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Michelle Williams

# Swan Songs

WE MAY FOLLOW CELEBRITIES FOR STYLE CUES, BUT WHICH ARE TRULY STYLISH? HERE, IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER, IS MY TOP TEN

BY ELYSE RANART, FASHION & STYLE DIRECTOR

**We remember the story** of the duckling who grows up to be a swan. We read it – or had it read to us – when we were children.

But what makes the Hans Christian Anderson fairy tale so poignant today – so lasting into adulthood – is its story of transformation. It's as much a message that applies to personal style – and fashion – as fairy tale.

Many of the fashion icons and muses of yesterday were considered odd, different and quirky growing up – and the same is true today. But ducklings, we remember, can become swans: The ones to watch, the ones to admire and to emulate.

Few things are more seductive than fashion because of its capacity to transform. Fashion offers us an opportunity to reinvent ourselves each time we dress; and clothing can be our most creative form of self-expression. In our media-mad culture, more women than ever look to celebrities for this mode of "self-expression," while most so-called fashion icons don't even have their own sense of style.

I'm bewildered to see so many women following celebrities for trend cues when so many of the stars have their style manufactured for them. Celebrity stylists squeeze them into gowns for red-carpet events, whispering that this or that designer is "the one to wear." So what they end up in has very little to do with their own personal fashion POV, if they even have one.

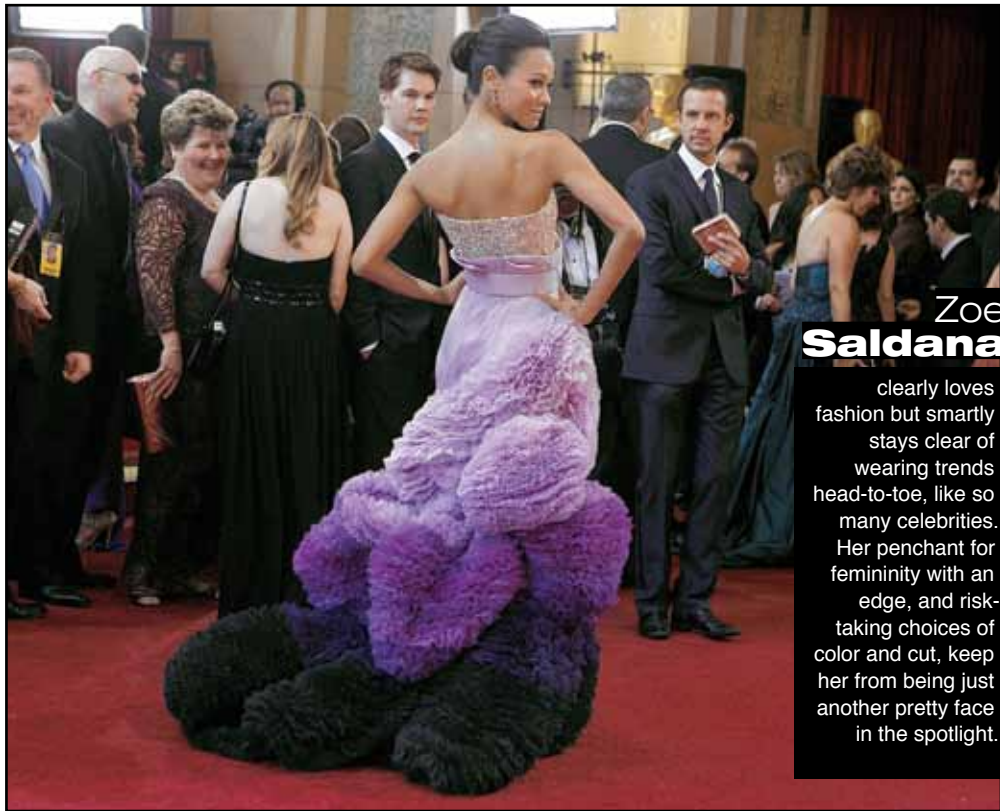
Who wouldn't look "the part" in a borrowed \$10,000 gown? But fashion icon? Not even close.

Off the carpet, the stars are often seen strolling around with the requisite bottle of water in hand, donning the standard celebrity



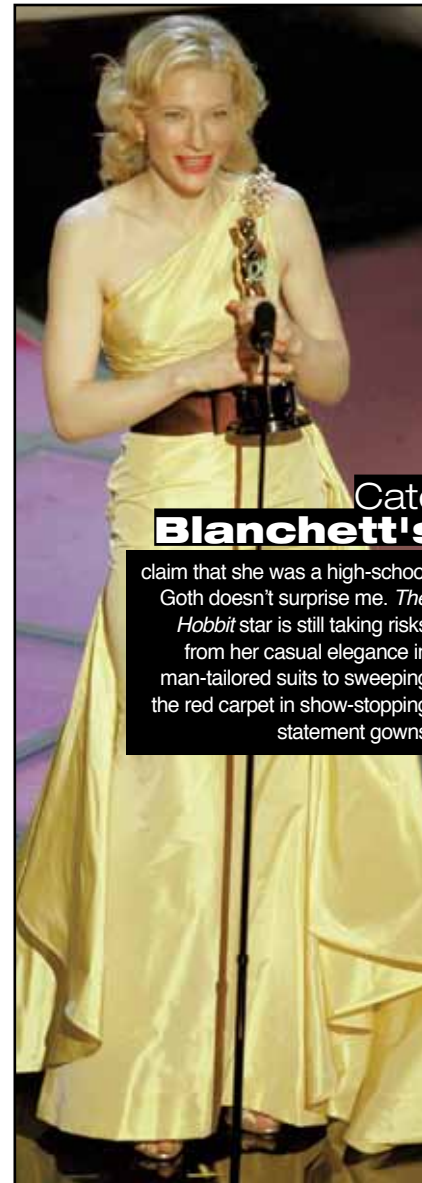
**Diane Kruger**

A former model turned actress, Diane Kruger comes from the world of fashion, and her perspective is spot on. She brings retro glamour to the red carpet, but she keeps it from turning cliché with her modern edge.



**Zoe Saldana**

clearly loves fashion but smartly stays clear of wearing trends head-to-toe, like so many celebrities. Her penchant for femininity with an edge, and risk-taking choices of color and cut, keep her from being just another pretty face in the spotlight.



**Cate Blanchett's**

claim that she was a high-school Goth doesn't surprise me. *The Hobbit* star is still taking risks, from her casual elegance in man-tailored suits to sweeping the red carpet in show-stopping statement gowns.



**Tilda Swinton**

is simply sublime in every choice she makes. Her avant-garde style is minimal, modern, dramatic and daring. Equally elegant in sportswear or eveningwear, she claims, "I follow my nose."



**Helena Bonham Carter**

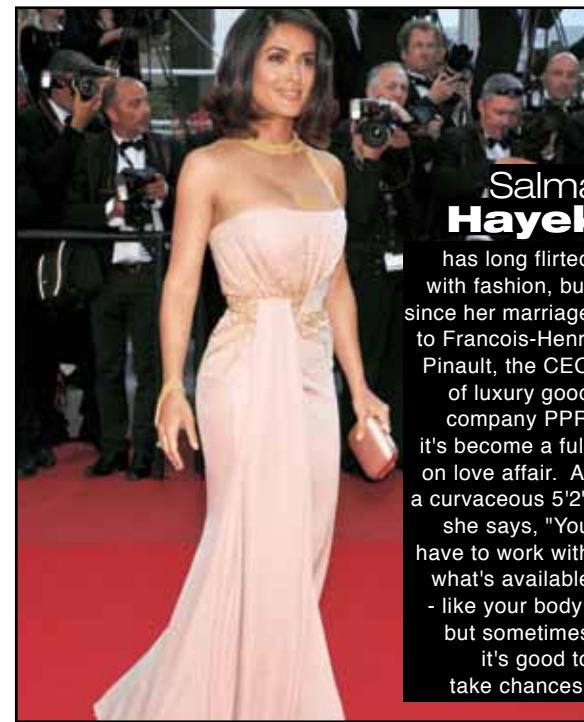
Truly a free spirit, Helena Bonham Carter says she dresses to please herself. Her "how-do-you-like-them-apples" style is fabulously fun, often tongue-in-cheek and always uniquely her own.

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**Michelle Williams**

is the perfect mix of quirk and charm. She has a ladylike look that says modern and an atypical elegance that says nonchalant chic. Her keen sense of pairing apparel with the unexpected accessory is both surprising and stylish.



**Salma Hayek**

has long flirted with fashion, but since her marriage to Francois-Henri Pinault, the CEO of luxury good company PPR, it's become a full-on love affair. At a curvaceous 5'2", she says, "You have to work with what's available - like your body - but sometimes it's good to take chances."



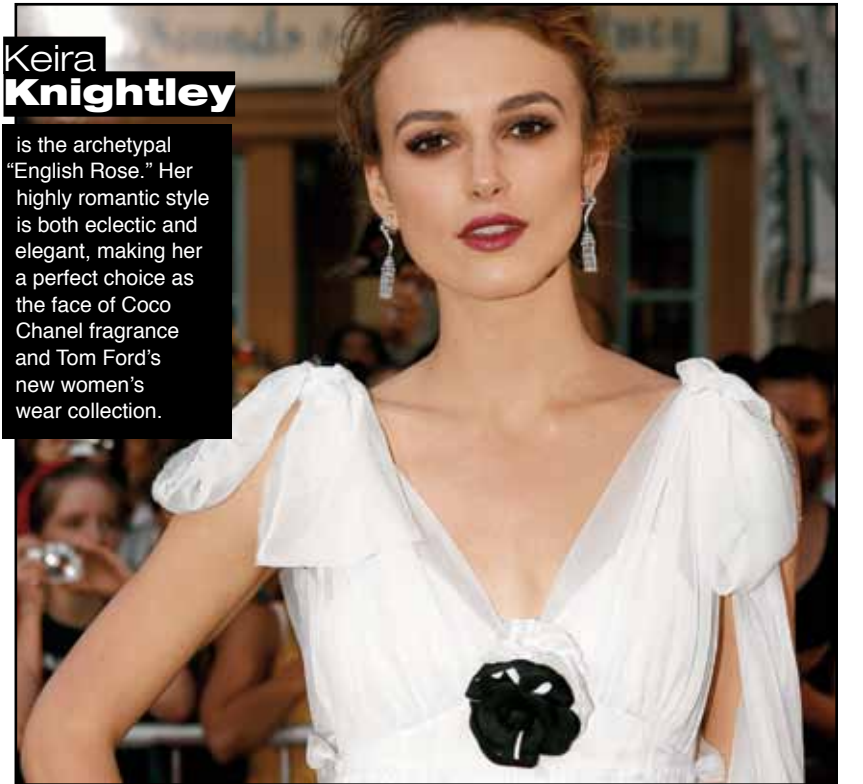
**Carey Mulligan**

Like no other actress at the moment, Carey Mulligan has mastered a modern take on the '60s French New Wave style. Her fresh-faced, gamine glamour shows that she has the pulse on fashion but her spunky style makes it all her own.



**Emma Watson**

makes interesting style choices, from Rodarte to vintage Ossie Clark. She opts not to use a stylist, she says, because "there's nothing interesting about looking perfect." I couldn't agree more.



**Keira Knightley**

is the archetypal "English Rose." Her highly romantic style is both eclectic and elegant, making her a perfect choice as the face of Coco Chanel fragrance and Tom Ford's new women's wear collection.

uniform of designer denim, trendy T-shirt, leather jacket, boots and, of course, the "look-at-me-but-don't-look-at-me" oversized sunglasses. This is not style, personal or otherwise.

So when thinking about celebrity style, it is much easier to reference from the past, including true stars Grace Kelly, Marlene Dietrich, Greta Garbo, the two Hepburns (Audrey and Katharine) - another reason "retro" style remains so relevant today. But that's too easy, and a bit of a cop-out, if you ask me. Their costume designers, nee stylists, dressed many of these women as well. Even the "lifestyle" images of them, "at home" or "on trips abroad," were staged

photo-shoots, for which these stars were primped and primed.

That said, it doesn't mean that there are no fashionable females in today's firmament of stars. They are just harder to spot and less likely to get the credit they deserve for having a steadfast sense of signature style.

So with the start of the fall fashion season, it's time to give credit where it's due to some seriously stylish stars who choose clothing that is refreshing, different, sometimes quirky and often unexpected.

The ones on these pages who know real style can be as transformative as duckling to swan. ●