

Festival Fashion



I love a festival because I can do all my favorite things in one place: flirt with carnies, eat a fried Twinkie, get in fights with feisty Latina chicks, and buy a gator head ashtray.

For the three months that are not winter, the people of Oshkosh spray themselves with a fine mist of sweat, musk, and Milwaukee's Best Ice before heading out to the mega-fairs Lifest, Country USA, and Sawdust Days. I inhale the parfum-de-port-o-let as I stand in line to ride the Vomiton 2000 or cram myself in the crowd waiting for candy-coated cheese curds to emerge from a vat of hot grease. It is the scent of summer.

Because we are a people who must remain shrouded against the elements for most of the year, when we finally have the opportunity to display our flesh in the open market there is a tendency to go overboard. One is required to wear UV protective eyewear in the presence of native Caucasians as the blinding whiteness of uncovered arms and legs could cause permanent retinal damage.

It appears this year's titular accessories for women are boobs. When the thermometer climbs over forty-eight degrees, the first mammaries of spring can be heard bursting from tube tops with a tremulous "boiiing." Everywhere I looked breasts ranging from perky to pendulous were on display. Country queens undid the first three buttons of their western shirts and women playing the roles of fur trade wenches wore peasant blouses with navel-dipped necklines. Infants and old men careened their necks with greedy yearning.

The style scene at family friendly Lifest was somewhat consistent with Christian doctrine. If cleanliness brings one closer to godliness than the advanced laundering techniques of this crowd were clear in the whiteness of socks and neatly pressed trousers. Entire families thwarted lewd thoughts in muted color palettes. The church-appointed

wild man wore a “Got Jesus?” t-shirt prominently displaying tattooed bible verses I would have been able to decode were I not one foot in the hand basket to hell. I will truthfully report that the teen girls still made the devil smile with their brassy lip gloss and booty hugging short shorts.

At the gates of Country USA, sexy shirtless volunteer firemen collected for their charity fund as spray-tanned cougars attempted to stuff dollar bills in the gentlemen’s pants with their teeth. I finally understood the concept of reverse sexual harassment and have renewed respect for the various ways our brave firefighters risk their lives.

Beer box cowboy hats, aviator coke-dealer shades, and unrepentant fannypacks littered the landscape. The proud image of Old Glory embroidered on piped western blouses signified national pride whereas the same scene printed on muscle shirts folded into beer bellies was a desecration of the American flag. Tom Petty doppelgangers tagged behind leathery meth-thin Queens of the Beer Tent. Clad in hand-fringed and beaded tank tops these leathery rawhide bitches were the grand dames of the festival. They might flash a knowing smile of seventeen teeth and four stumps while twisting their fingers into celebratory rock hands or shank you with a whittled corndog stick for lookin’ at their man.

The country couture award must be split between the fellow who outfitted himself in hundreds of glow sticks with bunny ears attached to his Stetson and the man who cut his jeans shorts high into the crack of his buttocks creating the first ever pair of David Dukes (these are shorts similar to Daisy Dukes but named after racist politician David Duke indicating that a fellow wearing teeny-tiny cutoffs, like a Klansman running for public office, just ain’t right.)

Sawdust Days debuted a sweeping fashion phenomenon: the reclaiming of trucker caps by old men. The ironic puffy-brimmed chapeau worn by urban hipsters has finally met its match. Veterans and retirees were treated to a vast selection of hats decorated with snappy sayings at one of the vendor tents. My favorites declared “This is my cap, everything else is hers” and reminded “Don’t forget my senior discount.”

The masses sat for henna tattoos (a much better way to immortalize your affections for Larry as the ink will fade at the same rate as your love). The popular look for men was wearing an item of clothing featuring Calvin, of the syndicated cartoon strip Calvin and Hobbes, pissing on stuff. On t-shirts, a Chevy fan might have Calvin pissing on a Ford insignia. A soldier could sport a button showing Calvin pissing on Iraq. A recently divorced dad covered his bald pate with a hat featuring Calvin pissing on the words “ex-wife.” He did not have much luck asking ladies to dance at the Cajun tent.

The most kick-ass look of the day was an older woman in the world’s most tricked out wheelchair. Those who refuse to self-identify as handicapped or remain invisible are figures of pure inspiration. Her lapdogs were outfitted in bandannas and visors. Her spokes were embellished with matted stuffed animals. Flags, bells, horns, whistles,

streamers, pinwheels, noisemakers, and neon plastic flowers sent a clear message: Get out of my way, I'm comin' through!

As I tapped my foot along with the mariachi music at the Mexicofest end of Sawdust Days, I attempted to peruse a collection of amazing art that could be airbrushed onto a t-shirt for a ridiculously low price. Should I select the snake and eagle "Don't Tread On Me" design or a unicorn with a rose in its teeth? I accidentally bumped into a Latina lady who said "*Ex-cuuuuse* me?" She eyeballed me, letting a dramatic pause fill the air with tension. "*Ex-cuuuuse* you?" I said, at which point her tough gang-banger looking boyfriend demonstrated courtesy and a flair for mediation by saying, "Come on now, it's all good, it's all good." We all laughed and in the warm summer sun of a crowded festival, it really was all good.

TRIED: Overindulgence in carnival foods will not ruin your diet as the body either instantly rejects the perverse science experiment of a batter-dipped Oreo or stomach-churning rides purge offending calories. It's bulimia by proxy.

TRUE: A change purse made of frog hide is a guaranteed conversation starter.

TIRED: The Floridian Jimmy Buffet perpetual island party persona must be retired. Accepting who you are and where you are is the first step to individual dignity.

TRENDY: One color that looks great on everyone is vibrant jewel-toned enthusiasm.