

WEEKEND *MATERIAL*

PERSONAL ESSAY

The objects that define me

// BY FABEHA JAHRA



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On my cluttered desk sit three things that have followed me across semesters, dorm rooms and different versions of myself: a journal, a set of gold bangles and a cup I bought in London this summer. None of them are worth much on their own, but together they form a small archive of who I’ve been trying to become.

My journal is a contradiction. It contains both versions of myself that are long gone yet it is still unfinished itself. Half finished and half full. The cover is soft from being packed and unpacked too many times, the edges bent from being jammed into overstuffed tote bags. I started writing in it last winter break, inspired by a friend’s goal to journal every day. I was determined to write everything that ever mattered.

I thought that I would write everyday, that documenting would keep me grounded, but instead the pages are uneven: a burst of messy handwriting one week, nothing for months after. Still, when I flip through it, the fragments feel enough — a line about a song I couldn’t stop listening to, a note about the way the city looked after rain, a few entries written in the middle of the night when I couldn’t sleep. It has become less of a record of what I did but more so what I felt in the moments I thought I’d forget myself.

The gold bangles were gifted to me by my mother. She gave them to me in pieces, one on my fifteenth birthday, another before I left for college, the rest tucked into a small tin box I still only rarely open. They’re delicate, thin enough to make a faint clinking sound whenever I move my wrist, a reminder that memory has a rhythm of its own. When I wear them, I’m reminded of her, of the way she would slip off her own set before washing dishes or praying, how they’d catch the light whenever she gestured mid-sentence. For her, they’re a form of both adornment and inheritance, a small form of self-preservation etched in gold. For me, they’ve become something quieter: proof of care, continuity and the kind of love that doesn’t need to be spoken aloud.

Then there’s the London mug, printed with the city telephone booths. I bought it impulsively this summer at a souvenir shop near a train station during my first trip abroad simply because I wanted to, not for school or family or any reason that needed explaining. I didn’t mean for it to mean anything, but now it’s one of the first things I unbox in a new room. Now, whenever I fill it with coffee, I think of those quiet mornings in London: the hum of buses outside, the pale light through the window, the feeling of being lost but certain I was where I was meant to be. The cup really isn’t elegant or sentimental in any way, but it’s ordinary in the best way. It’s a small reminder that meaning often hides in what we use every day without thinking.

Together, these items form a way to step outside of my own thinking and see who I’ve become. When I flip through the journal, I don’t only see myself, but I step into the third person. I see a girl furiously scribbling with no direction. When I see the bangles on my table, I think of what they’d be if they weren’t mine. How others would have treated them. Even without them being a part of who I am, innately they are beautiful and delicate in their own right. Maybe that’s why I bought the mug in London, even knowing that there were tens of other exact copies behind it on the shelf. It’s comforting to see how an inherently ordinary object like a mug has its own identity. That’s when they come to mean something to me, in the moments when I tap into the parts of myself that align with that identity.

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WEEKEND
RECOMMENDS:
**NEVER WASHING
YOUR JEANS**

STYLE

On the 60th Anniversary of “Take Ivy”

// BY ZACHARY CLIFTON

The book with lots of nicknames

On Sept. 30, 1965, a Tokyo magazine publisher released a book about the fashion at eight American college campuses. The book is “Take Ivy.” The photos were taken by photographer Teruyoshi Hayashida. The text was entirely Japanese, and the campuses he shot make up the Ivy League. The New York Times hailed it a “treasure of fashion insiders,” and GQ dubbed it a “seminal #menswear tome.” The book has had no shortage of nicknames: “Original style bible,” “Sartorial kayfabe,” “Ivy League bible for Japanese baby boomers” and just about any pairing of a fashion word and synonym for sacred text one can imagine.

Last week, “Take Ivy” celebrated 60 years, and its legacy still stands in Philadelphia, Princeton, New York, New Haven, Providence, Cambridge, Ithaca, Hanover and every city between.

Stripped of its endless accolades and enduring references, “Take Ivy” is a photo book. It was the first time “Ivy style” was methodically chronicled. Hayashida shot the images in the spring after traveling from Japan. The photos numbered in the tens of thousands, The New York Times later reported. Hayashida wanted to give curious Japanese readers — who appreciated rules and clarity — a better grasp of what seemed like a complicated code of Ivy League fashion.

The book includes “Yale University’s 20-Article Dress Code,” a set of guidelines published in 1965 for incoming first-year students. The guidelines reassured students they could “dress casually on campus, now that [they] spend most of [their] time in class or at the dormitory,” but also sternly advised wearing a sport jacket and tie on dates or to restaurants.

In “Stalking Ivy League Madras Wearers in the Wild,” American fashion and culture writer W. David Marx writes about student’s “Ivy style” captured by “Take Ivy.”

“They’re dressed in the pinnacle of classic Ivy League style: madras cotton blazers, Oxford-cloth button-down shirts, khaki Bermuda shorts, and patinaed penny loafers, he writes.”

Marx, who studied at Harvard and now writes from Tokyo, offers a succinct explanation of “Take Ivy.” Effectively, he says, the book is “young American men strolling across quads, eating hot dogs and studying for finals in libraries.”

The strolling and studying hasn’t changed. But the students have. Today, they’re half women and nearly one-tenth international. The Yale College students of the 1960s — almost entirely white, American men — are now less than one-fifth.

The students look different, but the clothes are often the same, especially now. Last month, “Double polo collars, cargo shorts, and lots of blazers — J. Crew, Ralph Lauren, and J. Press — led the preppiest New York Fashion Week in recent memory,” according to GQ’s Samuel Hine. A style catalogued six decades ago is still at the front of the cultural consciousness. “At NYFW, everyone wants to be a preppe,” the recent GQ writeup reads.

What is “Take Ivy” to today’s Yale students?

Some don’t know about it at all. But some still wear the style that the book introduced to Japanese readers. Those who know about “Take Ivy” still have copies and still use it as a style guide — though, slowly, students have crept away from preserving its style rules and closer to subverting them.

Sunbathing and studying

On a sunny day outside of Morse College, a shirtless Yale student sprawled out on the lawn between his college and Payne Whitney Gymnasium, according to a “Take Ivy” photo. Its caption explains the student was “desperately trying to get bronze skin while also preparing for an exam. The photo — probably the most evocative in the collection — conjures the first warm day at Yale when a beaming sun tells students they’ve survived the New Haven winter. The caption continues, “Ivy Leaguers frown upon students who earn good grades but have pale skin from spending too much time inside.”

Last spring, the Edon Club turned that warning into a parody, hoisting a red leather couch from Berkeley College and onto Sterling Memorial Library’s front lawn, which Yale students affectionately call

“Cross Campus” — or “XC.” Jayden Gonzalez ’28, an Edon member who respects the style Hayashida chronicled generations ago, helped.

On that early spring day, Gonzalez sat on the couch wearing dark leather J. Crew penny loafers, white ribbed gym socks with red stripes and red gym shorts with white stripes. Gonzalez lives in Berkeley College, whose colors — unsurprisingly — are red and white. Celebrating his college’s colors, his outfit could be called “allegiant.” Daniel Cappello used that term to describe Yale students in “The Ivy League,” his Assouline volume. “Yalies, both matriculating and graduated, bear a remarkably genuine love for their alma mater.” Cappello revisits the impression of “Ivy style” first catalogued by “Take Ivy.”

“Yale students tend to dress with a similarly unaffected classic ruggedness — what might be called the Maine look: a sporty Patagonia fleece or North Face jacket to temper the brisk autumns of the Northeast,” he writes. “New Haven, with its maritime climate, makes Yale a natural habitat for the Land’s End look.

Gonzalez gets it. He pairs his worn penny loafers with trousers or either striped or plaid shorts and tech fabric outerwear from Arc’teryx or The North Face. Recently, a minimally vibrant — almost burnt orange — yellow raincoat has been his go-to.

He talked to me about “Ivy style” — not just as “Take Ivy” presents it but a modern version which “from time to time,” Gonzalez enjoys “tapping into.”

He told me: “Fashion has a lot of different niches that are objectively good. Most of us gravitate toward a few and leave the others behind. ‘Ivy style’ is one of them I admire and wear. But I never fully make it my own.”

Gonzalez’s sartorial impulses are tempered by feelings beyond aesthetics. He echoed David Brooks, who last year wrote “HOW THE IVY LEAGUE BROKE AMERICA,” in The Atlantic: “Every coherent society has ... an image of what the superior person looks like. In America, from the late 19th century until sometime in the 1950s, the superior person was ... a man born into one of the old WASP families that dominated the elite social circles like the one on Fifth Avenue, in New York City.”

Gonzalez calls New York home, too, but told me, “Fashion shouldn’t be limited to the uber wealthy. So much of what becomes mainstream often comes from working-class groups. Fashion is one of our most prevalent forms of cultural exchange and language between different groups.”

That conversation, he believes, should include everyone — though few have his roommate’s fluency in it.

Standard Bearer or Wearer?

Griffin Santopietro ’28, a Berkeley College sophomore and Gonzalez’s roommate, has a fondness for “Ivy style” immortalized by News ads. He’s an “Icon” for J. Press, the storied New Haven institution that has outfitted U.S. presidents and Nobel laureates in navy blazers and Shetland sweaters since 1903.

Santopietro, who is also a writer, is originally from Maine. He’s now a Connecticuter but still sports Cappello’s “classic unaffected ruggedness.”

Last year, at the Yale-Harvard Game — which “Take Ivy” veneratedly calls “one of the world’s three biggest intercollegiate games” — Santopietro wore a waxed-cotton Barbour jacket, black leather gloves, a classic navy “Y” sweater and Japanese selvedge denim. He posted the photo with the aesthetics of a J. Press catalogue to Instagram and captioned it: “Harvard lost.”

Indeed, they did. But Santopietro’s outfit looked as though the football game was merely incidental.

He told me that he “didn’t want to be awkwardly formal,” and Santopietro’s classmate Saketh Sadha-

nala ’28, a student in Morse College, agreed. “I just don’t feel comfortable wearing something crazy,” he told me. “Instead, I prefer wearing normal staples with a little bit of a flair.”

Sadhanala told me his favorite thing in his closet is his Acne Studios 2021M. “They have a ‘personality’ that keeps me away from my other black pair of Levi’s.” Their “personality” is wide straight legs, a slight flare from the knee, a long length and a vintage wash for a heavily worn-in look.

Both men — and Gonzalez — agree about not making too big of a deal out of their clothing. Santopietro, specifically, resists letting “Ivy style” become doctrine. “There’s no reason to be didactic about it,” he said. “Not every day will be my best outfit, because there’s no reason for it to be. But I never want to end up in just sweatpants and a t-shirt. I want people to know I’m conscious of where I am.”

On the book’s limits, he arrived somewhere close to his roommate. “When you’re talking about this era ... it’s very white, very male. What’s important is not to re-create that, but to take the style principles and modernize them.” For him, that means “dressed up but functional. The ‘Take Ivy’ men were the first generation that went into their dad’s closet to wear his old clothes.”

“But,” he quipped, “they’re all wearing them in a cooler way.”

Sadhanala told me: “We’re far less formal today than the past. ‘Ivy style,’ to me, isn’t ‘law’ but more of a place to draw inspiration. I balance expressing myself while nodding to tradition.”

Each of the three men — Sadhanala, Santopietro and Gonzalez — get noticed on campus for their style. But none of them take it too seriously.

It’s easy to imagine them flipping through pages of “Take Ivy,” sinking into a Berkeley-red sofa and dissolving into the kind of laughter that is somehow at their expense and in their favor. The culprit would be Hayashida’s section titled “Play hard...” which, with the matter-of-factness of the Yale Dress Code, observes:

“When with male friends, male students may go on drinking sprees, which although usually tempered, sometimes involve the students bingeing to the point of unconsciousness.”

“Take Ivy” endures as proof that beneath the fabrics and formalities, college life at the Ivy League has long been a precarious balance — between style, study and the stir of social hours. In 60 years, the more dated pretenses of social life have faded. But the best style conventions have stayed.

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