



**CODA**

Dispatches from an arts and culture editor

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## Chicago Fashion Needs a Little Definition, Please

It's the great sociological question of the week: Is there a distinct Chicago style? It's time again for the city's annual [Fashion Focus](#)—and this year's slate of events (which run through Sunday) is considerably bigger than ever before. At the city's kickoff party last night at Blueprint restaurant in the Merchandise Mart, I had license to pop this question to nearly everyone I came across, including Melissa Gamble, the "fashion czar," whose job it is to promote local designers and oversee the week of events on behalf of the city. (Read my interview with Gamble [here](#).)

Having just returned from Paris, I can say with certainty that there is a Parisian look (if you want to see it, go to the street style blog [The Sartorialist](#); he has been in Paris and has great street style shots.). But do we have the same thing in Chicago? I thought about that as I waited for the 65 Grand bus this morning in a dress that will take me from the office, to a lunchtime event, to a runway show tonight. I needed to get to work; the bike, my usual mode of transport, was definitely out. Cab? My outfit may have cost me a small fortune, but I don't think I even had \$10 in my wallet. So it was on to the bus. Maybe, I thought, Chicago style is best described as 65 Grand bus-friendly? Sort of an edgy-meets-functional-meets-lo-fi?

I can't quite wrap my vocabulary around it just yet, so I'll be asking this question all week. Tonight is the biggest event, in my opinion: it's the GenArt's "FreshFaces" runway show. Like all of the shows, it is in Millennium Park. It will feature locals Dieter Bennet (a women's clothing label backed by two guys—unusual here) and Abigail Glaum-Lathbury, among others. The afterparty is, perhaps, a bigger deal than the show; it's at the James Hotel, and it's worth cruising by just to see the outfits this crowd will come up with.

For my part, I put on mascara. I also managed to find, from within my dimly lit closet, a dress from the British company Reiss. This dress never stretches or shows wear, it always just sort of ... works. I was wearing my little workhorse dress when I asked Melissa Gamble what her style strategy was for the week. "Something I can work in and wear now at events. I don't have time to go home to change."



Designer Orlando Espinoza (in his menswear line), Doo.Ri (in her own designs), and Council of Fashion Designers of America executive director Steven Kolb



Accessory designer Paul Lewin (in a thrift suit from Salvation Army that he had tailored) and his wife, Doriennie (holding one of her husband's bags)



Malabar boutique owner Claudia Kleiner (top by Orlando Espinoza and suit by Cyndi Chan) and local designer Cyndi Chan (in her own designs)



IIT fashion design student Jena Nesbitt (in a vintage dress from Reruns, a goldmine of a vintage store in Kansas City)

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