

Chapter Four

Kensuke Ishizu was absolutely knocked out by the style he saw on the Princeton campus when he visited in 1959. He was like this is it. I found it. This is the look. It's a little respectful, but also a little rebellious and totally reminds me of the shabby bankara style that Japanese students already wear. And so in 1962, Ishizu takes his clothing company, Van Jacket, and he pivots it. And he decides to start selling khakis and blue blazers and oxford button downs to Japanese teenagers.

But the tricky thing was- the whole reason he liked the ivy look was because it was casual and carefree and sort of tossed on and natural. And that wasn't going to happen in Japan right away.

Marx: [00:28:45] Ivy League style in the U.S. it's not a fashion in the sense that people ran out and all bought it at the same time.

As you now know, and as W. David Marx will attest, Ivy developed really slowly in the United states. The classy-casual vibe Ishizu loved so much with Ivy style had evolved organically from a number of unique social circumstances in America

Marx: [00:29:35] And so you can't take this thing that's organic and where the rules are unspoken and hope that it spreads, you have to convert it to a trend that you can explain in painstaking detail of how exactly you dress Ivy League.

So, before he could sell Ivy, Kensuke Ishizu first had to define it.

Marx: [00:32:45] And so when they started making Ivy League clothing, they also converted men's club to be like a Bible of Ivy League style.

Men's Club, the fashion magazine that Ishizu had helped start. Men's Club became Ivy style's definitive rulebook-

Marx: [00:32:45] And so they basically create this guide for people who know nothing about Ivy League style to somehow. Learn how to dress Ivy League by breaking everything up into these very, very detailed rules. [00:33:17][32.1]

Really specific rules.

It's like, your jacket must have a center hook vent.

You need three buttons on the jacket

[00:33:34] Pockets must be straight. Slanted pockets are anti ivy. So it's just like every detail of the suit. It's like, here's what it should be like

Which is so funny, because you know on the campus of Princeton the hallmark of Ivy was that it was casual and improvised and that was the appeal. But improvisation is a byproduct of mastery. Before you can jam, you have to learn the scales.

Masafumi [00:22:35] when it was originally introduced to Japan in the 1960s.

Professor Masafumi Monden of the University of Sydney.

they had this. Idea of Ivy as a very solid, clear, defined fashion style.

According to Kensuke Ishizu's rules, you couldn't just casually buy some ivy clothes. No. If you were going to engage with the ivy look? You WERE ivy.

It's almost like their identity to a certain extent, because that's what it was back then.

But buying an entirely new wardrobe is sort of a pricey risk. So the early adopters of Ivy in Japan were those who could afford it.

[00:33:52] 63, 64. Van Jacket It starts getting picked up by actors. And rich guys but it's far too expensive for a normal person. And you could read Men's Club and see all this great ivy league style but you went to Ginza or you went anywhere in the city in Tokyo and no one dressed like that.

Because still, even in the early 60s stepping out in public life in anything that wasn't a dark uniform would get a lot of stares. No one wanted to be the first to try out this new style in a normal everyday context. So Ishizu and Men's Club Magazine had to convince all their readers that Ivy was a mainstream popular, totally socially acceptable look.

Marx [00:34:24] I'm not sure that it was the first it was the first to do street photography. But certainly one of the first to kind of operationalize it to sell clothing. But they started a column called *Machi no Aibii Riigaazu* which means Ivy Leaguers in the city. And they would go out every month to Ginza and they would shoot young people dressed in Ivy League style.

Why were these people brave enough to wear ivy you might ask? Well Men's Club sort of ...fudged it.

And of course, beginning no one is wearing Ivy League clothing. So they're kind of just finding people who kind of look like it.

If you were wearing something from Van Jacket at all, or just anything that was not-a-Gakuran, they'd be like hell, this is Ivy enough. They'd take your picture.

And then once they did that column, the kids who read the magazine realized, Oh, if I dress like this and I show up at this time, I can get my photo taken then I'm in the

magazine. And so they start dressing like Ivy League kids in order to get their photo taken so that the photo would be picked.

And then the next round of kids who reads the magazine says, Oh, I can outdo those kids in that spread. I can dress more ivy than that.

And so it creates this kind of cycle where everyone's trying to dress more and more according to the rules of the magazine, because they know that that will help them get into the magazine.-And having these street photos say to young people, See real people just like this. So don't be scared. You can dress like this.

But it turned out the youth of Japan still definitely had reason to be scared to dress like this. And not just for fear of looking weird - there was a real risk involved

[00:38:53] Remember again, that any teenager in clothing that is not a uniform is a delinquent. And so suddenly you have 200 kids wearing this Ivy League style - they just look like prep school kids but the police could not figure out what this Ivy style was.

It was confounding for Japanese authorities -they were like “why are young men wearing these outrageous bright pants and boxy jackets?”

And they were convinced that Ivy was a slang term for beggar. So it's like these beggar kids on the street wearing this beggar style

all right before Tokyo was about to enter the world stage

Marx: [00:36:55] 1964 is the year of the Summer Olympics.

“The host nation Japan, the last of 94 countries”

As David Marx wrote: this was Japan's first moment in the global spotlight after WWII- and the Tokyo authorities were so worried that the teens' Ivy clothing would offend the foreign tourists-

you had hundreds and hundreds of these kids wearing Ivy League style, just hanging around in the street in Ginza. And Ginza was like Fifth Avenue, you know, it's the fanciest part of town. And so Japanese authorities are freaking out because they were so worried the guests would come to Japan for the Olympics and say, this is a country that cannot discipline their children.

So ..., the police do a night raid on Ginza and they just find any flimsy pretense to pick these kids up and put them in a paddy wagon and ship them off.

Teens were loaded into armored police buses that were normally used to detain political protesters, and sent them off to the local jail.

[00:38:29] And so they, like cleaned up the streets of Ginza so that the Olympics could start. But the problem was that everyone knew who to blame. And it was Kensuke Ishizu.

So the police call up Ishizu and they're like how *dare* you convince our youth dress like delinquent beggars in front of the whole world

And Kensuke Ishizu was like, Okay, you guys got this all wrong. This is like the most elite style in America. That's what I'm selling. And they were very skeptical.

How could Ishizu continue to sell Van Jacket clothes if anyone who wore them got carted off? His business would never survive. So Ishizu came up with a plan - to show everyone what he had seen on the Princeton campus and to, hopefully, rehabilitate Ivy's reputation in Japan

[00:39:50] So, an idea kind of floated around, we need to make a film of the Ivy League campuses to show people wearing this in its natural environment.

Ishizu decided he would have to go back to the United States, to film all the Ivy League campuses up and down the east coast. And this movie would show everyone— Japanese authorities, prospective customers— exactly what these ivy clothes look like in their full context.

And if we bring that back, we can show everyone in Japan, see, this is what elite Americans wear!

So Ishizu gathers a small film crew, and not a small amount of money.

They packed a suitcase full of illegal cash. Because you couldn't take that much cash out of the country.

In post-war Japan, the government still maintained very strict currency controls and there was a legal limit to how much yen you could take out of the country. So bringing all these people and all this money over to the states was a huge gambit. But at the last minute, as an afterthought, they bring along one more person in their crew. A photographer.

[00:40:54] they're like oh yeah we need a still photographer, so they get a still photographer at the last minute and they come to the US and they show up at Harvard day one...

They set up early in the morning. On a day at the end of the semester. The cameras are poised- waiting for the students to wake up and start strolling across the Harvard quad in their soft shoulder suits and madras and khakis and loafers. But as the students drip out of bed and into the morning light. Ishizu and his team slowly start to panic.

the kids start showing up and they're just wearing, dilapidated flip flops and cut offs -you know, the most casual version of Ivy League style you can imagine. And they just start melting down because they're like we we spent the most money that's ever been spent in the fashion industry on a promotional video. And we can't find any people that dress the way we thought they would.

Because now the year is 1965. And Kensuke Ishizu could not have imagined the massive shifts that have happened in youth culture, consumer culture, and the fashion industry since his first visit to Princeton just six years earlier. A revolution was afoot to kill ivy. And so Ishizu had to move fast.

----- ***Doo doo doo doo doo***

Dressing young or youthful was sort of a new concept in the 1960s. Dressing young used to mean dressing like a child. Because children used to wear literally infantilizing clothes for a really long time!

Susan: [00:03:50] When I was growing up, the little smock dresses at best and company still came up to a size 12. I mean, that's a large- practically a sixth grade person wearing smocked liberty dresses.

That's Susan, who attended Wellesley in the 50s.

There were no teen clothes. And we went from looking like little girls to looking like our mothers.

So for many decades, Ivy was the only style that was in between looking like a child and look like a serious adult. But after world war 2, this new being, known as a teenager. The result of new free time, new disposable income and a lack of responsibilities.

Lorynn[00:43:29] We had for the first time a significant middle class and upper middle class youth culture. And these young people did not have to go to work.

Dr. Lorynn Divita, associate professor of apparel merchandising at Baylor University.

They were able to go to college! And by having this freedom and choice and ability, they were able to demand things that expressed their priorities - as opposed to having to go to work....

"Hey gang how about sandwiches and coke? I'd go for that any time! Me too!"

As the teenage demographic grew and solidified, the youth were about to become a stronger commercial force, and they would demand more than Ivy. And so the fashion industry was about to bend down and kneel before them.

It was the prosperity generated during the mid. 20th century that enabled us to get to this youth culture that had all of this buying power and bargaining power and the ability to change culture like we knew it.

The French philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky has said that modern fashion has had 2 distinct phases. So far in this story, up to this point, we have been squarely in the first stage.

Lorynn: [00:36:40] And in the first stage we routinely chose fitting in. Over what was most. Flattering to us. The designer was all powerful and the designer dictated to his clients what they should be wearing.

That first stage lasted from the mid-19th century through the 1950s. But then, the 1960s hit. And they bring the second era of modern fashion.

Lorynn: [00:37:35] ...And for the first time young people don't want to look like old people.

Which *sounds* obvious right?

00:38:57] Young people don't want to be like old people.

I mean it is now such a given it feels even silly to say.

Lorynn: [[00:39:11] *That's why when Meemaw and Pa-paw got onto Facebook, Facebook was over.*

But before phase 2 of modern fashion, it used to be that you kind of wanted to look older to be taken seriously. To look rich or important or wise or whatever.

Lorynn[00:38:00] When we look back into pictures and yearbooks from the past, we're always struck by how much older high school seniors looked back then than they do today.

Side note, Patricia Mears at the fashion institute of technology also noticed this

Patricia: [00:45:09] *when I was looking at images, I was looking at 19 year old men that we today would say that's a 50 year old.*

And that is because it was— even for young women— being thought to be mature and being adult was an aspiration.

Even when Ivy style was taking off- it mostly was like- people graduated and kept wearing the look. It wasn't like people were taking it on to try to appear young.

Lorynn: But in the second era of modern fashion, we flipped that on its head And that has stayed constant

In Phase 2 of modern fashion, young became synonymous with cool. And this idea was taken on with gusto by the advertising industry, who took the concept of youth. And sold it to consumers of *all ages*.

Thomas Frank: [00:14:48] It was new in the in the 1960s that was a novelty. The idea that the kids were ... much more intelligent and wiser than their parents.

Thomas Frank wrote this book called *The Conquest Of Cool*. And it's an examination of business literature from the 1960s.

Thomas Frank: [00:42:38] I studied two industries: advertising and menswear.

And how much they loved this new youth culture.

Thomas Frank: [00:12:46] That's the critical thing, it wasn't hostile. They saw something that they deeply admired. So they these guys on Madison Avenue looked at the counterculture, looked at what was happening in the 1960s, the youth stuff, the rock music, the music festivals, you know, and they and the drugs and they were like, This is awesome. This is really cool. This affirms everything we believe.

Because. The ad men of the early 1960s had already undergone a revolution of their own. And it all had to do with... stay with me here.. management theory.

[01:10:30] There is all of this management theory at the time that, you know, capitalism is too hierarchical. Capitalism is too mechanistic. It's, you know, it's too soulless.

In the late 50s, a professor at the MIT School of management theorized that most companies and workers were operating under what he called Theory X, where labor and performance was sort of spurred on by strict supervision and external rewards and penalties. It was a system of sticks and carrots. It was deadening in the soul.

Thomas Frank: [00:20:27] And this is the Fifties malaise or as later was thought to be, you know, representative of the fifties malaise, the man in the gray flannel suit.

In the 1955 novel and the 1956 movie *The Man In The Gray Flannel Suit*— a new york City advertising exec — just another commuter on the train in a gray flannel suit — realizes his life is devoid of meaning, as he becomes a workaholic and becomes alienated from his family and loses track of what really matters in life.

Thomas Frank: [00:23:20] and we were in the grip of conformity. This was always the word. This was the great critique of the consumer society. It was it was conformist. You know, we did whatever we were told to do- We were being dehumanized. The IBM punch card was the kind of symbol of capitalism that had lost touch with human spirit, with spiritualism, etc..

And so this MIT professor proposed a new theory. Theory Y of management. And it basically said if workers feel self motivated to work, by their own creative fulfillment and sense of higher purpose- they will need less supervision and they'll just work all the time. Which just made me realize I am writing this at 9pm on a holiday weekend.

Thomas Frank: [01:12:27] it's like American business went all in on. Creativity. And this is in the late fifties, early sixties. This this happened. They called this the creative revolution. And then here comes the counterculture. Right, here comes the Beatles.

Here comes all the stuff. But the creative revolution definitely happened first. And then they saw the counterculture as an affirmation of what they were doing And they embraced that.

In the advertising industry, the cool, creative young executives were not threatened by the hippie or the hipster. Honestly they probably listened to the same music and wore the same clothes Because as early as 1957 you can see that there's a new male appetite for fashion. A desire for a little flare and panache. You can see the early seeds of the peacock revolution.

Thomas Frank: [00:03:29] In the menswear industry. I mean the Peacock Revolution. At first was an extraordinary success.

So remember there was this magazine that really helped popularize the style of the students at Princeton? That was called Apparel Arts and that was mostly a trade journal. But in 1957 Apparel Arts turned into Gentleman's Quarterly. Subtitled "The Fashion Magazine for Men," GQ trumpeted the dawn of a new fashion movement in America. At the time, a GQ writer proclaimed that this new look was "the birth of the counterculture, the first visible evidence in America that the young were drifting away from the solutions of their fathers." This look was imported from England and it was called Mod.

Jason Jules: [00:09:48] A lot of working class guys in the U.K., probably for the first time had a certain amount of money, a certain amount of kind of employment freedom, and so they started dressing in this very slick, sharp way.

Jason Jules, author of Black Ivy, a revolt in style

This kind of look became what we call modernist and then became mod

You can think of mod clothing as very like- the who. Or early Beatles. English rock- Very chic

which included three button jackets, button down shirt loafers, pointed shoes, thin ties. And one of the essential inspirations was Ivy.

Because there were a bunch of Ivy style shops in the UK. And actually as an aside, ivy would actually provide the bedrock to a number of british countercultural trends.

Jason Jules: [00:47:31] the mods evolved into skinheads

And skinhead style eventually feeds into the uk punk fashion, etc etc. This is a huge tangent that I am not going to get into now but suffice to say- a lot of countercultural and subcultural styles will come out of Ivy

Jason Jules [00:47:57] Ivy is, is the godfather of all these styles in the sense.

But when Mod first hits the United States, it comes looking radically different from Ivy. It becomes, as GQ said, the first style to be associated with sixties youth counterculture, and the creative, hip ad executives ate it up.

And they thought this was the greatest thing in the world.

Thomas Frank says the advertising guys got it. They understood that America's happy mediocrity was not quite so happy anymore. That respectable conformity was making everybody miserable. That we couldn't buy our way to egalitarianism and happiness- it wasn't working. But capitalism is so clever!- because it took that critique of capitalism and capitalized on it.

[00:24:11] And the advertising industry really took this critique to heart, really embraced it and decided that they would start marketing products as as emblems of this critique of of capitalism of of the consumer society you would no longer can consume in order to conform you would consume in order to stand out, in order to be different.

Now you didn't follow trends to keep up with the Joneses. You wanted to get to the new thing to *stand out* from the Joneses. The new trends were about ditching the old ones. That's what youth symbolized

Thomas Frank: *[00:34:07]* that was entirely its meaning and that's still its meaning to this day is rebellion, escape. And so what. I love about this—by which I mean, what I hate about this— is that. Is that the consumer society develops an opposition to itself.

Basically The consumer malaise can be cured by more consumption! But upgrading to cooler more youthful products. This is why the advertising around a product like Pepsi was so significant. Because Pepsi is, and please don't argue with me here- functionally the same as Coca-Cola. But Pepsi had a markedly different advertising campaign in 1963. It was for the Pepsi Generation. It was for rebels! It was for the youth! Which now meant it was for *everyone*.

Thomas Frank: [00:32:05] Oldsmobile, the brand, really went all in on youth culture, you know, and they started calling their cars young mobiles?! Hahaha. Or advertising them- they didn't change the actual name of the company. But the idea was the car would make you instantly youthful. You know, it's ridiculous. But there's a lot of products sold this way back then

And the menswear industry, like the advertising industry, looks at this new change coming from the youth - they see the mod fashion- and they're like, Great. We love it. Let's start churning out some new exciting designs as quickly as we can and make some money!

[mux out]

Lorynn: [01:01:54] Innovation is harder than it looks.

Dr. Lorynn Divita again.

I know we like to think that it's very easy to come up with a really innovative style. But it's not. It's really hard to innovate. So what do we have to do? We look. Backwards.

And the sheer desire for new designs and variety compelled clothing designers to fish around in history

Thomas Frank: [01:02:54] there's a lot of mimicry of all sorts of historical styles. ... this is the beginning of the retro fashion.

I mean you look at the peacock revolution and designers are trying everything. All these patterns and colors. Collarless jackets to wide collars and frilly shirts. The past becomes this giant grab bag

Thomas Frank: [00:58:04] you know remember The 60s is the affluent society. This is the most prosperous period in American history. And these kids basically look or they this society, I should say, looks at the past as a kind of smorgasbord of fun styles to choose from.

So I don't want to say this has never been done before. Looks from previous eras have always found their way into clothing. It's why Jane Austen characters look like greek goddesses, or dior's new look was functionally an updated bustle. But the thing about the Peacock Revolution and the hyper acceleration of design in the 60s put all eras all together all at once.

Thomas Frank: [00:58:40] in like the San Francisco scene-they were wearing like straw boater hats and fake Victorian outfits and this is in 65

And so starting in the 1960 a deluge of styles kicked the men's and women's fashion industry into hyperdrive. But by the 1970s it was clear that the peacock revolution just took it a step too far.

Lorynn: We laugh at the patterns. We laugh at the polyester fabrications. We laugh. Laugh at the details.

But Dr. Divita says, and I agree.

Lorynn [01:22:43] The Seventies. Was actually a. Marvelous time for men's fashion. it was one of the few. Times in modern history men were able to express their esthetic self at a level even close to what women have been able to.

[mux out]

And yet the peacock revolution had come on so hard and so fast- that it made that level of self expression just one giant trend.

Thomas Frank: [00:03:29] The long term effect of it, I think, is a kind of cynicism that led to the destruction of men's the men's wear industry altogether, you know, that people just were like, this is bullshit, you know, what was I doing wearing this stuff?

And so Thomas Frank says this created a new opportunity for people who wanted to sell an alternative, away from frilly shirts and nehru collars. You know, escape the consumerism with more consumerism!

Thomas Frank: [01:04:03] Yeah, these clothes look ridiculous. And it was so easy for the people retailing the preppy stuff to puncture the the peacock styles as “you've been had!”

The simplest, most comfortable return was of course back to Ivy. And one designer made his reputation by being able to deliver a new version of Ivy. One that was more fashion forward, and a little sexier. And this designer did not have a country club membership. He didn't attend an Ivy League school. He actually dropped out of Baruch college. He was just a kid from the Bronx. But Ralph Lauren learned all about the ivy league look by working at Brooks Brothers.

---BREAK---

Let me start the story the classic way. Ralph Lauren was born Ralph Lifshitz to Russian Jewish immigrants in 1939. His dad was a muralist and a house painter, who raised his whole family in a two bedroom apartment.

Alan: [00:20:05] He grew up in the mosholu area of the Bronx, which at the time was suburban

Alan Flusser is a designer and prominent menswear author. And his most recent book is called Ralph Lauren: In His Own Fashion.

[00:20:24] And of course, he had two older brothers, both of whom were supposed to be very stylish. Ralph inherited a lot of their hand-me-downs. They kind of paved the way somewhat.

So Ralph figured out how to make his brother's garments work on his body and make them his own. But Ralph's initial inspiration was not exactly clothes themselves. A lot of other designers' stories begin with them learning how to sew or pouring over their mother's issues of Vogue. But not Ralph. Ralph thought of clothing as a means to an end. Because his inspiration first and foremost. Was the movies.

Jeffrey: [00:08:09] *You know its the world of Ralph Lauren. He envisions everything very much like a movie*

Ralph idolized Fred Astaire and Gary Cooper and Cary Grant. All who paired Ivy style with hollywood style

Jeffrey: *Wearing his sweater over his shoulders. That was Fred Astaire.*

Jeffrey Banks is a fashion designer and prolific writer and co- author of the book *Preppy: Cultivating Ivy Style*. Of which Fred Astaire is a titan.

[01:15:01] He loved he loved pink and was not afraid to wear pink. the whole romance of taking his tie and using it as a belt.

Avery: *[01:15:17] That was him.*

Jeffrey: *[01:15:17] That was Fred Astaire.*

Avery: *Oh!*

Alan: *[00:11:53] And, a young person looking at a Fred Astaire movie or Cary Grant, who's interested in clothing— pretty hard not to get just eyefuls of ideas about how to wear clothes and how the insider people knew how to put clothes together. So Ralph ended up. Thinking cinematically*

At Dewitt Clinton High school, Ralph stood out- dressed in preppy tweeds and sweaters tied around his shoulders. He later called his high school look “As brooksy as you can get.” It was in high school that Ralph changed his last name. And next to that name, in the 1957 *Clintonian* yearbook, Ralph Lauren listed his ambition in life: “millionaire”

Jeffrey [00:06:47] he really certainly in the beginning of his career, he wasn't into the idea of being a fashion designer. He was the idea of someone who had a certain style, that people really respected and liked. And that was from the very early days from from his working at Brooks Brothers,

Ralph started at Brooks Brothers in 1959. Which, if you recall, happened to be the same year Kensuke Ishizu visited the Princeton campus for the first time. Ivy was enchanting in 1959. It was at its peak. And Brooks Brothers was the place to be.

Alan: *[00:25:48] Brooks was the place. I mean you could see Fred Astaire at any given, day buying Brooks Brothers stuff.. And it was The Fountainhead, really, of American style.*

within the walls of Brooks Brothers was everything a well-dressed man would want to own.

but it wasn't so much the owning of the clothes. It was more the wearing, how you wore them, how you put them together, the nonchalance, so to speak, with which you wore the clothes. And that was something that you couldn't get from other stores. So it was just an incredible learning place!

Ralph was 20 years old.

Alan: [00:30:14] He was a salesperson there and a just standing, you know, in the same floor as all of these well-to-do people. And watching how they behaved and watching what they bought was a tremendous formative ground for him to feel like, okay, I can see this business.

Ralph daydreamed about the kind of clothes *he* would want to wear. Ones that looked more like the movies. And Brooks Brothers came awfully *close*. But it wasn't quite what he imagined.

Alan: [00:21:40] you know, Ralph worked for about a year, a little less than a year at Brooks Brothers. But at the time he worked there, I think he felt like he got the look. Now, the question was, you know, could he do it any better than what they were doing there.

Ralph realized the Brooks Brothers clothes were sort of... square. Basically he liked the soft shouldered nonchalance of the Ivy look. But the cuts were all loose and baggy.

Alan [00:30:45] they didn't really have much sex appeal. They didn't have much shape. You know, they were just boxy and whatever.

Ralph wanted a little more pizzazz. A little more glamor. And just different proportions.

Alan: [00:34:21] And Ralph felt that I could give this look but I could make the clothes fit and feel body-conscious. More sexy. Which is essentially what he went out to do.

But he could only start small. So Ralph began with neck ties.

Alan: [00:36:09] making wider ties.

Like very wide. Like four inch wide ties.

Alan [00:36:32] But I don't think he's the first person to have ever proposed it.

He is certainly not and Richard Press will have you know that.

Richard: [01:05:09] ...I said, We got to make some wide ties. Ralph Lauren came out afterward. So I proceeded Ralph

I mean really both Richard and Ralph were copying wide ties from the 1930s. But for Ralph the width was just one factor. Ralph was trying to manufacture a sort of sumptuousness you couldn't find at Brooks Brothers or J. Press. That old guard was about understatedness. They sold kind of modesty only rich people would want to pay a lot of money for. But Ralph wanted all in on luxury.

Alan[00:36:41] Ralph went and bought fabrics from completely different, you know, from interior decorating firms.

Avery: [00:36:53] Like upholstery?

Alan: [00:36:53] Upholstery type stuff. Yeah. So you felt this tie was was really something. And, you know, instead of it being like 3.50 or 4.50, his ties were \$8 and \$9.

Ralph decided to name his brand after a sport he had never played.

Jeffrey: [00:56:40] Polo originated in India, but then it went to Europe and of course, could only be played by wealthy people because you had to have a stable of horses. Because the horses get very tired. So you'd have to have a stable of horses. So it was only the very wealthy.

When Jeffrey Banks first encountered a polo tie, he was a dapper little kid in Washington DC.

[01:30:15] black kids even then, took probably took more care about the way they looked I mean I know growing up there's no way my mother would let me go out of the house, not properly dressed, and certainly when it came to church or some event.

Although DC wasn't exactly a hotbed of fashion.

Jeffrey: [00:08:30] *I mean Brooks Brothers was for many years the standard bearer when it came to clothing shops in Washington –wasn't the most exciting place, surely. [00:08:43] But then came a store, 1967, called Britches of Georgetown And they were one of the first five stores in the country to carry polo by Ralph Lauren when he just made ties.*

And Jeffrey had never seen a tie like this before. It was different and somehow classic. It was anachronistic. Which is how Jeffrey felt himself.

Jeffrey: [00:12:06] *I always had this sense that I was sort of born in another time. Always. I loved old movies, and I loved – you know, when other kids were into the Beatles, I wanted to look like Fred Astaire.*

[mux out]

[00:09:30] *I was about 12 or 13 when I bought my first polo tie, which was \$25 and which I was so incredibly proud of because I thought it was truly like a work of art. I can describe it to this day. It was Navy and burgundy, regimental stripe with a snowflake jacquard in between the stripes. And so it was like a tapestry fabric. And I just thought it was exquisite. And I remember bringing it home and showing it to my father and being so proud of it. And he said, Well. That's a nice tie. And I said, no, no, it's a beautiful tie. And he said, How much did you pay for that tie? And I said, \$25. And he said, \$25?! \$25!! He looked at me and he said, you don't have \$25 worth of neck!*

Avery: [00:10:41] *And what made this tie so different than other ties? [00:10:43][2.3]*

Jeffrey: [00:10:44] *Well, it was wider. And, B, it was in this luxurious fabrication. It was more luxurious. I mean, ties were skinnier and thinner and were not worth talking about in my estimation. And this tie had something to say.*

In the 60s, in the swirling confusing sea of retro fashion, Ralph Lauren had tapped into something that felt like solid ground. something that felt classic and sumptuous and all American but still looked new. And you could see it in something as simple as a neck tie.

Jeffrey: [00:07:15] *he knew exactly what he wanted when he designed these wider ties.*

Because like a satirical Rube Goldberg Machine- by changing this one thing, it meant you needed to change all the dimensions of everything else.

He needed larger lapels, wider lapels to go with the wider ties, and he needed different kinds of collars on his shirt. He began something which he's continue to this day, which is he looks at the whole person. You know, it's not just the jacket. It's the it's the tie and the shirt that goes with the jacket. It's not just the pants. It's it's the shoes and the socks that go with it. It's not just the shoes and the socks. It's the carpet underneath the shoes and the socks. It's you know, it's the world of Ralph Lauren.

And Jeffrey was there watching Ralph Lauren's world expand. Because Jeffrey Banks had started to work one day a week for the only store in Washington DC that sold Ralph's stuff.

Jeffrey: [00:11:36] *I started working for Britches when I was 15. I was completely enamored with his clothes, and every time something new came out like shoes, I had to have them.*

Avery: [00:11:46] *So you were like watching the line expand? [00:11:47][1.5]*

Jeffrey: [00:11:48] *Oh, yeah, totally.*

As Polo grew, Ralph wanted consumers to know that all his clothes belonged together. They were all elements in the cohesive world of Ralph Lauren. But that was just not how clothing was sold in department stores.

Alan: [00:08:04] *when Ralph and I started out, you know, if you had a collection of clothes, they'd take your trousers and put them in a trouser selection. They'd put your ties in the tie collection, they'd put your sport jackets wherever they carried sport jackets, but they didn't put them together as a collection.*

By the 70s, Bloomingdale's had become a juggernaut of New York retailers- The Department store was *the vehicle* that introduced consumers to new designers. And Ralph wanted to carve out a part of Bloomingdales for himself. He specified that all Polo merchandise be grouped together within the store. And no one had done this before.

[00:06:26] That was something completely new. And it meant that, he took not just isolated clothes, but he put together a story. And so it's much easier to get a customer to understand Well, what is Ralph Lauren? If you're looking at a collection of clothes that all go together - so they gave him this first store on the floor of Bloomingdales. And, of course, once you saw it, it made perfect sense!

Because it was exactly what men wanted to hear at the height of the peacock revolution. It wasn't just some wild patterns and fabrics for the hell of it. Ralph was telling a cohesive story

Alan: [00:42:11] And Ralph's story was about substance and about transcending, you know, the moment and having some kind of heritage with the clothes. Which was appealing. It was pretty perfect, actually.

So when young Jeffrey Banks when he heard that Ralph Lauren was coming to Washing DC for a charity fashion show and he was going to spend a day at the shop Jeffrey worked at, Britches of Georgetown, Jeffrey Banks knew he had to meet the man.

Jeffrey: [00:13:01] *And I said to my parents, I am not going to school on Friday because I'm going to meet Ralph Lauren. and I got to the store early in my burgundy, double breasted polo blazer, my polo gray flannels, and my polo brown suede shoes.*

And at the time, this fandom was very niche.

Jeffrey: [00:01:31] *I mean, the company was very small. There were maybe 15 people working there. He had never done an ad at that point.* [00:01:43] *And a lot of people had no idea who Ralph Lauren was. But I knew! from day one that he would be as big as he is now. I knew it.* [00:02:03][19.1]

Avery: *How was he - he was in his 30s?*

Jeffrey: *He was in his thirties and he was wonderful to me.*

Ralph and Jeffrey hit it off. This jewish guy and this black teenager talked for two days.

Jeffrey: [00:03:40] *we talked about Fred Astaire and Gary Cooper and Audrey Hepburn and Cary Grant and Katharine Hepburn and all the things he loved and I loved. And he said, okay, when you come to look at colleges next year, give me a call. I might have a job for you.* [00:04:30] *And and that's what happened. I came up a year later to look at colleges.* [00:05:24] *had my little portfolio of sketches. went up to Ralph's office. He sat at his desk. I sat across from him, and we began talking about Audrey Hepburn and Fred Astaire and Cary Grant and Gary Cooper all over again. He never once asked to see any of the sketches. And two weeks later he called me and told me I had a job.*

Of course Ralph did not care about the sketches. Ralph has this famous quote: "I don't do shoulders. I do worlds." Which is to say—what he sold to his customers was not the soft shoulders. Or the hook vent. Or any of the details. Or any of the tailoring. That's not the selling

point. What Ralph was selling is the vision of a complete lifestyle that he was inviting you to enter. It was like a movie.

And this, in Ralph's time, was a strike against him.

Alan: [00:04:55] you know, Ralph was looked upon as a stylist, someone who just, you know, kind of manipulated clothes and didn't really create them, took existing models and, you know, adjusted them, etc.. And compared with people who drew their designs and could cut models and stuff of that sort. he had difficulty gaining traction as a, you know, true, legitimate designer.

Henry Brooks didn't need to sew to sell clothes. And neither did Ralph

Jeffrey: [00:15:39] *even though he wasn't a school trained designer, he could look at a jacket six feet away and tell you it needed to be a half an inch shorter. He had a great eye. I remember going with him one of the first Saturdays I was in New York. He said, Let's go shopping – and by shopping. He didn't mean buying. He meant like, let's just look in the stores. And I remember we went to Brooks Brothers and he talked about the roll of the collar, of a button down shirt.*

And that day that Ralph Lauren and Jeffrey Banks went to Brooks Brothers, they both noticed these luxurious buttery soft wool hand cabled socks

Jeffrey: [00:16:31] *And they came in, you know, soft yellow and oatmeal, bottle green and navy and red. And Heather Gray. And Ralph really liked the socks and so did I. And so we start to buy a few, and the salesperson said, We're discontinuing this sock. And Ralph looked at me and I looked at Ralph, and we bought every pair we literally bought between the two of us. We bought every pair of those socks that they had*

This image of Ralph buying up the entire supply of socks at Brooks Brothers feels so symbolically rich. That he was literally acquiring what they were losing. And becoming a surprising heir to the Ivy legacy

And Ralph did it not by making shoulders, but by making worlds. By creating advertisements and shop window displays that gave a complete sense of place and context. And this was exactly what Kensuke Ishizu needed to do with his Ivy Style movie. To show the whole picture. The full context. Not just to sell clothes, but to sell a world - even if that world was rapidly disappearing. And god dammit, Ishizu would find a way to do it.

Articles of Interest is a proud member of radiotopia, from PRX.
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