

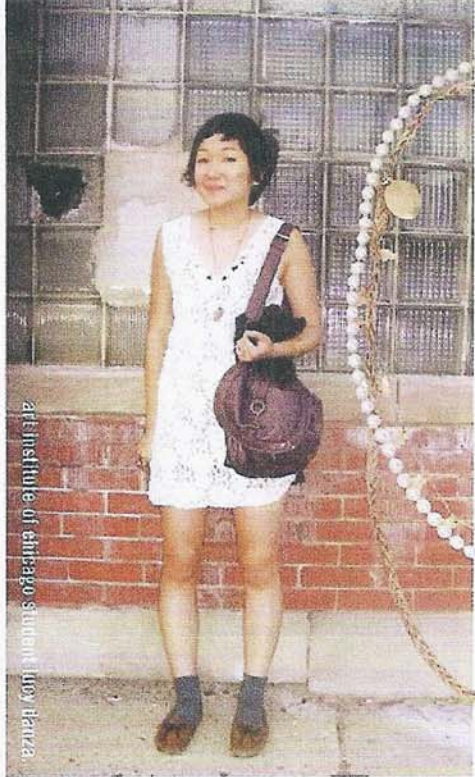
CHICAGO

As major cities go, Chicago is usually cast as the underdog. The winters. The eccentric. The poor, pathetic Cubs. Even one of its best-known nicknames gives it short shrift: Second City. Chicago is actually the nation's third most populous conurbation, behind New York and, since the '80s, L.A. And in terms of style, it is generally regarded likewise in the hierarchy. While the coastal megalopolises are capitals for clothing design and production, Chicago has traditionally lacked both creative industry and a mass media to fan its flames (Oprah doesn't count). There's plenty of great architecture, beautiful scenery, and disposable income, but its meat and potatoes are meat and potatoes.

Then again, its very Midwestern-ness is what makes Chicago one of the most inspiring cities in the world. "There aren't tastemakers in your face around every corner," says JC Gabel, editor of *Stopsmiling*, a respected culture magazine based in the city. "It's a lot more chill. There isn't a competitiveness, largely because there is still a bohemian-minded culture of people who come to brood and work on creative projects." (Or, think of it this way: No matter how intimidatingly cool someone might look, they'll probably be nice to you.)

From its unique brew of immigrant cultures and industry, Chicago has forged a tradition of bold, quintessentially American ingenuity—from Mies van der Rohe to McDonald's—that continues to reverberate. Influential record labels—Touch and Go, Drag City, Thrill Jockey—have been around for years; *pitchfork.com*, music arbiter *ne plus ultra*, is based here. As for the fashion scene, a walk in Wicker Park—once a dreary gangland, then the stomping grounds of a Guyville-era Liz Phair, and now a gentrified youth-culture hub—should lay to rest any lingering "Da Bears" stereotypes. "Proximity to a vast expanse of smelly farmland is actually what helps our anything-goes fashion stance: There's less pressure to adhere to anything in particular," says Jeffrey Kalmikoff of Chicago-based artist-T-shirt emporium *threadless.com*. Adds Heiji Choy, owner of *Hejina*, a Wicker Park boutique that sells Alexandre Herchovitch and Camilla Staerk: "The music scene and the style that emerges from it are dynamic and ever-changing. We're as susceptible to trends as anywhere else, but there is more color and more thrift mixed in." Built by Wendy's Wendy Mullin, who grew up in suburban Wilmette, finds constant design inspiration in her hometown: "There's an educated sense of humor balanced with a darkness. Like *Ordinary People*, but there is also Bill Murray."

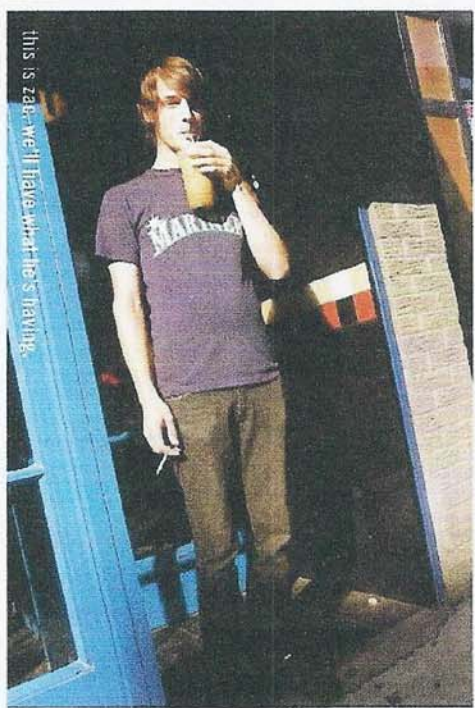
One person who's noticed is Mayor Richard Daley—the man who transformed the city into a sparkling beacon of liveability via green roofs, zero-emission buses, and the miracle of public art that is Millennium Park. In June, he launched a citywide initiative to attract and support a large-scale Chicago fashion industry. Judging by how much those who live here love it, the Second City should soon, it seems, be second to none. EVIANA HARTMAN



artisticlifeofchicago student lily danza



1. necklace by soos at hejina; 2. t-shirt at threadless.com; 3. dress by built by wendy, at builtbywendy.com; 4. blouse by eskell



this is zoe we'll have what he's having



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