

North Cambridge native puts her fashion sense online

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Cambridge If you go out on the street today, you better dress your best.

— Martine Severin, a Harvard graduate student and North Cambridge native, often takes photographs of the on-the-street-fashionistas she meets for [her fashion blog, Beyond Boston Chic](#).

Severin said she was inspired by the Sartorialist and other fashion bloggers who focus on the centers of international fashion. In February, she began documenting couture do's (and sometimes don'ts) in Harvard Square, where she works in child development. Since then, she has branched out, going on trips around the city, and even carrying her camera with her on vacations to Canada and Washington, D.C.

"They're in every city you can imagine," Severin said of the fashion blogs she so often reads. "So I thought, why don't we do this for Boston? Then I thought, ugh I can't do this, because Bostonians aren't well dressed."

Severin, 30, picks her blog subjects by their outfit and the attitude with which they wear it.

"I don't care who they are or what the person looks like, but that what they're wearing looks well put together," she said. "It has more to do with the character and the mannerism that's behind the clothes that attract me."

Severin said she has even stopped people at the grocery store, and typically just compliments what they are wearing and explains why she likes their outfit, which is not always easy.

"You have to convince someone you've never met, someone who looks at you like you're a complete idiot, to let you take their picture," she said.

Severin summed up the complexities of clothing and why so many people get it wrong: a misunderstanding of body proportions and what looks good on certain body types.

“There are no rules to fashion, and yet there are rules to fashion,” she said. “And the one rule that I try to stick to is proportion ... Once you understand your proportions, then you can move forward.”

Style is more important and long lasting than fashion — which literally changes with the seasons — she said, and fashion-conscious people should be more concerned with style.

“Fashion comes and goes but style is basically the structure, the bone of anyone’s repertoire,” she said. “My blog is more about style than it is about fashion. The people that I photograph are usually the ones that are very arresting. They’re the ones that stand out in the crowd.”

Severin said her budget does not allow her to wear many designer outfits, but she does not think a price tag should rule out stylishness.

“I don’t think [fashion] should be relegated to the very rich because even the very rich don’t know how to dress, on the whole,” Severin said. “People should figure out what works with their budget and work with that.”

Severin is still wrestling with the blog’s format and hopes that as Beyond Boston Chic grows, people will be more vocal about the subjects she features and add their own opinions to the posts, she said.

“Boston always gets eclipsed by New York and L.A. and Europe in terms of fashion, and there’s a reason you get eclipsed,” Severin said, adding she still has hope for the poorly put-together Bostonian. “I’m hoping the blog will help them by seeing what other people are wearing by influencing them and encouraging them to dress better.”

“I’m really surprised by how wonderful everyone has been. Bostonians are thought to be reserved, rude and cold, but they have been really receptive and awesome.”

Severin’s passion for and knowledge of fashion has spread to her friends and loyal readers, and she said it has inspired her and her friends to dress better.

“[The blog is] fun and it’s lighthearted and at the same time, you learn something,” said Severin’s friend, Anna Kolchinsky, now a graduate student at Boston College. She said she hopes to one day be featured on Severin’s blog: “I share her view that Boston could use a little more interest in fashion.”

The blog is helpful and gives readers a basic understanding of style and the techniques to put together any outfit, she said, and has made her more comfortable with her own sense of style and fashion.

“[It’s] something I’ve always liked and enjoyed, but more from a distance,” Kolchinsky said. “I’m much more aware now.”