

# The Style Invitational

## THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

### Week 649: Across the Wide What?

Only weeks ago we reported on the struggle by New Jersey to come up with a suitable motto. Now we turn to the beleaguered legislature of Virginia, which wants a state song to replace the unfortunate "Carry Me Back to Old Virginny" and its lyrics about darkies and old massa. After many ill-fated attempts, the state Senate is turning to the folk song "Shenandoah," which has a gorgeous melody but just a weensy problem with the lyrics: The song does not mention Virginia and in fact is not about Virginia; it talks about "the wide Missouri," for Pete's sake.

So: **Give us some Virginia-appropriate lyrics for "Shenandoah."** A whole verse is welcome but we will also accept a couple of lines. The original: "Oh, Shenandoah, I long to hear you / Away, you rolling river / Oh, Shenandoah, I long to hear you / Away, I'm bound away / Across the wide Missouri." (You can hear a nice version online at [Songsforteaching.com](http://Songsforteaching.com).) And do keep in mind that this is a humor contest.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. First runner-up wins not a Loser T-Shirt, but a plain white T-shirt bearing the word "better" preceded by a blank to fill

in; it's some gym chain's promotion that the Empress found in the Post mailroom wastebasket. The shirt is compressed into an amazingly small rectangular solid and packed with a laundry marker so that you may fill in the blank with "Lose."

**Other runners-up** win a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable mentions get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Magnets. One prize per entrant per week. Send your entries by e-mail to [losers@washpost.com](mailto:losers@washpost.com) or by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, Feb. 20. Include "Week 649" in the subject line of your e-mail, or it risks being ignored as spam. Include your name, postal address and phone number with your entry. Contests are judged on humor and originality. All entries become the property of The Washington Post. Entries may be edited for taste or content. Results will be published March 12. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. This week's contest was suggested by Peter Metrinko of Chantilly, yes, Va. The revised title for next week's contest is by John O'Byrne of Dublin.



... But I am gay, So I've moved away...

## REPORT FROM WEEK 645

In which we sought valentines for any personage or to someone in a generic category: *The Empress received more entries than usual this week in a foreign language: British. Her favorite line came in a valentine from Lydia M. Nicola of Grange Lodge, Bucks, to her garbage collector: "Your pong is like an elixir to me." We hope elixir pong, too. Okay, okay, we know, pong means stench.*

*First: The results of our special contest to come up with a name for the store in Bethesda whose sign advertised "Hair — Nails — Gifts — Mortgages": The Loser Pen and wax lips go to Kevin Dopart of Washington, who offered two good ideas: the perfectly fitting but arcane Maslow's Hierarchy Center (it won't kill you to look it up) and the, uh, higher-concept Mistresses R Us.*

**4** *Tho' it may not endure till the 24th hour, Its petals explode, its stem lose all power, Tho' it may be shot through by a blazing SIG Sauer, I send you this big fat red flower, Jack Bauer.* (Sharyn Kilderry, Washington)

**3** *Slinkity, binkity, Eva Longoria, Oh, how I pine as you Play hard to get. Why does my ardor meet Non-reciprocity? I guess you aren't that "Desperate" yet.* (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

**2** *The winner of the single silvery satin Converse All-Star high-top sneaker: To my favorite lobbyist: Remember that cash in the sack? I regret that I must give it back. If they ask about me While you're copping your plea, Be nice: Tell 'em I don't know Jack.* (Nick Curtis, Gaithersburg)

## AND THE WINNER OF THE INKER

**1** *As you chew on the bamboo and yawn In the sun on your makeshift veranda, Here's my Valentine wish, dear Tai Shan: May you never be moo goo gai panda.* (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)



## HONORABLE MENTIONS

**Mr. Ahmadinejad, is that a nuclear rod Or are you just happy to see me? Please don't be so coy, my Persian pinup boy, I'll show you a time nice and steamy. I'm your new biggest fan, O leader of Iran, You fantasy life is so crude. So don't be a snob. Let me doff this hijab And I'll put you in the Mahmood.** (Deborah Guy, Columbus, Ohio)

**Marlon, my heart still goes a-flutter Whenever I'm asked to pass the butter.** (Jay Shuck, Minneapolis)

**You listen to my private thoughts I hope they do not trouble you. And though you really bug me, My love's no secret, W.** (Joseph Romm, Washington)

**To Bill Gates: If each terrorist, schemer, nogoodnik and Hun United their forces and acted as one There's no way on earth we could resist 'em. But thanks to you, Bill, there'll be no attack Their brains are preoccupied, striving to hack Your Windows Operating System.** (Greg Arnold, Herndon)

**Dear Dear Dear Dear Philip Dear Philip Dear Philip Philip Glass Be Philip Be Philip Philip Glass Mine Philip Mine Philip Philip Be Mine Philip Philip Dear Philip Glass Philip Dear.** (Seth Brown, North Adams, Mass.)

**To Paris Hilton: If you can't be mine in reality, At least you're mine on DVD.** (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

**Unbidden, my devotion Spews skyward like a geyser Where'er my awe-struck peepers spy Your Page 1 pic, Kornheiser.** (Kathy Boyce, Herndon)

**To Israel's acting foreign minister: My dear Tzipi Livni, I get a sensation From your appellation that blows me away. Oh, say you'll be mine and I'll sing with elation Both "Tzipi di-doo-dah" and "Tzipi di-ay."** (Brendan Beary)

**Master P, all the homies and cronies Think it's wack that you fox-trot with phonies. But your dancin' is hot, And it's takin' a lot Of that ballroom to hold your co... urage.** (Chris Doyle)

**When by Bush you were courted, The right wing aborted His judicial desires, Dear Harriet Miers. Though you won't be Number 9, Will you be my valentine?** (Beryl Benderly, Washington)

**The name that I Google Brings Valentine kisses. I blow my own bugle. I love me — Narcissus** (Chris Doyle)

**To Judit Polgar: You're queen of world chess, I'm rookie unseen, But valentine, I hope this R(ie)xQ.** (Dave Prevar, Annapolis)

**At the sound of your name How my beating heart clenches. Oh dearest Don Rumsfeld, I want YOU in the trenches.** (Phyllis Reinhard, East Fallowfield, Pa.)

**It's your bare, burly chest And your brown, curly hair, How you say, "Only you —" Oh, be mine, Smokey Bear.** (Mel Loftus, Holmen, Wis.)

**Oh, lovely Catherine Zeta-Jones, You make me tingle in my bones. Fancy a catch with me tomorrow, Or must I wear the Mask of Sorrow?** (Ed Edwards) [Ed explains that a catch is a Welsh word meaning, among other things, a cuddle. By the way, it is pronounced "cwchh."]

**To my Costco cashier: If you would be my one true guy I'd stand in line for days and days. Since without you I can't buy My 15-gallon mayonnaise.** (Andrew Hoenig, Rockville)

**To my dental hygienist: I know there's a line that I'm crossing, But please, would you pause in your flossing And consider (I hope it's not scary) My plea that you be my Tooth Fairy. Then each morning I'll wake with a thrill — oh! To find you right under my pillow.** (Paul Cloutman, London)

**These many years you've been my masseuse You make me feel good, my muscles are loose. But you know what I'd like on this Valentine's Day? Couldn't you rub me, you know, "the wrong way"?** (Marleen May, Rockville)

**To a veterinarian: From three little stray cats, each with a uterus: Happy Valentine's Day — please will you neuter us?** (Sue Lin Chong, Baltimore)

**To my wife: Though I now shop at Costco for your birthday candles. You're more fun to hold now, with your love(ly) handles.** (Peter Metrinko, Chantilly)

**Next Week: Warped Perspectives, or Take Your Pic**

More Honorable Mentions are online at [www.washingtonpost.com/styleinvitational](http://www.washingtonpost.com/styleinvitational)

## In New York, the Decline of Fall

FASHION, From D1

al growth, about her search for peace and focus through yoga, through meditation, through raw food.

All of those notions make for fine gossip. But Karan is one of the few designers whose admirable goal is to aid a woman in finding security, confidence and herself as the hectic energy of New York — or any city — spins around her.

For fall, Karan limits her color palette to black, charcoal, red and purple. Only occasionally does she inject a spark of white or a glimmer of gold. She molds her coattresses to stand just slightly away from the body, echoing its hourglass shape. Her fluid dresses with their cowl backs fall seductively down the body and allow for an alluring view of a woman's spine, her waist and the gentle slope that leads to her derriere. The clothes tease the eye, but they aren't coquettish. They evoke self-assurance. These are womanly clothes that speak of intelligence without being all twisted up, raw-edged and incomprehensibly "intellectual."

Karan's clothes do not look as though they have been created to satisfy the impetuous desires of the

latest Vanity Fair cover starlet. These clothes are too smart for the typical winsome actress or junior socialite.

Susan Sarandon, yes. Paris Hilton, no. They're not full of sequins or ruffles. Necklines don't plunge recklessly. No, there is cool calculation in just how far that cashmere and jersey will recede. These clothes don't live without a woman in them. Put them on a dress form and they are little more than expressionless technique. A woman's swan neck rising up from a jeweled neckline gives the dress its regal attitude. Her strong back is what makes a flowing gown sexy.

Karan highlights the parts of a woman's body that speak of effort, strength and determination. There is powerful symbolism in the vision of a graceful woman with a back rippling with muscles. They do not get there by chance. They are earned. Strong shoulders are not bought through plastic surgery. They are built with sweat and concerted effort.

In celebrating a woman's strength — both physical and mental — Karan does not lose sight of her customers' sensuality, of her desire to be romanced. There is a vulnerability to these dresses with their insets of transparent illusion netting. They are not only approachable, but also touchable. Karan's clothes articulate the complicated message that women themselves so often have difficulty putting into words: Strength, confidence and independence do not negate a desire and a need for a confidante, a partner and a little breathless romance.

Karan's collection was also inspiring because it showed such perfect balance between a designer's desire to be creative and the customer's desire to not look like they're wearing an art project. The collection that Francisco Costa showed under the Calvin Klein label lacked balance. No one was advocating for women. No one was reminding the designer that he is at work within the confines of an established aesthetic. He can expand it, modernize it or reinterpret it. But he should also respect it.

For spring, Costa offered one of the most beautiful collections of the season. It expressed his own artful desires but it also spoke of the minimalism and modernism that define the Calvin Klein brand. For fall, Costa, showing in the company's new



PHOTOS BY MARIA VALENTINO FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

**Left and center, Donna Karan's womanly styles emit self-assured allure. Francisco Costa's designs for Calvin Klein seemed more like art one would stare at than clothing one would choose to buy.**



**Left, Karl Lagerfeld's new brand; center, Badgley Mischka's attention-getting aesthetic; Zac Posen's tailored charm.**

loft-like exhibition space, presented a collection of mostly translucent gowns intricately woven with a chevron pattern. Dresses were embroidered and often included chiffon bras with straps visible from the back. There were ruffles and toggles that looked like they had been molded from chunks of bamboo. As a diplomatic and indulgent parent might say, one could tell that Costa had put a lot of work into that collection. Indeed, every bit of energy, angst and labor was evident in each garment. There was nothing easy or effortless

about these clothes. One could practically see the designer's sweaty fingerprints on each piece of chiffon. It was an exhausting collection to watch. It teetered dangerously toward the sort of wearable art that one might find at a craft show.

That's not necessarily an unattractive product, but it's not fashion. Throughout the show, one kept wondering who exactly might be enticed into wearing these clothes. The average woman would most likely feel too exposed, too fussy in all that unsubstantial, yet ornately

treated chiffon. An actress heading down the red carpet would be warned off the collection by her stylist. Kathy Griffin and every tabloid and blog would hold her up for mockery. Isaac Mizrahi would accost her breasts.

One can't even imagine Gwyneth Paltrow, who has worn confections by Alexander McQueen and Balenciaga, in these clothes. If not Gwyneth, then who?

A designer certainly doesn't — and perhaps shouldn't — have a particular customer in mind as he de-

signs. He has to follow his creative spirit. His passion and conviction should guide him. Still, there has to be some inner voice — the same one that helps him balance his own checkbook — that keeps him from allowing creativity to ambush the reality of women's lives and the responsibility one has to the name on the label. That name is Calvin Klein, not Francisco Costa.

Which is worse, a designer who pushes his creativity too far, or one who doesn't bother to even tap into his? Designer Ralph Lauren presented his collection Friday morning in front of an audience that included his family, possible family-member-to-be Lauren Bush and the actresses Joy Bryant and Halle Berry. Olive green dominated the line. Call it the "Loden Collection," not to be confused with last fall's "Gray Collection" or the "Camel Collection" before that. Lauren's fall collection was equestrian, Tyrolean, all-American and altogether too familiar. Olive plaid fitted blazer, loden wool skirts, light green leggings and sage-colored turtleneck gowns with floor-sweeping hemlines. Lauren never turns his aesthetic topsy-turvy from one season to the next. But there are usually subtle tweaks, a more refined silhouette or a surprising bit of eveningwear. Everything in this collection seemed dusty with history — Lauren's own.

The few pieces of black velvet had been transformed from heavy to leaden thanks to an overuse of gold braid and trim. The effect was too theatrical and gave the clothes a stuffy, period costume look. The designer walked out to take his bows in a sweater and a pair of brown leather trousers with buttons and fringe along the side and looking quite like he'd just strolled in from Brokeback Mountain. Lauren believes in costuming. He believes that a woman can transform herself simply by dressing the part. For him, the entire world is a stage. But one wishes that he'd offered a new story line for fall.

The shows here ended with the debut of Karl Lagerfeld's new signature collection — a modestly priced, mass appeal brand. The line is geared toward both men and women and has a distinctly urban sensibility, with its concentration on black, brown and gray. The men wear slim jeans that hang off their rear end, not because they are too big but because the models do not have glutei maximi to fill them out.

There are starched white shirts

See FASHION, D3, Col. 1



**Ralph Lauren's collection was equestrian and all-American.**