URL to IRL

APRIL 2024
ISSUE 01

# INDEX MAGAZINE

## CULT CLASSICS
5 of the darkest

## COTTAGECORE UNDERTONES
Will it ever grow up?

## HARAJUKU 0.5
It's back! This time, it's personal



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# Editor’s Letter

Index Magazine / Issue 01

Alternate realities. It’s an idea synonymous with Internet 2.0 and integral to the mechanism of Index Magazine. Led by a generation with eight-second attention spans, Internet 2.0 is all about curating parallel universes contained within our real one. As chronically online youth achieve this by embodying ‘core’ aesthetics and joining digital-first subcultures, Index offers unapologetically positive spaces for their self-discovery and expression.

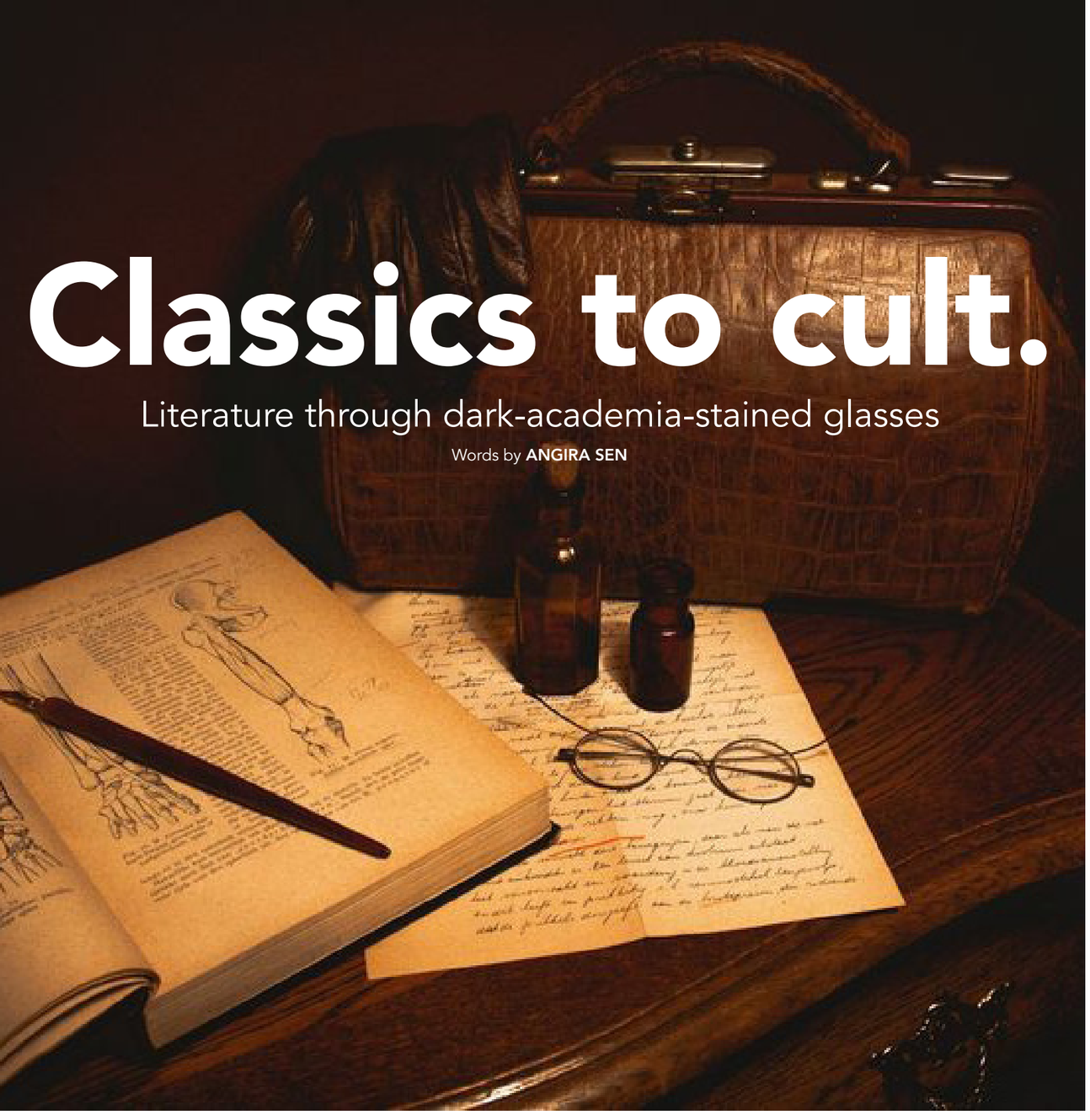
This pursuit urged me and my team to channel cybercore on the cover of our first issue. Signalling optimism for the 21st century, the aesthetic captures Index’s digital culture literacy and adoption of a dopamine-fuelled design language across creatives. Covering cult aesthetics like cottagecore, dark academia, lolita and decora, we offer our April 2024 issue not as a guidebook but as an extension of our commitment to transient identities.

I’d also like to dare and equate this bid to the role of fanzines during the emergence of punk. With more member-centric narratives and cultural critiques, we hope to evolve as a hub for visual culture that helps validate several hyper-niche communities. At its core, Index explores the potential of digital aesthetics and subcultures to forge camaraderie and trigger meaningful social changes offline – thereby connecting URLs to IRL.

Here’s to internet enlightenment and identity reboots until we meet again in the second issue.



Malavika Pradeep
Editor



# Classics to cult.

## Literature through dark-academia-stained glasses

Words by **ANGIRA SEN**

Photographs from **PEXELS AND ANGIRA SEN**

In the enchanting realm of literature, where shadows dance upon the pages and intellectual fervor permeates the air, a subculture of readers is drawn to the allure of academia tinged with mystery, melancholy, and a hint of the macabre.

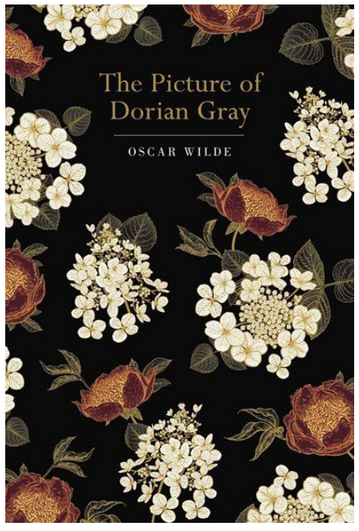
"Dark academia" is an aesthetic movement that is fascinating bibliophiles of all ages. This world is a niche movement that celebrates the interplay between academic pursuits and a hauntingly atmospheric backdrop. It evokes images of candlelit libraries, ivy-covered universities, and the timeless elegance of Gothic architecture. With its fusion of erudition and melancholy, devotees are drawn into a realm where literature, art, and history intertwine to create an immersive experience.

From the timeless classics that laid the foundation for this literary aesthetic to the contemporary works that breathe new life into its hallowed halls, this is a journey through the top five dark academia-themed books, traversing the corridors of knowledge from antiquity to the modern age, leaving an indelible mark on the literary landscape.

So, get ready for a night of literary indulgence! Slip into your favorite cardigan or tweed blazer, light some candles, and settle in to enter the moody and captivating world of dark academia with these handpicked books to start your journey.






**Embark on this literary journey, allow yourself to be trapped by the captivating narratives within these pages, and join the cult of culture that is dark academia**

**The Picture of Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde**
Dark academia's roots lie in this gothic fiction masterpiece of Victorian literature. This is the story of a young man named Dorian Gray, whose portrait is being painted. From moral duplicity to vanity and the duality of human nature, this remains as relevant today as it was written in 1890.

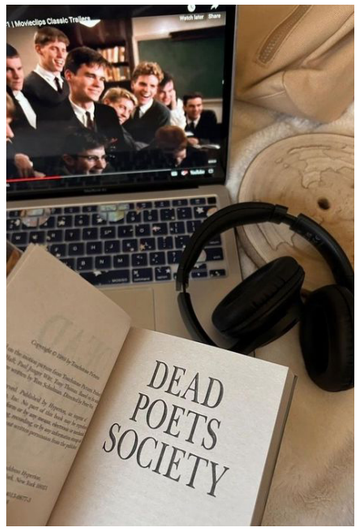
**The Secret History by Donna Tartt**
Crowned as the queen of dark academia, Tartt's magnum opus published in 1992 is a testament to that. Lush prose, intellectual elitism and hubris tangled with a group of classic students who find themselves under the influence of their professor, leading down to a dangerous path beyond human morality.

**Frankenstein by Mary Shelley**
Written by a 19-year-old Shelley in 1818, this is a classic about a scientist who creates a monster and the unfolding of terrible events he unintentionally causes. The book poses the question of what it is to be human.

**Dead Poets Society by N. H. Kleinbaum**
We've all read books that have been adapted into a screenplay, so why not do the reverse for a change? Kleinbaum adapted this in 1988. The story is based on the film's plot- a story of an English teacher, John Keating, inspiring his students to challenge the norms and urging them to seize the day. What The Secret History is to dark academia books, Dead Poets Society is to dark academia movies.

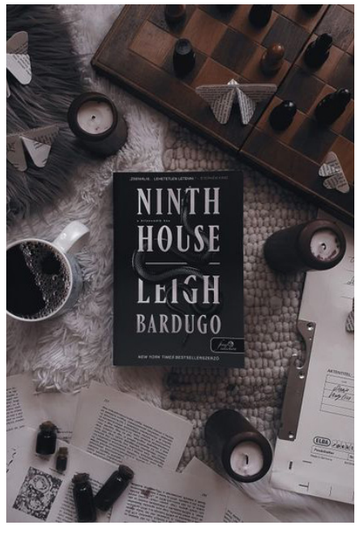
**Ninth House by Leigh Bardugo**
Published in 2019 this modern dark academia themed book follows the life of Alex Stern, the sole survivor of an unsolved homicide, as she's given the chance to attend one of the most prestigious institutions, Yale. But she is tasked with monitoring the clandestine activities of secret societies- unveiling more sinister things than she could have imagined.

This online community is bleeding into a literary genre abounding in mysterious, magical, bookish mood boards, preppy fashion, oak-panelled libraries with mundane secrets locked away in them.









# Cloaked in shadows

Inside the enigmatic world of one of the reigning aesthetic of pop culture

Words by **ANGIRA SEN**

Photographs from **PEXELS AND ANGIRA SEN**

Imagine stepping through a grand entrance like one of the Harry Potter films. Gothic arches soar overhead, casting intricate patterns of light and shadow upon the stone floors below. Clad in pleated skirts/trousers and tweed blazers, you dart through the labyrinthine corridors toward the old library, your footsteps echoing and mingling with the hushed rustle of fall leaves. Till you reach the towering shelves, laden with leather-bound books, illuminated by the soft glow of antique lamps and burning candles, stretch endlessly into the shadows, their secrets whispering through the musty air. Each turn reveals a new nook, each shelf a treasure trove of knowledge waiting to be unearthed.

Amidst the dimly lit corners of the internet lies a subculture under the guise of academic refinement and intellectual allure. The fascinating world of Dark academia, popularised on Tumblr in 2015, captured the imaginations of the maturing Harry Potter generation. It is steeped in classical literature, Gothic architecture, and a penchant for the macabre. Its popularity soared during the COVID-19 pandemic with the shutdown of schools and universities.

"I was studying film production at university when I came across the Dark academia subculture and had just watched Dead Poets Society," says Laura (@laurasreadingtime), a dark academia-themed Instagram user. She continues, "Around that time, a few captivating photos kept appearing on my social media feeds – old libraries, typewriters, students running through halls, books, ink and paper, gothic architecture – and I loved every part of it. It encapsulated my interests, especially reading, writing and philosophy."

## LITERATURE & FILM

As the name suggests, Dark academia is intricately related to academics and literature. From Mary Shelley to Oscar Wilde to the modern incarnation by Donna Tartt and Leigh Bardugo, its strength and number have grown tenfold. This aesthetic has proved its substantial presence not just in books but in films, too. Often set in Ivy League or prestigious universities, these films question what it is to be human. From classics like the late Robin Williams starrer Dead Poets Society (1989), Julia Roberts' Mona Lisa Smile (2003), and Matt Damon's acclaimed Good Will Hunting (1997) to modern manifestations like Radcliff's Harry Potter series (2001-2011), Kill Your Darlings (2013) and the recent hit Saltburn (2023).




"Dark academia consists of many things - as for my favourites, I'm passionate about English literature of the Romantic period," says Janet (@coffeeyre), another Instagram user who found 'tranquillity' in this world. "Some of my favourite books are Jane Eyre (above all), Sense and Sensibility, and Wuthering Heights- a 19th-century enthusiast right here!" she says.

The modern adaptations of such classics follow morally gray characters, often making questionable or corrupt decisions. Laura says, "Dark academia books don't shy away from asking difficult questions about human morals and often have strong existentialism themes woven throughout." This Dark academician says her three favourite dark academic books are "The Classic- The Picture of Dorian Gray by Wilde, The Secret History by Tartt and If We Were Villains by Rio."

The appeal of these books lies in the vulnerability of their characters. At some point, we all have felt like we do not belong, and these books explore the discomfort of not belonging, which acts as a reassurance to others who may be feeling the same way.

## FASHION & STYLE

Not just the fictional worlds but Dark academia's influence on fashion is undeniable. Laura says, "The visual aspect of DA was new to me, but it has made the biggest influence in my life."

The colours that define this subculture's aesthetic are dark and neutral colour palettes. It blends European classics with Greek mythology and poetry with existential themes- traditional and vintage. In short, Dark academia fashion is a preppy schoolgirl with a gothic twist. Pleated skirts, tailored trousers, collared shirts, cosy cardigans and chunky loafers are the vibe of Dark Academia. Moody and romantic with an intellectual twist. The poster girl for dark academia fashion is none other than Wednesday Addams. After the recent release of Netflix's Wednesday, this fictional character wearing all-black blazers and pleated skirts- signature dark academia clothing soared in popularity. But it's not just Wednesday; our girl-next-door Hermione Granger from the Harry Potter book/film series is another illustrious example.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

Platforms like Tumblr, Instagram, and TikTok have played pivotal roles in perpetuating and amplifying the allure of Dark academia, fostering a sense of belonging and community among enthusiasts worldwide. Laura says, “To be understood, to connect, and to relate are three reasons why I always liked reading, and the Dark academia community showed me that it’s not only characters or published authors that can give me those things.”

Tumblr served as the incubator for Dark academia, where its roots began to take hold and flourish. The platform’s emphasis on visual content allowed users to curate and share aesthetic images, quotes, and literary references that encapsulated its essence. Through reblogs and original posts, Tumblr users formed a tight-knit community centred around their shared appreciation for the aesthetic.

Instagram emerged as a natural extension of Dark academia’s visual appeal, providing a platform for enthusiasts to showcase their interpretation of the aesthetic lifestyle. Instagram users like Laura (@laurasreadingtime) and Janet (@coffeeyre) found their niche within this community. The platform’s emphasis on curated feeds and storytelling enabled users to construct narratives around their fascination with Dark academia, further fueling its popularity and visibility.

“Belonging to a community that shares my passions and thoughts is the most amazing thing since I started my account. This subculture has broken boundaries, as I’ve made many friends whom I truly appreciate,” Janet says. These platforms’ interactive features facilitated collaboration and community-building. They have given enthusiasts like Janet and Laura a space to express themselves creatively, connect with like-minded individuals, and explore their shared interests in literature, fashion, and aesthetics. “I hope that the words and photos I share online can comfort others the same way I’ve been comforted by many others in this community,” Laura adds.

Beyond fashion and entertainment, Dark academia has influenced lifestyle trends, shaping individuals’ preferences and pursuits. Enthusiasts embrace the subculture’s emphasis on intellectual curiosity, artistic expression, and appreciation for the arts. Dark academia enthusiasts actively engage in activities that reflect their shared interests and values, from literature clubs and poetry readings to themed gatherings and aesthetic home decor. The subculture’s emphasis on introspection and self-discovery has resonated with individuals seeking meaning and depth in their lives, fostering a sense of community and camaraderie among like-minded individuals.

## CRITICISMS

Even though the Dark academia subculture has harboured many positive responses, every coin has two sides, and so does this. There is the romanticisation of Renaissance art and literature and a constant need to bring back the essence, but critics argue that the Dark academia aesthetic lacks representation. The central theme of this subculture focuses on Ancient Rome and Greece and thus fails to represent any other race or colour. The subculture might have heavily tried to convey that Eurocentric literature is superior with no diversity. Women of all ethnicities and sexualities are seldom represented in the Dark academia subculture.

In the context of glorifying historical events and periods, Janet says, “It’s well said that he who does not know his history is doomed to repeat it. And now, I cope with all that by learning from the mistakes of people from the past.”

Talking about balancing between embracing romanticism and the criticism such as elitism faced by this subculture, Laura says, “There is a saying that I’ve heard from vintage fashion enthusiasts: “vintage style, not vintage values,”; and that is how I try to separate the Dark academia visual aesthetic from the period it arises from.” She adds, “One of the most popular quotes in the community is about The Secret History main character’s fatal flaw – ‘a morbid longing for the picturesque at all costs’. It acknowledges that focus on aestheticism can be detrimental, and I think that’s the first lesson anyone interested in Dark academia should learn.”

Some critics also argue that this subculture promotes and glorifies mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and existential angst, which are often portrayed in the struggles of its characters. Phrases like “drinking your sorrow away” and “sticky sweet drops of vodka” prove that they idealise and promote the drinking problem as well as admit that mental health should be ignored.

Laura poses a different perspective; she believes, “The approach to balancing romanticism with criticisms is to widen each element of Dark academia and focus on the activity rather than the subject.” She continues, “There is a potential for Dark academia culture to improve if we used those lifestyle choices (reading, research, writing) to criticise the aspects that are elitist, racist, sexist, etc. Let’s romanticise being critical!”

Critics have also argued that Dark academia encourages escapism rather than engagement with real-world issues. By immersing oneself in a nostalgic, romanticised past, individuals may avoid confronting contemporary social, political, and environmental challenges, potentially fostering apathy or disengagement.

## CONCLUSION

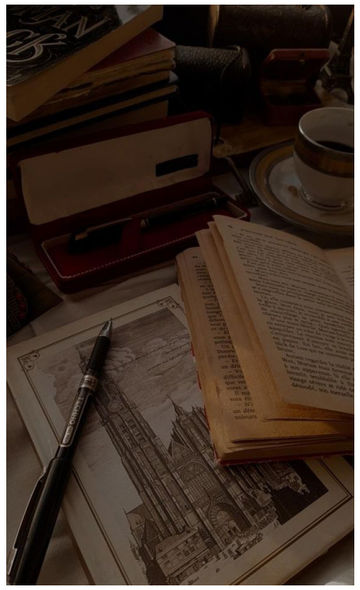
But there is no doubt that Dark academia continues to captivate and inspire individuals worldwide with its blend of literary romance, intellectual charisma, and nostalgic charm. While it has faced criticism for its exclusivity, romanticisation, and lack of diversity, its influence on popular culture remains undeniable.

From literature to fashion to online communities, Dark academia has left an indelible mark, inviting us to explore the depths of knowledge, the complexities of human existence, and the beauty of artistic expression. As with any cultural phenomenon, it is essential to engage critically, fostering inclusivity, empathy, and authenticity as we navigate the intricate corridors of our collective imagination.

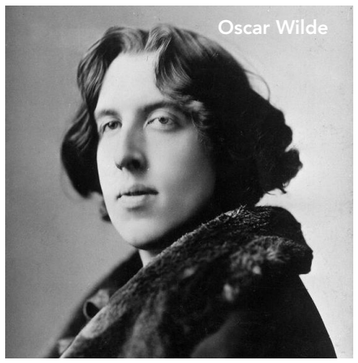


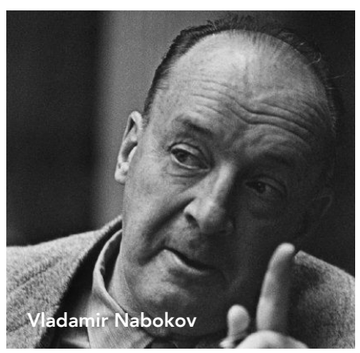



**So, whether you’re lost in the pages of a classic novel, donning a tweed blazer, or pondering life’s existential questions, remember that Dark academia offers not just an aesthetic but a journey—a journey through the shadows of the past into the illuminated realms of our shared humanity.**

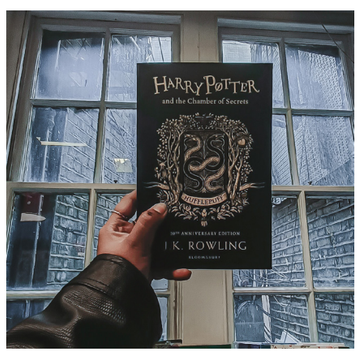



Donna Tartt


Oscar Wilde


Vladamir Nabokov


Leigh Burdugo



# harajuku 0.5

**Named after the Japanese neighbourhood that formed its epicentre, Harajuku has now entered its 0.5 era. The subculture renders a basic guideline for 23-year-old Mae's lifestyle as she incorporates its subgenres into her visual identity**

Words and photographs by
**MALAVIKA PRADEEP**

When Japanese street style magazine FRUiTS shuttered its operations in 2017, founder Shoichi Aoki cited a lack of 'cool kids' to photograph for its monthly issues. First published in 1997, FRUiTS is largely credited with documenting the rise of Harajuku fashion – Tokyo's most experimental youth culture defined by substyles including Kawaii, Lolita and Decora.

At the time, several factors marked the beginning of the end for Harajuku street fashion and the cult Japanese magazine. Traffic was allowed into the pedestrianised neighbourhood that formed the epicentre of the Harajuku scene, while artists like Gwen Stefani and Avril Lavigne pushed the style into mainstream pop culture. Harajuku ceased to be a physical gathering space for enthusiasts and imploded in light of its global popularity.

In mass media, these shifts implied the demise of the entire subculture. They believed the future was already online and fast fashion would only get faster, robbing the communal, creative buzz that is core to the development of a traditional subculture. The punchline? 'Harajuku is dead. Long live UNIQLO!'

These claims seem premonitory in an age where print magazines are termed 'old media' while new media platforms are saturated with Shein hauls alongside brain-rotting amounts of 'cores'. But subcultures thrive in camaraderie fronted by a common social message, unlike trends and aesthetics.

In the 1900s, Harajuku fashion was rooted in defiance against Japan's traditionally conformist society and privacy laws. Today, the kitschy subculture has birthed a global 'upperground', a term coined by sociologist Yuniya Kawamura to describe a visual culture that falls between the underground and the mainstream. The age of Harajuku 0.5 is more personal than ever before. It embraces the chronically online preferences of enthusiasts while anchoring their unique expression among a sea of fleeting digital identities.

23-year-old Mae's initiation into Harajuku fashion was back in 2018, following her interest in Japanese rock music. "I was trying to find myself when I left college and was going to art school," she recalls. "I was really into J-rock, then I found J-fashion and ultimately the styles I related to."

Harajuku street fashion now renders a basic guideline for Mae's lifestyle as she incorporates its various subgenres into her personal style. "Overall Harajuku street style is my thing, but I mostly like elements of Fairy Kei and Decora," she says, adding that she often gravitates towards FRUiTS and other 2000s Japanese magazines for inspiration. Chinese designer Leaf Xia and Japanese clothing brand Baby, The Stars Shine Bright are also on her list of muses.

"Sometimes people feel like they should align themselves with one style, which is cool if you want to go for it, but there are so many things I love. Apart from J-fashion, I'm also into eclectic British fashion and adore designers like Zandra Rhodes and Elizabeth Whibley," the London-based enthusiast says.

British fashion has long influenced visual culture in Japan. While brands like Vivian Westwood and Christopher Nemeth are widely credited for the rise of Harajuku, its substyles continue to be inspired by Victorian England and cyberpunk – which blossomed in Camden in the early 2000s.



Harajuku pulls from several sources, including British punk, to create an unexpected and unique aesthetic







Mae has previously used bioplastics to make jewellery and other accessories. Here she is in Covent Garden, London

A chunk of London and Harajuku streetwear currently feed into each other. Mae shares the instance of a British punk-themed event which saw J-fashion enthusiasts influenced by the old subculture in attendance. "It's funny because the J-fashion people who are inspired by punk are already part of a subculture that is inspired by British fashion," Mae says. Assuming an almost evolutionary yet symbiotic relationship, she hopes to see more of such crossovers.

Mae was already making her own clothes when the core-ification of styles resulted in a wave of identities over the pandemic. "J-fashion blew up on TikTok and it was exciting to see," she says. Mae's digital diet at the time included Instagram and *Animal Crossing*. "TikTok made fashion more accessible to people and I would say the pandemic was when I truly found my style."

On the flip side, Mae believes that the platform resulted in the generalisation of subcultures. In Harajuku's case, Kawaii, Lolita and Decora were all once mushed into the term 'cutecore'. Mae also agrees that viral videos often pushed a subculture narrative far from reality. "You would think, 'This person is so cool. I need to have all the stuff they have and do all the things they do,' but when you go into the real world, there are not that many people dressed up. It's a really small community offline."

Although a sizeable number of gatherings are hosted in London, Mae admits that she rarely gets to meet new faces during the events. "Once you're in the community, you're *in*. But it's hard to get in. It's also difficult to know about these events unless you're following everyone within the community," she says, adding that she only got involved in the London Harajuku scene in 2023.

**"There is a difficult balance between being a 'closed' community and welcoming new members"**

Mae further explains how her friends from the scene have influenced her consumption patterns. "I was into the music before the fashion, but I never watched anime until my friends put me on it," she says. "Everyone is now watching and listening to the same things."

A lot of these communal activities and challenges echo old subculture values. But Harajuku 0.5 is not a resurgence since the fashion never expired in the first place. Instead, we are witnessing a permanent revision, which is still in its infancy. Sure, the movement would not exhibit the same level of enthusiasm, but young people are bravely unorthodox again and have the opportunity to bond with other adherents offline. An all-consuming lifestyle also backs members – although its demands are met on their own terms.

Harajuku 0.5 further emphasises sustainability when dealing with maximalist substyles like Decora. "A lot of items are imported from Japan, so it can be expensive to get into the fashion," Mae says. She started her Harajuku journey by buying pre-loved pieces from Vinted and altering kid's clothing. "There is nothing wrong with people buying fast fashion if that is the only option they have access to. But make sure you hold onto those pieces and be conscious about your choices."

The values of traditional subcultures are revised again in view of the record-breaking number of Gen Zers reporting symptoms of mental health concerns, including social anxiety. "I find it so much easier when I'm going out with people who look like me," Mae says. "I started by incorporating pastel colours into my street style and built my identity from there. So, make some friends and start small."

After all, Harajuku 0.5 is here for a long *and* a good time. The cool kid shortage is so 2010s now, Aoki.

# decoding decora

**Lyra was 11 years old when she was introduced to Japanese fashion on YouTube before gravitating to Decora, one of the most popular Harajuku substyles, in her teens. Here, she reflects on her influences, hobbies and the Decora community in London**

Words by **MALAVIKA PRADEEP**
Images by **LYRA**



Lyra gravitated to Decora after rewatching YouTube videos and wanting to try the substyle

**Hi Lyra! Let's start with the basics. How would you define Decora?**
**Lyra:** Decora is a very curated and expressive style in which someone completely decorates themselves in a maximalist way with lots of accessories, keychains, hair clips and stickers. These often reflect their interests and favourite colours while boldly embracing their individuality in a fun and over-the-top way.

**So, when and how did you first gravitate to Decora?**
**L:** I was introduced to J-fashion on YouTube by the likes of Venus Angelic, Haruka Kurebayashi, Kyary Pamyu Pamyu and Princess Peachie when I was 11 to 14 years old. But I lacked the funds, freedom or confidence to try the styles I really admired. I 'officially' gravitated to Decora after revisiting my fascination with it, rewatching YouTube videos from Kurebayashi on Kawaii Pateen and really wanting to try the style.

**Do you think your style changed a lot over the pandemic?**
**L:** During the pandemic, I certainly started to lean towards a more alternative style – which fed back into my interest in Kawaii fashion. At the age of 18, I was finally able to do all the things I'd been dreaming to try and be at a younger age.

**What are some of your chronically online hobbies besides YouTube?**
**L:** I have an online shopping addiction to buying second-hand clothes from Mercari Japan and ordering alternative fashion pieces from Taobao brands. I also have an unhealthy obsession with Pokémon, Rilakkuma and cute animals, for which I'll spend hours on TikTok and the web researching and fuelling my interests. I also adored playing dress-up games online even before I wore the style I do now to project my ideal image and outfits in the activity. I can't do as much today because Flash can no longer run most of these games.

**Is there a Harajuku substyle besides Decora that you're currently fascinated with?**
**L:** I like wearing Tenshi Kaiwai and Lolita on the days I feel like I want a change while still embracing my love for alternative Japanese fashion. Alongside Decora, I also like limiting an outfit to one colour, theme or character, as in Oshi Decora.

**Are there any brands that inspire you or that you would recommend to people interested in Decora?**
**L:** A lot of the brands I wear and love are old Japanese kid's labels like Grand Ground, Love Revolution, Mezzo Piano, Angel Blue, Daisy Lovers, Cherichu and Earth Magic. I love the cuteness and fun designs of these brands, although they are relatively inaccessible due to their sizing and availability on the second-hand market. Candy Trap is also an amazing small business that caters to Decora wearers by Decora wearers, but I've yet to own anything from the brand myself. A size-inclusive and cute Decora brand I really love is ACDC RAG. 6%DOKIDOKI is also perfect if you're looking for chaotically cute Decora accessories.

**What are some of your tips for layering clothes and accessories?**
**L:** Having a lot of different-length necklaces is great for layering and I love hanging keychains on my zips and belt loops to add as much as possible to the outfit. Hats and cute bags are probably some of my favourite additions as they can easily create and transform shape and cohesion.

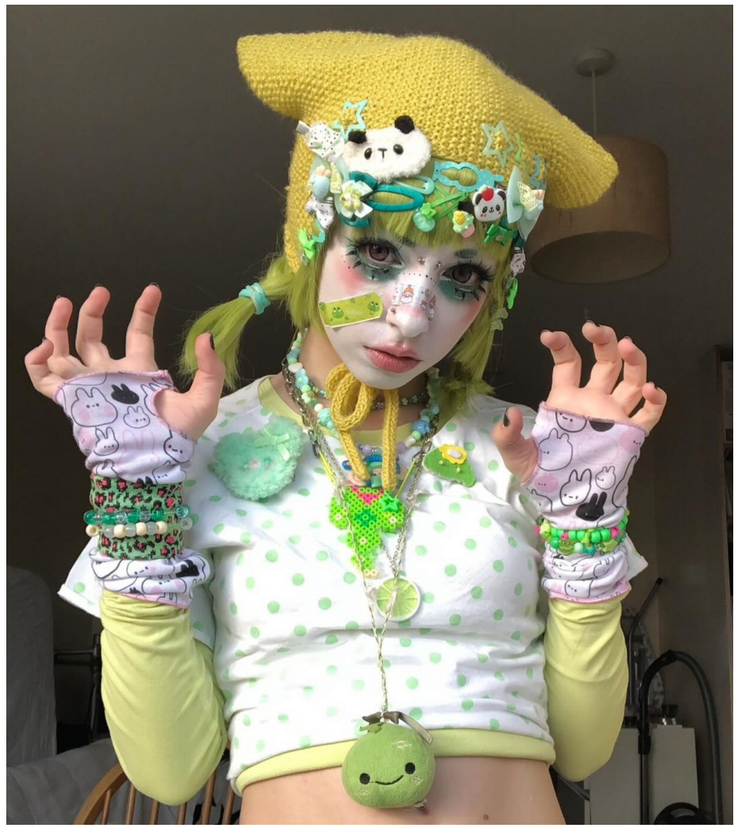


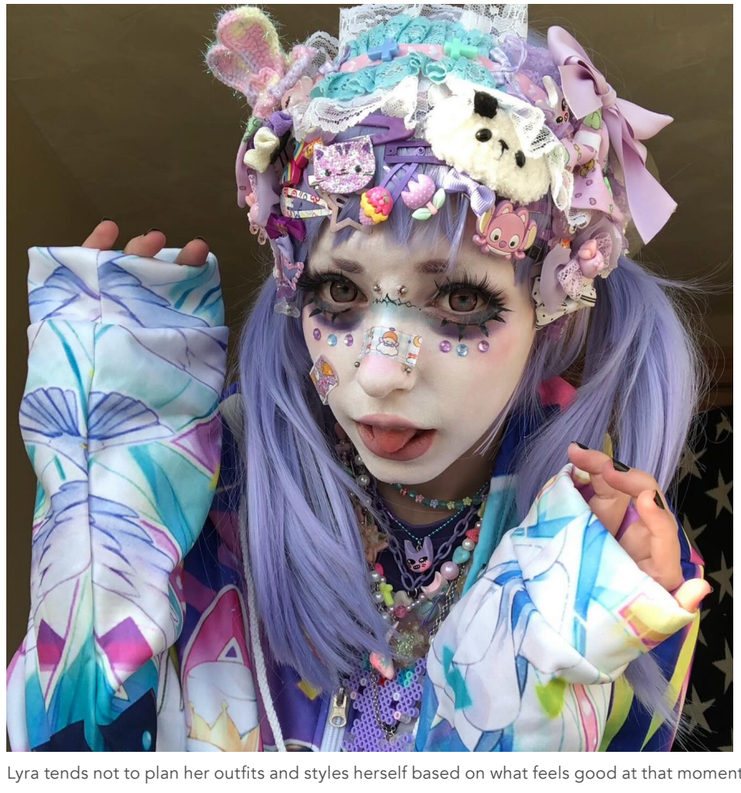


**Is there a particular order that you keep in mind while styling your clothes and accessories, or do you layer them intuitively?**
**L:** I tend not to plan my outfits and they're put together based on what feels good at the given moment. The accessories I choose to layer always depend on the colour scheme or certain repeating characters in the coordinate – or if there's something I got recently and just can't wait to wear. I'm also usually accessorising from the neck down before makeup, after which I arrange all the hair clips and headwear to complete the look.

**We know Decora visually hinges on a lot of accessories and is a very maximalist subculture. But as with all maximalist fashion, there is a question about sustainability. How do you think Decora enthusiasts can be more environmentally conscious while staying true to the nature of the subculture?**
**L:** It's true that Decora is a very maximalist lifestyle and emphasises the over-consumption of manufactured goods – which can be perceived as problematic. However, I can definitely see a shift towards more conscious







Lyra tends not to plan her outfits and styles herself based on what feels good at that moment

collecting, such as buying second-hand items and swapping existing pieces with other Decora wearers. When a lot of small businesses within the community make pieces themselves, it also creates slower fashion consumption as opposed to funding corporate factories and brands that make hundreds of products each day.

**Since we're talking about the community, how would you describe the Decora scene in London?**
**L:** I've found gatherings and communities dedicated to Decora quite rare in London compared to Japan, France, and the USA. There definitely are quite a few of us, but I think we're always mixed in with other J-fashion groups – as opposed to Lolita meets, for example. I don't find this to be a particularly bad thing, but it might be nice for the resurgence of Decora as a community, as I've seen in other places.

**Are there a lot of these gatherings, even if they're at Comic Cons or other anime conventions?**
**L:** I've been to a fair share of meets and gatherings for J-fashion in London, even Brighton, and at conventions such as MCM Comic Con, but none that are specific to Decora. Whereas in Paris, I was lucky enough to attend an Oshi Decora-themed meet where everyone made an effort to wear Decora or its variations like Deco-Lolita.

**Lastly, what's your advice to someone who is interested in Decora but hesitant to experiment with their style in public?**
**L:** It's honestly hard to wear such an elaborate fashion in public because you might enjoy donning the style but not the attention that comes with it. I'm definitely one of those people and the advice I can give is to find friends who also wear the fashion or are okay accompanying you when you step out, as it reduces anxiety. When you start dressing in a new style, you also have to take small steps during the transition to truly embrace your new look. So, slowly start wearing more of what you like and get used to dressing in Decora and others seeing you in Decora. Nine out of ten people will acknowledge you, but they'll be too busy with their daily tasks to bother too much to 'judge' you. And even if they do, know that you're out there inspiring others fascinated by the style. Anyone giving negative attention can always be scary, but nobody should treat you that way – regardless of what you wear.

# The Art of Coquette

Words by **YASMIN AHMED**



Photo credit: @flowerful_vinatge

Coquette has captured our cultural imagination for decades, from Hollywood's bombshells of the golden age to today's social media influencers.

The coquette attracts attention with her seductive blend of flair and pink aesthetics, carefully balancing flirting with the elusiveness of bows. The name "coquette" first appeared in 17th-century French literature. The charm and allure of the coquette come from her ability to project an air of innocence while still captivating.Hollywood starlets of the 1940s and 1950s. Actresses such as Brigitte Bardot, Jayne Mansfield, and Marilyn Monroe rose to fame by playing the part of the stereotypical blonde bombshell, a gorgeous, gamine woman who could make a statement with a pout and a wink.

A combination of self-aware sensuality and pretentiousness was epitomised by their hourglass bodies, dishevwelled platinum locks, ruby red lips, and clinging sweaters and wiggle dresses.

With social media enabling large-scale personal branding, the coquette look has come back, although with a decidedly contemporary twist. A new wave of coquettes has emerged; unlike big-screen stars, they market their mystique via bow-wearing TikTok trends and Instagram photos.The coquette persona of today is embodied in aesthetics, but it is most evident in the fashion industry. The coquettish aesthetics renaissance is characterised by pink high-end underwear, silky slip dresses, sheer fabrics, ribbons, bows, and dramatic puffed sleeves.







Photo credit: Break Out Jewellery

Complete with dishevelled curls, kitten heels, and a flawlessly smeared eye, the ensemble exudes a sensuous, provocative femininity with a pink hue.

We reached out to 'Break Out Jewellery's Charlotte Peet who told us a little more about the coquette aesthetic and how she managed to incorporate it into her jewellery and accessories company.

**When did you start to realise the rising trend of the coquette aesthetic?**
Through social media, I started seeing bows incorporated in all sorts of ways.

**Why did you want to incorporate this in your jewellery/ accessories?**
I always want to make sure we're offering what our customers are looking for, and this trend fits perfectly in with our whole feminine aesthetic, so it was a must.

**What's your favourite thing surrounding coquette?**
Just the hyper femininity associated with bows, and how you can be 3 years old or 30 years old with a bow in your hair.

**Name one of your new coquette themed jewellery or accessories?**
We have some tiny little huggie hoop earrings with bows on which are super cute and quite understated for the customer who wants some subtlety

**Does Coquette fit your branding?**
I think it does, we have a very pink and cream feminine aesthetic in store, and the bows sit in perfectly with it.

**How did you go about designing your new coquette themed jewellery & accessories?**
I always take inspiration from customers and also following trends on social media, the first and easiest way to bring coquette in store was buying ribbons and tying them onto some of existing scrunchies for an easy and fun update. The jewellery itself took a little longer to get sampled and made.

**Does Coquette fit your branding?**
I think it does, we have a very pink and cream feminine aesthetic in store, and the bows sit in perfectly with it.

The timeless appeal of coquette appears destined to stay deeply embedded within our collective psyche as an enduring feminine mystique, whether through companies, photoshoots, social media feeds, or runway presentations. Because even when fashion trends and social mores change, the allure of the coquette and her captivating aura never goes away, constantly luring us to aim for the impossible.

# K-Culture

Words by **YASMIN AHMED**

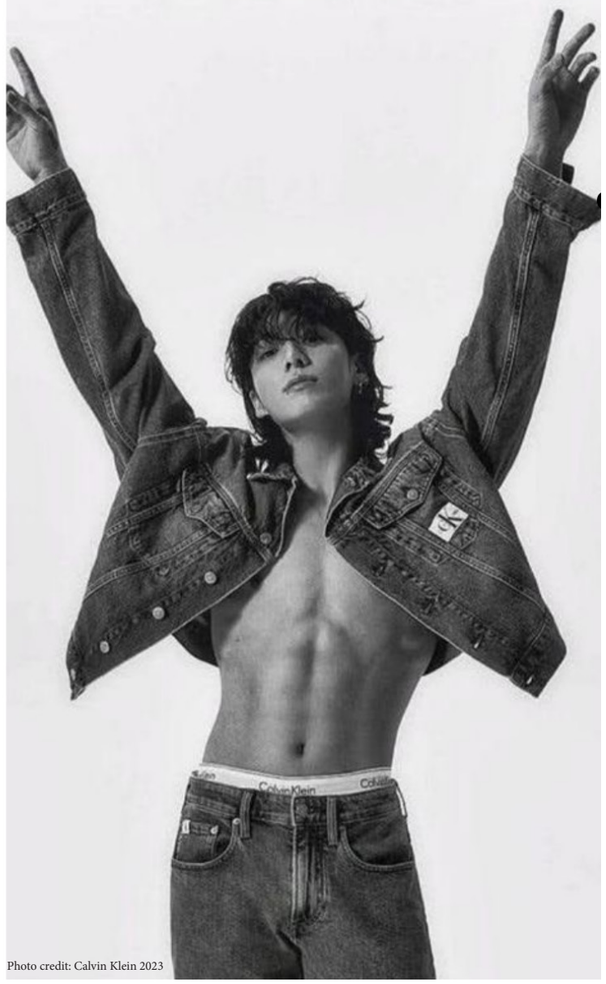



Photo credit: Calvin Klein 2023

You've probably heard the catchy tunes and striking images of Korean pop culture if you've recently turned on the radio or browsed through social media. The "Korean Wave" is sweeping the world, from the sophisticated choreography and popping tunes of K-pop groups like BTS and BLACKPINK to the avant-garde glitter of Korean beauty bloggers. Once a closely-kept secret among young people in the Asian diaspora, K-drama has become a global sensation, with fans of all ages and backgrounds obsessively following the newest developments in the narrative, advancements in sheet masks, and dance moves from their K-pop idols.

Hallyu, the Korean name for the explosion of popular Korean entertainment, is leading this cultural wave. With its synth-heavy bops and sci-fi-themed music videos, groups like the seven-piece boy band from Seoul, BTS, have amassed billions of streams and views and sold-out stadiums all over the world. However, the music isn't the only factor. With their captivating melodramas and love storylines, Korean television dramas have also attracted a sizable international readership, drawing viewers from Seoul to Surrey. Who can resist watching "Crash Landing on You" for hours on end and indulging in its heart-wrenching romantic tension between strong heroines and wealthy conglomerate heirs?

The aspirational lifestyle and cutting-edge beauty trends promoted by Korean media are the main sources of fuel for this preoccupation. A worldwide skincare and cosmetics obsession has been ignited by the radiant "glass skin," striking eye looks, and flawlessly undone Korean makeup aesthetic.




Photo credit: Yasmin Ahmed

Entrepreneurs have made millions by developing K-beauty product lines. The strong allure of Korean pop singers, whose tailored music video appearances and high-end ensembles set the standard for fashion objectives, is what propels many of these fads. Supporters shell out enormous sums of money merely to try to imitate the beauty and fashion choices made by their idols.

All of it is supported by Korea's exceptional artistic output in the fields of fine arts, gaming, cinema, and even street fashion, which is enhanced by the nation's celebrity status. Some of the most well-known films of the past few decades, including Parasite and Oldboy, have come from Korean cinema, while modern painters such as Do Ho Suh have had their works shown in international museums. Thus, whether you're a beauty enthusiast trying out the newest cushion compacts and glass skin tips, a movie buff enjoying the newest arthouse Korean film, or a concert-going K-pop fan, the world has become more intriguing and colourful due to Korean culture's boundary-pushing influence.

We wonder what else K-culture woll be trendsetting from the infamous countrys supremacy?



Photo credit: Elle Korea

Words by **YASMIN AHMED**

# Y2K

Y2K
Y2K

At the heart of Y2K fashion lies a fearless embrace of vibrant colours, and unconventional silhouettes. Neon hues, holographic fabrics, and shimmering metallics pay homage to the techno-futuristic dreams of the era, while crop tops, low-rise jeans, and platform shoes echo the era's rebellious spirit.




Photos credit: Justin Pulley

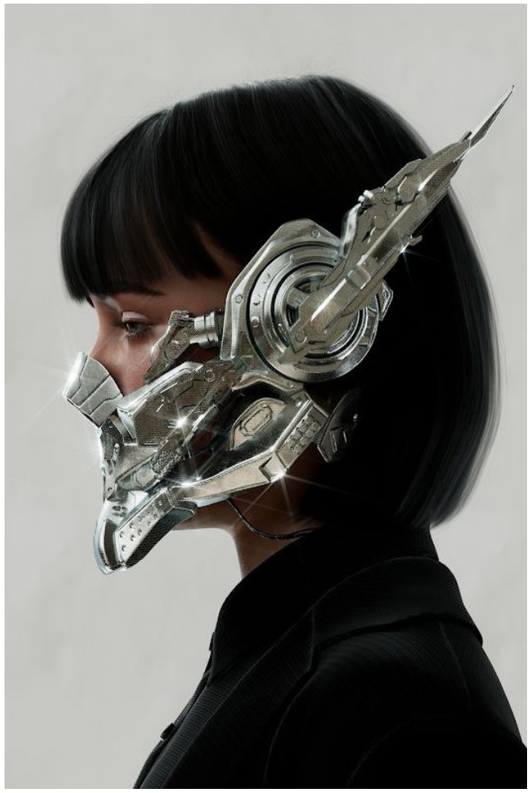
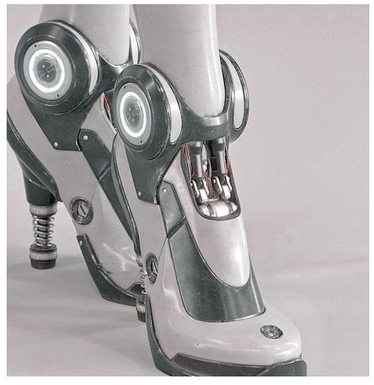


Photo credit: Yugal Odhrani

Cyber core fashion embraces deconstruction with asymmetric cuts, mesh panels, and raw edges. Accessories like bionic visours, glitch prints, and LED lights add a rebellious tech-wear edge. In beauty, cyber core means blunt bobs with coloured money pieces, black lipstick, and kaleidoscopic eye looks. This daring aesthetic isn't for the faint of heart - it's an electrifying celebration of what's next.

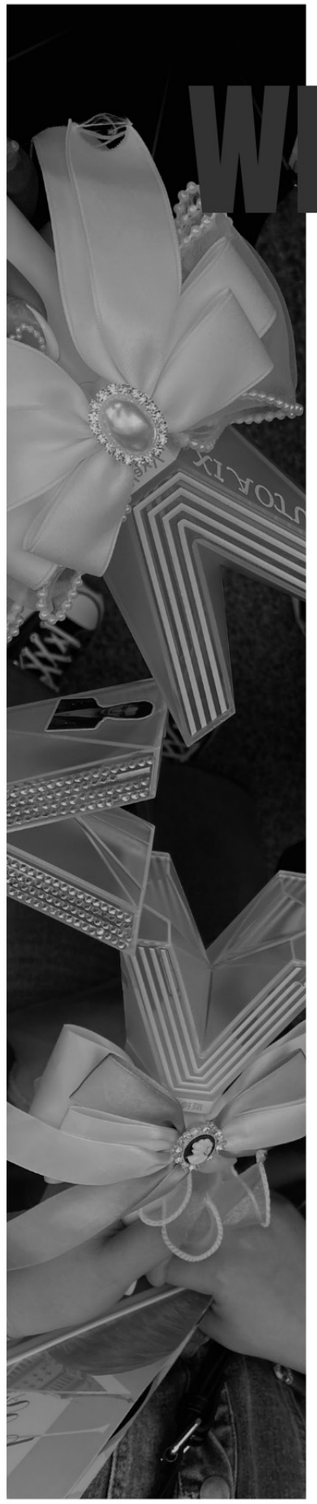
Cyber core is the bold new aesthetic dominating youth culture. A fearless fusion of cyber punk's grit is integrated through gleaming neon accents and sleek, metallic forms with exposed wiring, chains, and metal accents. The look screams future retro - nostalgic for technology not yet invented. A fundamental theme of the cyber core aesthetic is the notion of technologically augmenting human capabilities.





# CYBER-CORE

Words by **YASMIN AHMED**



Words by **YASMIN AHMED**

# WHAT FANDOM ARE YOU IN?

**It's quite okay to be completely enamoured with the subject of your fandom these days. Celebrating your fandom has become its own phenomena, whether it's through cosplay, fan fiction writing, merchandise collecting, or sleeping out weeks in advance of a film debut.**

## *WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?*

Superfans, devoted followers who go above and beyond a passing interest in a TV show, movie franchise, celebrity, band, or book series, are the centre of fan culture. The quintessential superfan? going above and beyond to demonstrate their admiration with fervent passion projects, unwavering loyalty, and encyclopaedic knowledge.

Their interests and hobbies, which range from creating elaborate costumes to penning unapproved fiction that reimagines established plotlines, are what really bring the superfan community together. For excellent instances, look no farther than the Harry Potter fandom. Potter superfans not only organise fiction archives and yearly events!

## *FAN FRENZY!*

They are unparalleled in their creative abilities, which they use to enhance the source material they like. A vast community of fan makers utilise YouTube to celebrate their idols by creating music videos, parodies, recaps, and other content. Ask any K-pop fan about the fan-edited videos they've laboriously assembled over hours to highlight their prejudices. For devoted superfans, it's all in a day's work.

Simultaneously, with the ease of social media virality, the up-side of fandom has also surfaced. Polluting fan behaviour has become a concerning occurrence, ranging from violent ship fights amongst fandoms over "who's better" to harassing actors over contentious narrative decisions. However, the majority of superfans find that being a part of a fanbase fosters their sense of identity, creativity, and camaraderie within the beloved media franchise. Extreme? Yes. Excessive? Indeed. Fandom has so evolved into a way of life for those who are ardent collectors, cosplayers, fan painters, and fiction authors.




Photos credit: Yasmin Ahmed

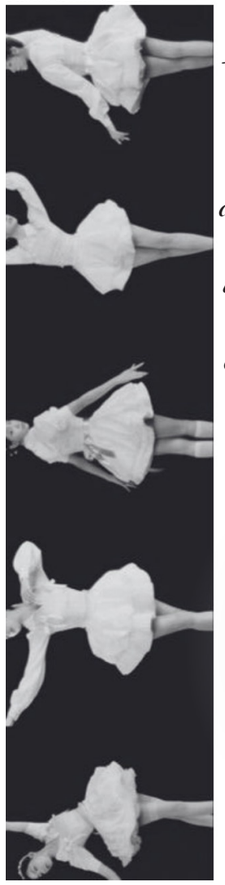


# LOLITA: The Subculture Of Sweet Rebellion



Words by **YASMIN AHMED**

Photos credit: SM Ent



*Introducing the world of Lolita fashion, a subculture that originated in Japan and has since travelled over the world, captivating admirers with its sumptuous interpretation of ultra-feminine style. Fundamentally, Lolita subverts archaic conceptions of femininity by lavishly reinventing herself in a girlish manner.*



They appear to have been taken directly from a Victorian novel or an 18th-century baroque painting at first glance. Young ladies with gorgeous parasols protecting their porcelain faces from the sun, petticoated skirts overflowing onto the ground, and poufy bell-shaped costumes embellished with lace and ribbons. Upon closer inspection, the elaborate accessories—frilly headdresses, extravagant jewellery, and exquisite gloves—that finish the outlandish ensembles become apparent.

In fact, the appearance is much more than just donning a frilly frock for true Lolita's. Its purpose is to immerse wearers in a world of imagination and fiction, allowing them to indulge in their whimsical side while resisting the need to be prim and reserved as ladies. It's a brazen refusal to give up girlhood by elevating it to a myth with opulent attire and grandiose speeches.

Therefore, despite the delicate and fantastical appearance of the lacy, crinoline-clad ensembles of Lolita, the subcultural phenomenon has demonstrated a remarkable level of creative endurance. In the current era of selectively curating social media exhibitionism, Lolita's ostentatious portrayals of sentimental, idealised girlhood have evolved into the pinnacle of overdone self-promotion.

# The dark undertones of cottagecore aesthetic

## A deep dive into one of the top aesthetics of the 2020s



Words by **MATIN ANIMASHAUN**
Photographs from **PEXELS**

We've all seen it. It's all over the internet. The aesthetics are characterised by old farmhouses, vast, luscious fields, and the slim, blonde women in beautiful white dresses. The idea is to escape to a time that was simpler and more in tune with nature— cottagecore.



Cottagecore is a digital subculture that centres on rural escapism. It is an aesthetic shared via social media posts on platforms like Tumblr and TikTok. However, beneath all those pretty cottages and cotton dresses are there racist undertones that are not easily recognisable?

How could this harmless and beautiful aesthetic be racist? Well, to answer that, we have to look at the origins of cottagecore. Rural escapism has been a common feature of human history, from the Arcadians of ancient Greece to the emergence of naturalism of 18th Century France. Although its context varies from era to era, the central theme remains— a desire to live a simpler life.

This latest version of rural escapism, began in the late 2010s on Tumblr. It then rose to prominence in 2020 during the pandemic on apps like TikTok and Instagram. Its aesthetics, baked in nostalgia, attracted many people, especially women, who wanted to forget the technological chaos of the 21st Century. Social media apps were soon flooded with images of homes covered in plant life and women in prairie dresses.

However, the real issue is that cottagecore encapsulates a romantic view of rural life. It refuses to acknowledge the realities of rural living, especially in the North American context. In addition to trivialising the efforts of farmers, it celebrates the aesthetics of colonialism and slavery. Minorities mainly cultivated the American landscape, yet many communities of colour were forced to abandon the land they had lived and worked on due to a history of violence and displacement. The two "classic" American pastimes of farming and playing in the outdoors are a reality that cottagecore fails to acknowledge.

There is also the issue of reclaiming land that was never truly yours. Participants in cottagecore often forget that the land they wish to escape to was never theirs to begin with. It was stolen from indigenous people like the Native Americans of North America and the Aboriginals of Australia. The genocide of these people is largely ignored by enthusiasts. Cottagecore's Eurocentrism and overwhelming whiteness have also dissuaded POC from participating in the aesthetic. It is rather difficult for those whose past cottagecore tends to trivialise to indulge in it. And for those who can, they are often rejected because they are seen as not belonging to the community. Varis Zima, a frequent participant in the aesthetic said "I've noticed that a vast majority of cottagecore-tagged content was very white and Eurocentric in choices of fashion and houses."

Fortunately, despite these shortcomings, there is now a community that strives to achieve inclusivity. Many black and other women of colour have begun to make it their own, having different takes on the aesthetic. It has begun to evolve. It is moving beyond the constraints of Eurocentrism and whiteness and adapting to other cultures. From highlighting Black American traditions of homesteading to celebrating the rich agricultural heritage of Asian and Latin American cultures, the inclusion of these perspectives enriches the aesthetic. Now, we see cottagecore embracing traditional Japanese tea houses amidst bamboo forests or vibrant adobe dwellings bathed in desert sunlight.

For cottagecore to fully morph into a subculture that fully accommodates everyone, its consumers must acknowledge they also have a part to play. They must recognise its limitations and reject its colonialist values. The aesthetic must exists beyond whiteness.

They must accept that people from other cultures and backgrounds have every right to participate. If they fail to do so, the subculture cannot grow to its full desired potential. This evolution requires participants to acknowledge the historical realities of rural living and actively celebrate all of the diverse communities that have helped to shape it.




Lace dresses are one of the common dresses for cottagecore aesthetic



# 8 digital of 2024

Words by **MATIN ANIMASHAUN**

# aesthetics to watch

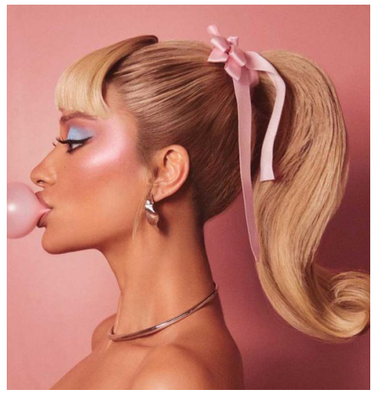
What are the most popular digital aesthetics so far this year? Is it the Victorian inspired dark academia, the girl-boss signifier that is barbiecore, or the eerie liminal spaces?

Wake up babe, a new aesthetic just dropped!

The internet is that gift that keeps on giving. From niche communities to intriguing digital trends. They have different aesthetics and quirks that are unique.

However, digital aesthetics don't just stop at our screens. That's not enough. They manifest in real life, whether in the form of fashion, art or home decoration. In 2024, new aesthetics continue to appear, garnering thousands of participants.

This piece offers a glimpse into 10 digital aesthetics dominating the internet this year:





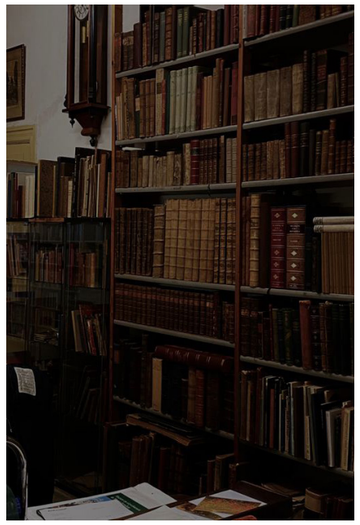
## Barbiecore

The Barbie aesthetic, known as Barbiecore, has a rich history dating back to the late 1950s with the launch of the Mattel fashion doll Barbie. However, the release of the Barbie movie in 2023 has catapulted this aesthetic back into the mainstream.

This aesthetic, characterised by hot pink fitted dresses, skirts, and a playful, feminine vibe, draws inspiration from the Barbie toy line and movies. It embodies a more upper-class lifestyle, complete with multiple cars, a private jet, a huge house, multiple pets, including horses, and a yacht, often coloured pink.

## Y2K aesthetic

People often say fashion is a cycle and old trends always come back. This is exactly what's happening with the Y2K aesthetic.





Left to right: Barbiecore, Y2K, Dark Academia, E-Girl

Y2K stands for the year 2000 and is inspired by the fashion trends of that era. It was originally characterised by fashion, hardware design, music, futuristic technology, and optimism relevant to the time.

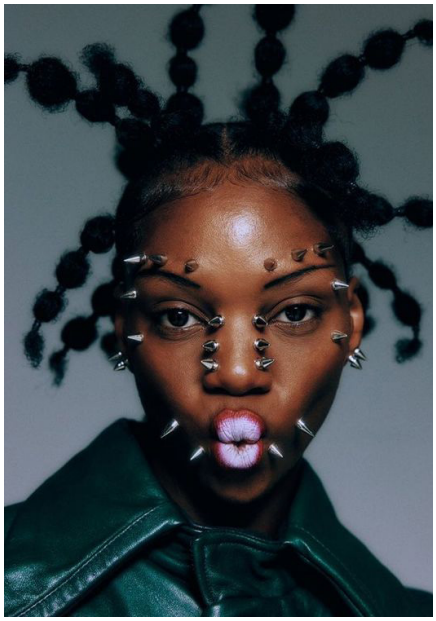
Since the mid-late 2010s, the aesthetic group Y2K has made a resurgence in popular culture and social media. In its latest form, popularised mainly by celebrities like Kanye West, it has incorporated accessories like chunky sneakers, baggy/flashy pants and futuristic sunglasses.

## Dark Academia

Step into a world of dark-coloured

Left to right: Kawaii aesthetic, Afrofuturism, Cottagecore, Liminal Spaces









leather-bound books, crackling fireplaces, and classic literature. Dark Academia is another aesthetic that takes inspiration from past trends, although from a long time ago. Its visuals stem primarily from upper-class European cultures of the 19th century, Gothicism, and American Prep.

It has its roots in Tumblr and has seen a resurgence in 2024. Members find solace in the aesthetics of classic literature and the pursuit of knowledge. Online communities dedicated to Dark Academia share reading lists, discuss historical figures, and engage in creative writing exercises.

This subculture reflects a desire for intellectual depth and a rejection of superficiality in an increasingly digital world.

## Kawaii aesthetic

Due to anime's popularity, Japanese culture inspires many digital aesthetics. We can see this in the Kawaii aesthetic. Kawaii is a Japanese word that refers to anything cute. It mostly refers to pretty childlike things that elicit an overwhelming reaction.

The Kawaii aesthetic incorporates a wide range of colours. However, it is most commonly associated with pastels, with white as neutral and pink as the most popular colour. Kawaii fashion typically involves pastel-coloured jackets, stockings, and sweaters with big buttons. It also uses accessories like bunny ears and ribbons.

## Afrofuturism

Rooted in a celebration of African diaspora cultures and a reimagining of the future, Afrofuturism continues to be a force in the digital art world. This aesthetic merges traditional African patterns and motifs with futuristic technology, creating a visually stunning and empowering narrative.

Imagine spaceships adorned with intricate beadwork patterns or portraits of astronauts with vibrant hairstyles. Afrofuturism challenges traditional narratives of the future, claiming a space for Black stories and perspectives in the technological landscape.

## E-girl aesthetic

In the latter part of the 2010s, the E-Girl look surfaced on platforms like Twitch and TikTok, quickly establishing a signature look for the digital era. It combines aspects of anime, present street style, and grunge from the 1990s. E-Girls are renowned for their striking hairstyles, daring makeup looks, and ferocious attitude that matches their impeccable sense of style.

It's a hybrid of DIY punk attitude and digital culture. E-Girl makeup frequently consists of a bright lip, graphic eyeliner, and a lot of blush applied to the cheekbones and nose. Essential pieces for their attire are platform shoes, stacked necklaces, and chains.

## Cottagecore

Cottagecore encapsulates a romanticised view of rural life. It is an aesthetic which evokes the warmth, cosiness, and simplicity of rural living. This aesthetic, which began to take shape in the 2010s as a calm response to the craziness of the modern world, was inspired by a desire for a tranquil getaway from the everyday grind.

This style is the basis for the popular Netflix series Anne with an E. It's all about the charm of freshly baked products, handcrafted items, and peaceful time spent in nature. The love of the rustic and handmade is at the centre of cottagecore fashion. Imagine serene scenery, animals, and clothing with a vintage vibe that is typically handmade and captures the timeless elegance of bygone times.

## Liminal spaces

This aesthetic uses images of lifeless transitional spaces, such as early-morning malls, deserted parking lots, or summertime school hallways. The allure of transitional areas is frequently attributed to their motionless and rather unnerving elements, as well as the enduring sense of familiarity they arouse. The aesthetic is inspired by late 20th and early 21st centuries, characterised by ceiling tiles, linoleum flooring, and cool-toned fluorescent lighting that evokes feelings of coldness and detachment.