

# STYLE BASICS

## For Every Woman



*Illustration by  
Anelly Lee*

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## **Introduction**



**The Kampung (aka Village) Girl  
Wants to Dress Up**

## Introduction



### The Kampung (aka village) Girl Wants to Dress Up

I lived in a village growing up in a state up north in Malaysia. My family owned a sundry shop, and we sold household items from rice, sugar to snacks and stationery. My grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins – one big family lived under the same roof, and many great-uncles and aunts were living next door to each other, so I grew up having many second cousins as playmates. We had fun, sometimes we argued, but we always looked out for one another.

Growing up in the village, we lived a laid-back and simple life. Paddy fields and rivers surrounded our home. The landscape changes according to the paddy farming seasons. It started with a muddy field during the seeding season. Then, it changed to a sea of green with young paddy plantlets at the second phase. That was my favourite season. It was heartening to walk along this refreshing landscape to school every morning. Finally, the field would turn into a blonde landscape at harvest time.

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My parents worked to raise the family, and living in the village was care-free and simple. No one cared much about appearance. After school, I would change into shorts, a comfy t-shirt, and a pair of slippers to go about the second half of my day. It was all there was in my styling notebook. Though I remember my grandma was a lady who dressed well. She had a uniform style of look. The peak lapel floral blouse paired with a wrapped around *Sarung* and completed with a pair of deep brown slip-on sandals. On any celebratory occasion, grandma would replace the *Sarung* with tapered cut trousers in textured and stretchy materials. She had a variety of colours, green, deep brown, black and dusty pink.

Dressing up was not part of my passion growing up. I did not pay much attention until I got my first job in the city. I rummaged through my sister's closet and put together what I thought was work appropriate attire based on the vision in my head. I had only one pair of work shoes during my first job. It was black heeled sandals, not even a closed toe shoe. But overall, it was far from the company's expectation, I had been told to improve my attire because my supervisor commented I still dressed like I was going to lecture.

The problem was I did not know where to begin. There was no one sharing any guidelines on work appropriate clothes, let alone dressing well to suit my body structure and all. This knowledge was not easily accessible. There were limited clues, otherwise incomplete information, so I took cues from the way my older sister dressed for the office and also sought ideas from the peers at



Grandma and me, when I was still a *kampung* kid.

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the workplace. Looking back from where I am today, I had improved slightly, barely passing the mark of work appropriate attire.

I did not dress well in my young executive days. I enjoyed hanging out with my girlfriends in the cafes, shopping for clothes on weekends, and picking out dresses that I thought were cute. I drew inspiration from magazines and women on television. I was attracted to svelte and well-dressed women, so I looked for similar garments myself, I did all that without knowing my body structure. There is a saying that goes – thin women look good in everything. Therefore, the ultimate idea was to lose weight to look good but I found out later on that it was not true.

Furthermore, I had not heard of seasonal colour analysis. When I saw women in a stunning colour that struck me, the next thing I did was looking for a new garment in the same hue. I had not heard about personality style either. Again, I seek inspiration from outer influence rather than looking inside me. I did not know how to associate my character with the clothing style that suits me. I did not have a style. My look was everywhere. Sometimes I wore a floral print dress to work. I still had not fully understood the working clothes guidelines. Also, I had zero knowledge about how to dress for various occasions.

I admired the women who dressed well but all I did was admiring them from the window in the café or behind the work desk. I had always wanted to dress well. I wanted to be like them, but I did not know where to start. My job and

busy schedules had distracted me from ever making personal image development a priority. Not until one evening when I finished work early, and I was happily walking towards the car park to pick up my car. I walked in platform heels carrying tons of paperwork in both hands. Suddenly I missed a step crossing drainage with no cover, my right leg went in and got stuck. I heard a crack and fell over. The next thing I knew was the ambulance came to my rescue. I could still feel the pain as I recollect the memory from that day. I was grateful for those who came to my aid to save me at the tragic moment. I was 29.

The accident was the turning point of my seven years long corporate career. It was also the beginning of a new path. The recovery time at home gave me ample time to rethink about my career and life goals. Towards the end of my two-month medical leave, I was certain I wanted to pursue a new profession. A few months after I resumed work, I ventured into a new role in a luxury fashion house because I wanted to learn about fashion and seek an opportunity to develop my personal style. Working towards this direction with high spirit, I promptly completed a part-time professional makeup course I had signed up for before the accident. That was not all, I started to do my research online for fashion training opportunities and months later, I found *Istituto Marangoni*, the London School of Fashion and Design. And the rest is history.

The training at *Istituto Marangoni* had given me a strong foundation in fashion. The school was like a fashion runway happening before my eyes every

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Training at *Istituto Marangoni*,  
the London School of Fashion and Design.

day. There were students from all over the world with the same passion for fashion. They dressed fashionably well and with great style. It was awe-inspiring because at heart, I was still a *kampung* girl. My heart was flaming with excitement. I looked forward to new lessons every day. I was reassured that styling could be learnt. I quickly picked up styling ideas. My appearance had improved over a short span of time as I promptly applied the fashion theories I learnt. It was not hard to learn. I knew the *kampung* girl who had no sense of fashion had hope. She had a long road ahead.

I was exposed to the British culture, the epicentre of professional dress code, social attire and street style. Moreover, London is one of the richest cities in the world of art and fashion. Undoubtedly, these experiences had incepted fascinating views and ideas of cultural beauty and fashion in me.

When I returned from London, I wanted to dive deep into this path. So I enrolled in image consultant training. I knew my calling was to style real people in real life, people like me. I wanted to make my newfound hobby and passion into a career because women need to know the importance of fitting a garment and more! The tailored fitting that makes a woman refined. Have swag with the oversized garment. The fabric texture could transform the silhouette of a woman's body structure. It is ceremonious of the occasion that decides the hemline of a dress. Colours can alter the aura of a person. The lists go on. I wished someone with expertise had shared these insights with me, so I was well prepared when I began a new chapter as a young woman.

Have you ever experienced walking in the street and there was this woman who dressed very simple, perhaps in plain blouse and slacks, yet she managed to make your head turned to take a second look? I bet she dressed according to *the basic rules of style*. I will share these rules in the following chapters on wearing the right colour, right shape, and the right style that suited a person's character. She was most possibly wearing the colour that complemented the natural colouring of her features, and she glowed. She knew her body and understood the cut and design that complimented her body structure. She managed to create a silhouette that was pleasing to the eye. She wore clothes that she felt comfortable and aligned with her character. All these elements added up to make her look stylish and confident. You will look fabulous and feel good about yourself when you get these style basics right.

Style is that visual identity that varies from one person to another. It may take years for a style to take shape. Styling is more than picking out the thing you love and put away the stuff you dislike. This book shares the ground rules of style fundamental. It enables you to categorise the garments and accessories that align with your character. You will begin to cultivate a certain kind of uniqueness about your look. It offers ideas about the clothes that look good on your body structure. It points you in the right direction and makes you grow and flourish as a confident woman with your appearance.

Dressing well is more than understanding your body structure, colour palette and finding your personality style. You will also need to learn the



Me, the before and after transformation.

dressing for business that speaks your professionalism. Your outward appearance determines the tone you set in the workplace. Let your attire speaks for you, sending out the message that you are competent at work and serious about your job. Knowing the fundamentals of business dressing will give you a good foundation before incorporating personal style into your workwear. You will have a lenient office attire requirement in the creative work environment, but the proper business dressing is essential in corporate companies. Professional appearance projects a positive perception of yourself and makes a lasting impression among your work associates and clients.

Also, you will need to master the dressing protocol for special occasions. You will get to know fabrics and their criteria which made them suitable for business or social dressing. You will gain insights into the kind of handbags and shoes that complement well with the separate occasions. You will learn about the appropriateness of accessories concerning the event you are attending. Only by understanding these conditions well will you be able to dress on point for every occasion, paving your way to becoming a stylish woman with grace and elegance. They say a man who dresses well win in business, in love, and in general. I suppose that applies to women as well.

Fast forward to my journey. It's been five years since I had my first paying client knocking on my door. After helping hundreds of women finding their personal style, I summarise the essence that transforms a woman's appearance in this book, *Style Basics For Every Woman*.

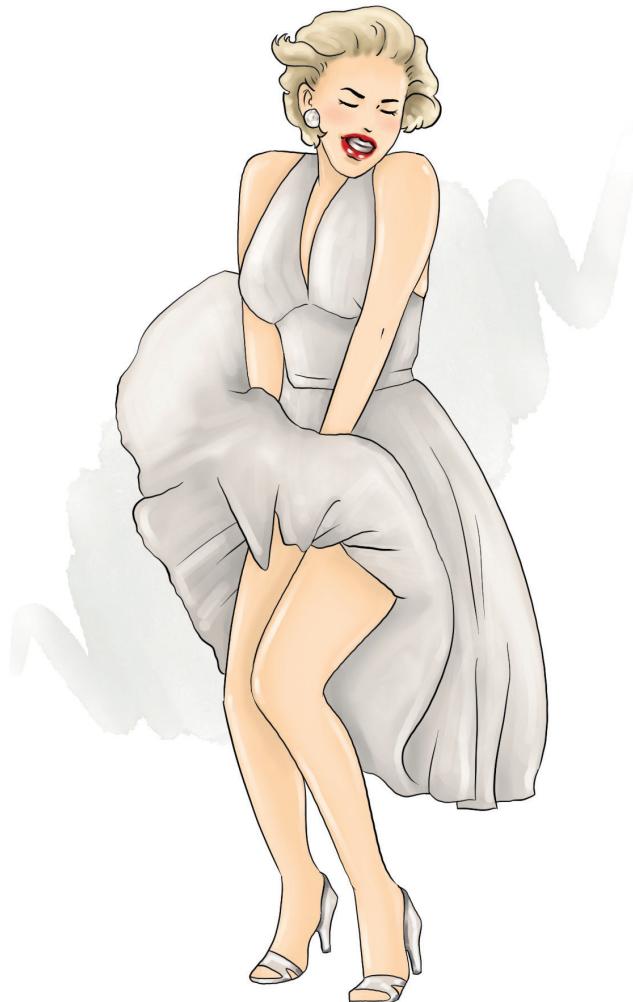
I aspire to bring this book to life as a reference in discovering your personal style, dressing a better version of yourself, learning at the comfort of your own pace. It contains the fundamental analysis for exploring and identifying your unique style tailored to your physical body and lifestyle. Hopefully, you will find pleasure in reading this book and find satisfaction in your transformation. I hope it serves as your guide to finding yourself, evolving and ultimately becoming a confident woman with style.

If you know me well enough, I am sure you could still tell the *kampung-ness* in me, especially when I speak in my dialect, when the words, the gestures and the soul were one. I dress up when I attend to my clients, and it is a form of respect in the work I do. When I am alone doing groceries, I still have the ordinary overworn tee and comfortable slippers, the *kampung* style. The inner *kampung* girl covered in mud will always be there. You know what they say, you can take the girl out of London, but you can never take London out of the girl.

# Chapter 1



## The Basic Rules of Style



Marilyn Monroe was known to be sultry, sexy and alluring.

## Character

A great style is the reflection of the true personality of a woman. When a woman lets her character lead the way she dresses, she will feel most comfortable in her clothes and becomes a confident woman. Nothing beats the beauty of a confident woman.

Audrey Hepburn and Marilyn Monroe were the most recognisable style icons of the 1950s and 1960s. They need no further introduction. They were Hollywood's most celebrated celebrities of their time. However, if you break down the way they dress, you see that they carry entirely different personalities and fashion styles. Marilyn Monroe was known to be sultry, sexy, and alluring. She wore the incredibly gorgeous outfit that showed off her skin, and she was not afraid of showing it. On the other hand, Audrey Hepburn was most famously known as the goddess of class and elegance. She wore a more conservative neckline and hemlines, and she was most beautiful in prim and proper attire.

Well, have you ever thought about switching their outfits? What do you think would have happened? Do you believe Marilynn Monroe would still be herself, covered up in the conservative neckline and hemlines? How about Audrey Hepburn in sexy and revealing dresses? Would she still be as charismatic as she had always been?

The high waist trousers or skirts can camouflage the long torso and simultaneously elongate your legs. The high waist bottom sits at the slimmest part of

# **Chapter 2**



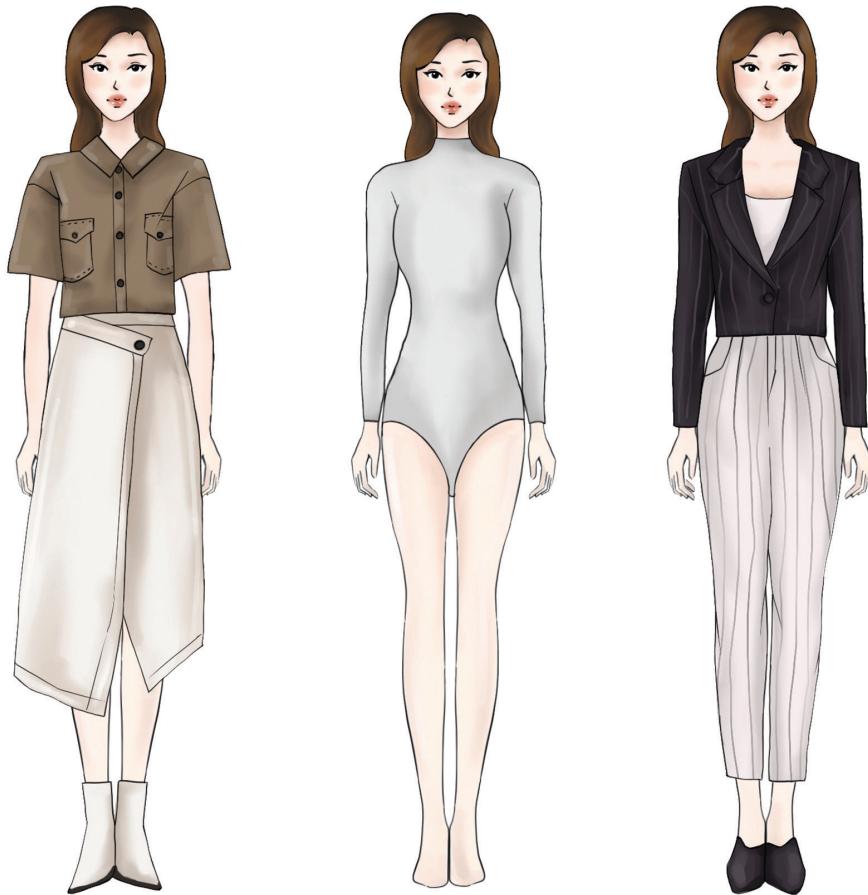
## **Your Body Structure**

### *Long Torso, with Short Legs*

When you have a body structure of a *Long Torso with Short Legs*, your goal is finding ways to visually shorten the length of your torso to fine-tune the ratio for an aesthetically pleasing appearance. Alternatively, you can find a way to elongate your legs, which will give the same result as altering the actual proportion and display an ideal body structure.

When you have shorter legs, wearing short sleeves blouse can visually balance out your body distribution. Stay away from sleeves longer than your wrist, especially those with wide-open end design, like the bell-sleeves. This kind of sleeves will drown you, cause your torso to look longer than it already has and bring about the legs even shorter, making them worse. Your most flattering sleeves should end around the mid of your forearm, enough to display the delicate portion of the arm. When looking at the long sleeve selections, go for designs with a deep cuff ending to keep the wrist small and be seen.

Choose a dress construction with a raised waistline. The waistline of a dress refers to the line separating the upper and lower portions of the garment. A raised waistline intends to shorten the torso while elongating the legs to make your body structure somewhat closer to the ideal proportion. Another type of dress selection would be the cinched waistline dress, which is made narrow at the mid-section of the torso with the help of a sash or belt. They are a great tool to break up your long torso.



Wearing a cropped top or jacket that hems at around the waistline or higher can break up the long torso and ultimately give the overall body an elongating appearance.

# **Chapter 3**



## **Colours and You**



*Winter seasonal colour palette.*

## Winter

When you looked harmonious in the *Winter* palette, your natural colouring is inclined to cool, bright and deep. You have a highly contrasted, brilliant appearance.

Your colour palette is reminiscent of the cold snowy days, which embodies the highly saturated hues of the icy cold colours such as frosty white, evening pink-blue sky and midnight blue in the clearest form in the coldest night.

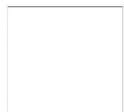
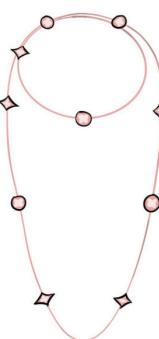
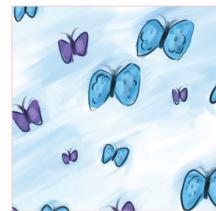
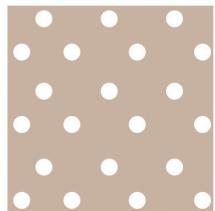
It would be best if you remembered that bold icy cool hues such as white, electric blue, bright pink, fuchsia, violet, cool red, royal blue and black harmonise with your natural skin, eyes, and hair colours. You will blend in with this colour palette.

The best metal accessories are silver and white gold. Your skin glow on absolute cool based and shiny jewellery. Avoid all other matte finished jewellery. Sparkly snow-white pearls will look flattering on you. You will look gorgeously vibrant in the winter palette.

# Chapter 4



## Your Character and Style



Colour palette, prints, and accessories of the *Romantic* style.

### *The Shoes of Romantic Style*

They say shoes can change a woman's life. I am not sure about that, but I am certain shoes can change your look and style. If you choose to match your dress with sneakers, you transform into an energetic and laid-back attitude. When you keep your personality style of the romantics, you will complete your look with shoes of delicate material like satin, with the addition of feminine details such as ribbons, rhinestones and crystals. Otherwise, the romantic motifs on the shoes are good choices as well. You can choose from florals to cute little animals motifs like bunnies, bees and butterflies. The shoes in design-wise, kitten heel pumps, slingback heels, wedge sandals, ballerina flats, or the stilettos pumps are perfect for the romantics.

### *The Accessories of Romantic Style*

The romantic woman has a free flow of love for the accessories, from vintage metal styles to sparkly rhinestones and pearly designs. They are the exclamation point of your outfit. The romantic woman's passion for accessories extends from earrings, necklaces, bracelets to hair accessories and scarves. All these accessories have one thing in common: they come down to adding sweet and romantic details, especially floral and ribbons. They are delicate and graceful. The sautoir necklace is a favourite addition for the romantic office lady to have a feminine touch on her solemn workwear. Also, a beautiful silk scarf around the neck can be a statement piece that makes you unique and lift your romantic spirit. Accessories always help bring out your outfit and pull them all together.

# **Chapter 5**



## **Dressing for Business**

## The Ground Rules

When you want to win in business or climb the corporate ladder, dressing the part of your profession plays a crucial role. A productive day in the office begins with the proper attire that perfectly fits the plan of the day. The clothes you wear step up your momentum and gear up your performance towards any challenges.

When meeting the executives to brainstorm for a new marketing project, wearing a bright green cardigan over a crispy white dress shirt and navy chinos offer a relaxed mood that could kick off the creative mind to conceptualise new ideas. When you meet high profile executives on a million-dollar project, formal clothes help you focus and boost your self-esteem. They could even influence your confidence in decision making because dressing formally increases your sense of self-empowerment. More importantly, a person who is meticulous with her appearance wins the assurance of her audience. Because the person who is serious about her appearance will take her job seriously too, it exemplifies someone who is committed to her profession. Therefore formal business attire enhances the professional image and your personal brand.

The question is, how do you build a winning office wardrobe? The answer is simple. I have summarised them into three ground rules. Your response to the following questions will decide the appropriate work attire you need for the day.



The ground rules of dressing for business.

# Chapter 6



## Dressing for Special Occasions

## Cocktail Event

A *cocktail* party is held in the early evening, usually from 4:00 PM to 6:00 PM. As the name of the event suggests, cocktails or other alcoholic drinks and finger foods will be served. Sometimes, the Virgin Cocktail, a type of non-alcoholic mixed drink that resembles a cocktail, is made available during a cocktail event.

If your evening function happens in the early evening before 6:00 PM, it usually requires cocktail attire. Cocktail attire is the little black dress or its equivalent. Do you know mademoiselle Coco Chanel's little black dress that hit the headline of American Vogue in 1926 was not a mini, but rather, it was a knee-length dress? Therefore, I am referring to a polished dress that hems around the knees for a classy look. Of course, if you think long, lean legs is your asset, the fun mini dresses are acceptable for the cocktail event. If you prefer a more conservative hemline, you may go as low as the midi length, but never longer than that. If you are more of a pants person, a jumpsuit in a dressy material will work it. You will still have room to experiment with a two-piece ensemble. I imagine a sleeveless silk blouse with an ankle-length lace skirt combo that combined sophistication as well as seductiveness are perfect for a cocktail function.

## Colour and Fabric

As the evening approaches, it is time for you to have fun with glitzy materials to glam yourself up. Give the fancy sequin dress a go. Do not be afraid of adding whimsical feather detail for the extra glam. Black is always a wonderful



Dressing for the *Cocktail* events.

## About the Author



Ong Soo Hua is a personal stylist and AICI Certified Image Consultant. She attended Fashion Image and Styling course at Instituto Marangoni, London School of Fashion and Design. She holds a Malaysian Skills Diploma (DKM) in the Image Consultancy Programme recognised by the Malaysia Department of Skills Development (JPK). She is a certified trainer by HRD Corporation, Malaysia, a certified makeup artist, and a Bachelor of Communication.

Ong Soo Hua founded OSH Image Consultancy in 2017. She lives in Kuala Lumpur with her dog, Arwen. She loves travelling the world to see new places, exploring each city's culture, history, and art. She is fond of cake and coffee.

