hairstyles to his theatrical stage wear—was an uncompromising expression of his unique identity. Now that's true style. **E**