

Style File *blog*

Q&A

Ike Ude Sees Spirituality in the Sartorial, Lady Diana in Paris Hilton

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Style File [Editor's note: Great

name!] is the well-deserved title for the collection of 55 stylemakers compiled by *aRUDE* magazine editor and consummate art-world dandy Iké Udé. "When you look at an urban landscape, it is a pleasure to see someone dressed as immaculately as Iké Udé," proclaims Diane Pernet, whose own iconic, romantic style is featured in Udé's fashion tome. The handsome Collins Design volume includes profiles of such aesthetic pioneers as John Galliano, Carolina Herrera, Victoire de Castellane, André Leon Talley, Francesco Clemente, and Diane von Furstenberg, along with portraits by Francesco Scavullo, Timothy Greenfield-Sanders, Seydou Keïta, and Maripol. (There's also an essay by Style.com blogger Nicholas Boston about Style.com contributor Scott Schuman.) Also included is an exegesis of the layers of influence comprising Udé's own striking look. In striking contrast to this ode to timeless style, Udé will show a series of paintings, sculptures, and photographs in December and January that deconstruct the allure of Zeitgeist kitty Paris Hilton at Chelsea's Stux Gallery. Tonight, Diane von Furstenberg hosts a launch for the book, but here Udé takes a moment to chat with Style.com about the unique ingredients for true sartorial greatness.

How did you decide whom to include or exclude in your book?

Each person in my book is, relatively speaking, an arbiter of style that I've known and studied for a while. This book is not for those who make an effort to dress up fashionably on special occasions. Rather, it is a collection of men and women with an innate, effortless gift of style and who make it a constant practice.

Besides providing insight into their personal aesthetic values, how much do you think these peoples' styles can say about their character?

A lot, I think, in that they are rarely confused or ever mistaken with the merely or archly fashionable.

Some of your subjects embody extreme style, but there are some who sport more subtle looks. Was it more difficult to settle on the less obvious candidates?

In charting the rich territory of style, I was also keenly aware that it is not only a most profoundly varied space but highly nuanced as well. Thus it was pertinent for me to chart from the extreme to the indeterminate shades of style.

You've included numerous photos and a profile of yourself. How do you relate your personal style to your role as an artist and critic of others' style?

There are select albums in the book that each denote a particular sense of style. Mine, which appropriately represents the Dandy Album, came from a 2003 exhibition, *Make Life Beautiful: The Dandy in Photography*, a Brighton Photo Biennial project at the Brighton Museum and Art Gallery, in Brighton, England. And as you may well know, I'm also known for my self-portraits.

Paris Hilton is not included in your pantheon of style icons, and yet you've curated a show that hinges on her status as an icon. What do you consider her significance in the world of style?

Paris Hilton is a media icon, a tabloid sensation that has such a massive influence on teenagers, especially teenage girls. She is not proper material for my book on style. She is of course a fashionable star, which is not the same as [a stylish one].

What is the distinction between being fashionable and being stylish?

There is a certain neurosis—an inevitable fatigue and a cyclical high and low—that goes with being fashionable. To be fashionable on one hand is to be unfashionable on the other; they're two sides of the same coin. In contrast, style is a sartorial equivalent of owning one's sovereignty—devised, understood, and defined by and for one.

The exhibition's press release states that Paris Hilton is America's Princess Diana. But Diana was considered morally as well as aesthetically exemplary. Hilton is the opposite. Can you explain the comparison?

The only major distinctions between Princess Diana and Paris Hilton are geography and marriage; otherwise, there is not much that distinguishes them. They are both anti-intellectual, given to populism, and obsessed with tabloids, paparazzi, and sex. Diana wasn't sophisticated enough for the House of Windsor. Look whom she divorced and whom she nearly married and died with: the former, Prince Charles, is a dandy/aesthete; the latter, Dodi [Al Fayed], is a rich, vulgar playboy. In fact, one can argue that Paris Hilton is far smarter than Diana, considering Miss Hilton's business acumen and yearly revenue. Let's not even get into any moral discourse regarding these two. Neither make the grade in the moral department any more than the rest of us. —Ana Finel Honigman

Photo: Courtesy of aRUDE

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