IMBUED FASHION MAGAZINE

CHI FW

THE SPECIAL ISSUE

BEYOND THE RUNWAY



What we saw

What moved us

Who we're watching

IMB / CHIFW / 26 / 001

FIELD REPORT 0001

CHICAGO DOESN'T NEED ANOTHER GATEKEEPER

IMBUED / CHICAGO FASHION WEEK 2026

IT NEEDS WITNESSES.

We're on sabbatical. But we're not absent. We're here to watch, document, listen and shine a light on the people making Chicago fashion worth paying attention to.
— Marlene Anzaldua
Editor-in-Chief, Imbued Fashion Magazine



Marina City, Chicago River

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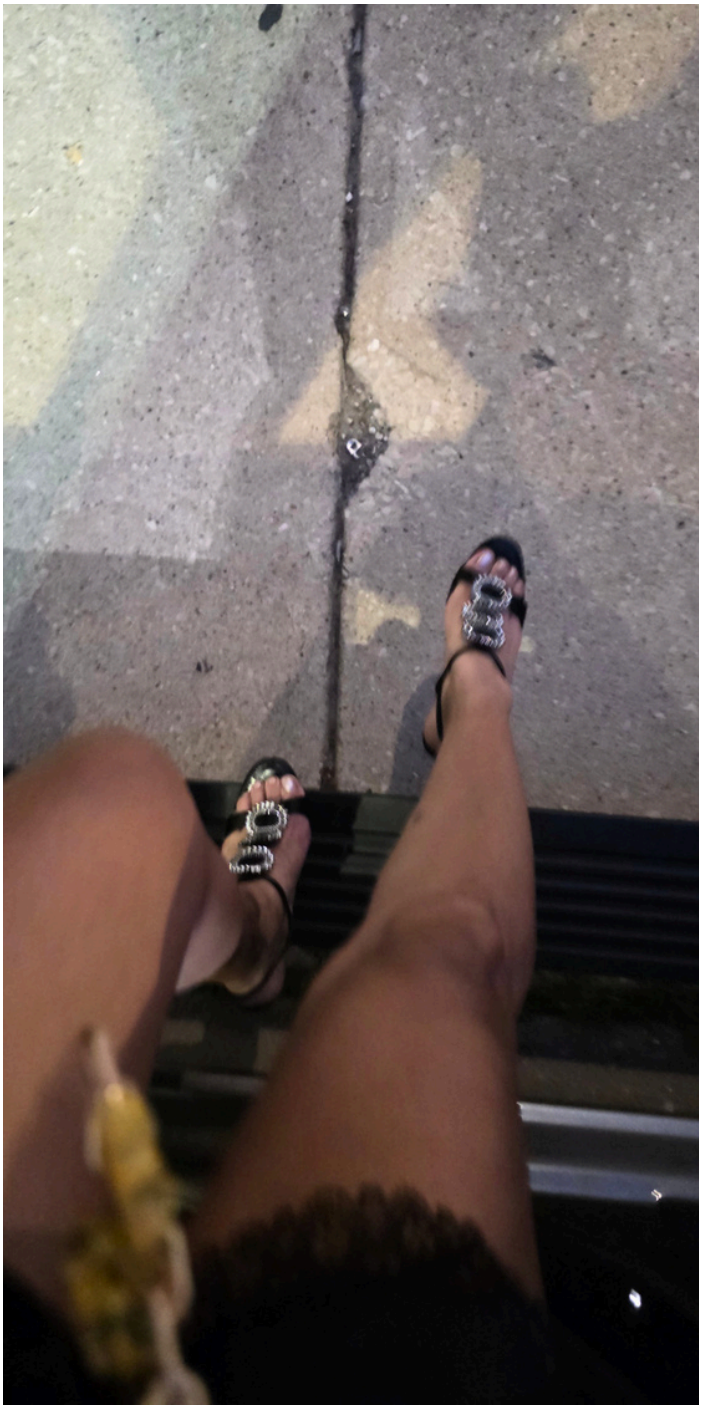

Chicago fashion has changed. There are more designers, more creatives, more shows, and more people pushing the city's fashion story forward. Chicago Fashion Week is part of that momentum, and it deserves to be seen.

But if we want Chicago fashion to truly grow, we have to look beyond our individual circles. More collaboration. More connection. More doors opened. The strength of this city's fashion community is in what happens when we come together.

Imbued is currently on sabbatical. We're taking a pause from our regular publishing schedule, but we haven't stepped away from the reason we started.

We still believe Chicago fashion deserves attention. We still believe its designers deserve to be discovered. And we still believe someone should be paying attention to what is happening here.

So we're stepping back into the field for Chicago Fashion Week, not to document everything, but to document what caught our eye, what moved us, and who we think you should be watching.

"SOMETIMES THE BEST WAY TO SUPPORT A FASHION COMMUNITY IS SIMPLY TO SHOW UP AND PAY ATTENTION."

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EVENTS

Before Fashion Week officially started, Chicago was already getting dressed.

MENSWEAR NEEDED A ROOM OF ITS OWN



Chicago has never lacked menswear talent. What it's needed is a room of its own.

On October 3, Chicago Menswear Day made an argument for widening the lane.

Founded by Nikhil Kapoor, the inaugural event brought designers, retailers, jewelers and menswear enthusiasts together at One East Wacker - not simply to watch clothes move past them, but to interact with the people making them.

Instead of relying solely on a traditional runway, designers presented through a live mannequin showcase, putting the clothes and the conversations around them - within reach.

That distinction matters. Because if Chicago wants a stronger fashion ecosystem, visibility can't stop at showing the clothes. Designers need rooms where people can discover them, question them, remember them and buy from them.

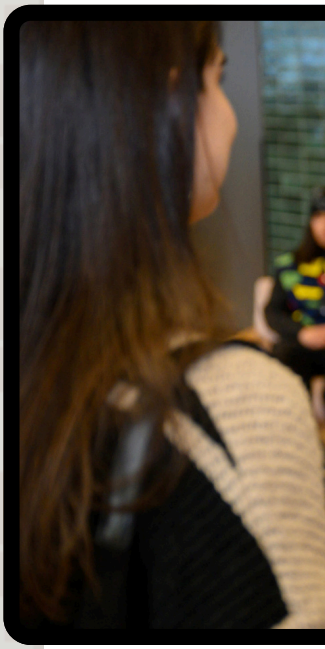
Chicago Menswear Day is still fresh. But founder Nikhil Kapoor is thinking beyond a single event. His vision is to position Chicago as a national hub for menswear, connecting local talent with a growing industry already taking notice of the city.

And perhaps that's the point. A fashion capital isn't built only by celebrating established institutions. It's built by making room for the ones trying to become them.

> *"I wanted to create a platform where menswear could have its own space in Chicago..."*

NIKHIL KAPOOR

FOUNDER, CHICAGO MENSWEAR DAY

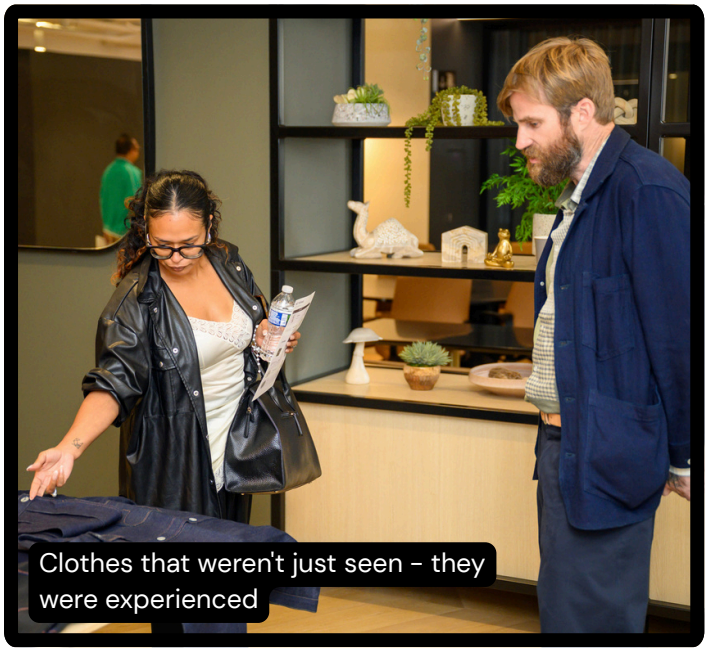








Conversations that move the industry forward



Clothes that weren't just seen - they were experienced

PHOTOS BY: ENRIQUE VILLALON @LIVEWITHENRIQUE

Participating Designers • Brands

Bespoke Below
George Patrick Designs
Ponder by Victor Mendoza
Hacochen Couture
Ford General Boutique
Takohl Jewelry
Dr. Bruce Baur of BSBee Designs

CHICAGO MENSWEAR DAY

CHICAGO FASHION

IN THE ROOM

EDUCATION
CONVERSATION
CONNECTION
COMMUNITY

The conversations shaping the future of styling.

Photography: Geraldine Teotico, LIFE MADE STILL @lifemadestill

When Chicago Fashion Week became official in 2024, Rachel Jimenez Penca recognized an opportunity to celebrate the creative professionals often working behind the scenes: stylists.

Founded on education, connection, community, and collaboration over competition, The Stylist Symposium was created to give stylists a space of their own within Chicago's growing fashion industry.

This year, the symposium made its debut at the historic Chicago Cultural Center, bringing industry professionals together for conversations, shared experiences, and opportunities to connect. Inside the Claudia Cassidy Theater, the gathering became more than a professional event. It was a celebration of belonging and a reminder that the people behind the looks deserve recognition, too.



INSIDE THE CULTURAL CENTER, CREATIVES FILLED THE ROOM FOR A CONVERSATION THAT MATTERS.



THE CONVERSATION

REAL TALK. REAL IMPACT

For Rachel Jimenez Penca, the most memorable moments of this year's symposium weren't simply about industry insights. They were about the energy in the room.
She recalls the applause, conversations, and excitement filling the Claudia Cassidy Theater, describing an atmosphere of belonging and a collective desire to learn.
One particularly powerful moment came when panelist Christine Matsunaga invited the audience to close their eyes and repeat a simple affirmation:
"I love what I do, and I am good at it."

Beyond the panel discussions, the Designer Partner Showcase in the G.A.R. Rotunda created opportunities for designers, brands, and stylists to connect directly and explore future collaborations.

For Penca, the larger vision extends well beyond a single event. She hopes The Stylist Symposium becomes a lasting community where stylists at every stage can learn, build relationships, and find opportunies.

As she puts it:

"There is room for all of us to succeed in this industry, and we are stronger when we help each other rise."

Rachel J Styling





CREATIVES, PANELISTS, AND PARTNERS CAME TOGETHER TO SUPPORT AND CELEBRATE THE CHICAGO STYLING COMMUNITY.



PANELISTS AND PRESENTING PARTNERS OF THE STYLIST SYMPOSIUM 2026

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STRUCTURE, WITHOUT PERMISSION



GVXO

A Glimpse of LA COSTA

Field Notes - Through Jasmine's Lens

Words & Photography by Jasmine Jimenez



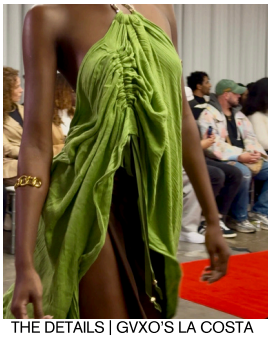
During Chicago Fashion Week, I had the opportunity to experience GVXO's designs at AIM Girls, People of Culture Black is Gold, and Culture Xchange.

What stood out was the brand's commitment to sustainable fabrics and body inclusivity. With Chicago's diversity reflected in its models, GVXO brought a sense of vibrancy and individuality to the runway.

But some of the most memorable moments happened behind the scenes. Capturing the preparation, creative energy, and occasional chaos backstage offered a deeper appreciation for the designer and everyone contributing to the presentation.

As Chicago's fashion community continues to grow, I hope to see more designers, stylists, creatives, and future fashion tastemakers working together to elevate the city as a fashion capital.

GVXO offered a preview of its La Costa collection during Chicago Fashion Week, ahead of its full presentation at Durango Fashion Week in Mexico.



THE DETAILS | GVXO'S LA COSTA

One Fashion Week. Four women. One question. Four perspectives.

THE WOMEN BEHIND WHAT'S NEXT



03/REN WILLIS - FASHION DESIGNER
Design by Ren Willis



Photos by @kandyclips_

01/TEDDI KROCHMAN-MODEL



02/J'EN MASON- STYLIST
Styling by J'en Mason



Photo by @gerryeustaquio

04/AUTUMN MARRON- MODEL

We asked Chicago's emerging and established creatives one question: What do you want people to pay more attention to in Chicago fashion? Their answers offer a glimpse into the city through the eyes of those shaping its future.

01 THEODORA KROCHMAN

@teddilovesfashion
Model & Content Creator



Photos by @kandyclips_

STYLE HAS NO EXPIRATION DATE

At nearly 73, Teddi is redefining what it means to show up in fashion on her own terms. "I dress for the woman I am today," she says. Having walked in Trashion Revolution's Icons show, she continues to embrace Chicago's creative community, where individuality, self-expression, and innovation take center stage.

For Teddi, Chicago's upcycling movement and multigenerational embrace of vintage fashion reflect a city where creativity and environmental consciousness coexist.

ON CHICAGO FASHION

"Chicago has a distinctive style that I believe deserves greater recognition and visibility across the country."

02 J'EN MASON

@JenRestyleFashion
Styling & Upcycling



THE ART OF A SECOND ACT

For J'en Mason, reinvention begins with what already exists. At the Goodwill x Chicago Vintage Fest runway presentation, she transformed a traditional men's suit into a bomber-style jacket and balloon-gaucho trousers, giving classic menswear a new silhouette and a second life.

Rooted in sustainability, her approach challenges us to reconsider the pieces already hanging in our closets. Through unexpected proportions, layering, and thoughtful alterations, Mason proves that personal style doesn't always require something new.

ON CHICAGO FASHION

"Chicago doesn't need to become the next anything. We need to become more of ourselves."

03 REN WILLIS

@rensowavy
Fashion Designer, Content Creator, & Community Builder



THE ART OF BEING SEEN

For Ren Willis, fashion begins with authenticity. As a designer, content creator, and community builder, she approaches creativity with an understanding that showing up as yourself requires courage, particularly in an industry that isn't always welcoming to newcomers.

Her work is rooted in storytelling. Inspired by the worlds people inhabit, Ren imagines the lives and experiences behind what they wear, translating those observations into sketches, designs, and spaces that encourage connection.

Beyond creating clothing, she hopes to foster a fashion community where individuality is celebrated and emerging creatives feel empowered to participate.

ON CHICAGO FASHION

“I want people to pay more attention to the individual and not the collective.”

04 AUTUMN MARRON

@autumnaiyana
Model, Dancer, Multidisciplinary Creative



Photos by @moderndaywife

MORE THAN THE RUNWAY

For Autumn, Chicago Fashion Week is more than an opportunity to walk. It's an opportunity to grow, connect, and contribute to the creative community around her.

A model, dancer, and multidisciplinary creative, Autumn has spent the past three years experiencing Chicago Fashion Week from both sides of the runway. Whether representing a designer's vision or supporting fellow creatives from the audience, she's learning that building a career is just as much about community as individual success.

ON CHICAGO FASHION

"I want to see Chicago get more resources and funds invested in the creatives building this industry locally."



Erick Locke styling actor Michael Epps (Jake from "The Chi")
Photographer: Blake Martin @mrblakemartin

BEYOND THE LOOK

Infinite Locke on personal style, creative independence, and building community in Chicago.

Chicago has no shortage of creative talent. For stylist and community builder Erick "Infinite" Locke, the challenge isn't finding that talent. It's creating an environment where it can thrive. Born and raised in Chicago, Locke has witnessed talented individuals leave the city in search of the support and opportunities they struggled to find at home. Rather than accept that as an inevitable part of building a creative career, he's interested in changing the environment that makes leaving feel necessary.



Erick at La Mode Collective Debut ChiFW event "Under Construction" at Timeout Market

"Chicago has REAL trendsetters that rival any major fashion community in the world."

Erick "INFINITE" Locke

Through his events, Locke hopes to cultivate spaces where creatives can connect without hidden agendas, develop genuine relationships, and leave with opportunities for both personal and professional growth.

His commitment to individuality extends into his styling work. With a portfolio that includes actor Michael Epps and projects for BMG Chicago, Locke approaches fashion with an evolving perspective. Once focused on having all the right answers, he now embraces inspiration from unexpected places, remaining a student of his craft.

For Locke, there's an important distinction between following trends and developing a point of view. He believes Chicago's independent style voices deserve recognition for the originality they bring to fashion, rather than being grouped together with those simply following what's popular.

His vision for the city is rooted in a simple idea: creative spaces should encourage people to show up as themselves, build meaningful connections, and grow together.

Because for Infinite Locke, the future of Chicago fashion isn't just about who's getting dressed.

It's about who's being given room to create.



Erick at Debut ChiFW event "Under Construction" at Timeout Market
Photographer: Jordan Smith @studio.Jordy



Styling for BMG Chicago Modeling Agency @bmgchicago
Photographer: Blake Martin @mrblakemartin

The Art of Noticing

CHICAGO FASHION THROUGH GALAXY'S LENS

While the runway held the spotlight, style was making its own statements beyond it. Across Chicago's fashion gatherings, Galaxy turned her attention to the details: jewelry repurposed, layers thoughtfully assembled, bold prints, and unexpected expressions of individuality.

PHOTOGRAPHY & STREET STYLE OBSERVATIONS BY GALAXY WOLF

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Lexus Spinato





TIMELESS REIMAGINED

A classic trench, considered accessories, and an unexpected approach to styling prove that timeless pieces can still feel individual.



TJ Cleckner



LAYERED WITH INTENTION

Patterns, textures, and accessories come together with purpose. A reminder that personal style isn't about matching everything, but making everything belong.

Style comes in pairs



Gerald H. Richardson & Jennifer Jones



A LOVE LETTER *to the Midwest*

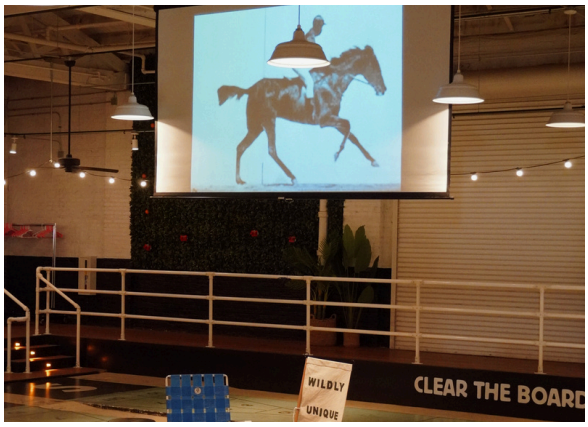
Inside Kone Ranger's Celebration of Fashion, Community and Regional Identity.

Twenty minutes before the show, a line had already formed outside Royal Palms Shuffleboard Club. Many guests arrived wearing Kone Ranger designs, while others embraced the show's Midwest aesthetic. Before the first look hit the runway, the audience had already become part of the story.

Presented as A Love Letter to the Midwest, the collection celebrated regional identity through clothing, casting, and community. Rather than relying on a conventional runway setting, Kone Ranger transformed a shuffleboard club into an unexpected fashion destination.

The casting was equally intentional. Models with distinct appearances brought individuality to the presentation, reinforcing a sense of authenticity that extended beyond the garments.











> **Midwest fashion has its own identity, audience, and stories worth telling.**
>
> - Delaney Deering

From morning coffee to post-show shopping and rooftop gatherings, the experience encouraged connection long after the final look. Kone Ranger created more than a runway presentation, bringing together fashion, community, and a shared appreciation for the Midwest.

Photography and Reporting by Delaney Deering







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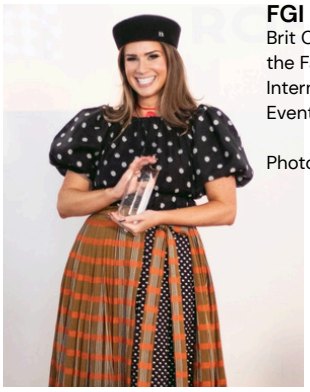
MORE THAN A RISING STAR

Beyond the spotlight and spectacle, Brit Cooper-Robinson makes a case for the everyday work, creative resilience, and community that keep Chicago fashion moving.

Recognition can be a defining moment, but for Brit Cooper-Robinson, being honored by Fashion Group International (FGI) represented something more personal: affirmation that fashion can create meaningful change beyond the clothes we wear.



FGI Rising Star
Brit Cooper-Robinson at the Fashion Group Internationsl On the Rise Event.

Photo by Olivette Media

Three years ago, Cooper began intentionally getting dressed every day as part of a personal healing journey. What started as a commitment to herself evolved into Dressing for the Dopamine, a trauma-informed personal style philosophy and confidence coaching practice rooted in self-expression and empowerment.

Her recognition at FGI's On the Rise event offered an opportunity to reflect on the work she had built and the people it had reached. For Cooper, the honor reinforced the importance of making space for approaches to fashion that extend beyond traditional industry expectations.



Community First
Brit with fellow creatives at CWilli Show.

Photo by Cindy Fandl

Yet her perspective reaches far beyond her own accomplishments.

When asked what deserves more attention in Chicago fashion, Cooper's answer was unexpected:

"The boring Tuesday mornings"

Behind the runway presentations and celebrated moments are designers, stylists, and makers creating with limited resources, often without the financial support or visibility their work deserves. Cooper believes those everyday efforts are what sustain Chicago's creative community.



The Work Behind The Look
Behind the scenes moment before the show with Chicago stylist Rahela Tanase.

Photo by Cindy Fandl

Her message is a call to support local talent beyond Fashion Week, invest in independent makers, and recognize the craftsmanship happening throughout the city year-round.

As Cooper puts it:

"Chicago doesn't need permission to be a fashion city. It's always been one."



IN THREE WORDS

We asked Chicago to describe Fashion Week in 3 words. Here's what the city had to say.



Different perspective. One city in motion.

THE SHOW GOES ON



The lights have gone down. The crowds have dispersed. The clothes have been returned to their racks. But the work isn't done.

THE SHOW ENDED. THE STORY DIDN'T.

Still looking through photographs. Still revisiting conversations. Still finding stories worth telling long after the last model left the runway.

Chicago was here before the runway. And Chicago will be here long after it. Because fashion in this city doesn't begin when the lights come on, and it certainly doesn't end when they go out.

This issue is a look back at the people, places, and moments that stayed with us. Not every show. Not every face. Just the moments we witnessed, the voices we heard, and the stories we felt deserved a little more attention.

The runways may be empty, but the city is still creating. And the story keeps going.

AND WE'RE STILL WATCHING

–IMBUED FASHION MAGAZINE

UNTIL NEXT TIME

We'll be watching.