



THE NEED FOR SWEDES

The Swedish invasion of Los Angeles is a real thing, but it's as subtle and sophisticated as you'd imagine **By Lydia Siriprakorn**



ACNE



LI Caffé, Acne Studios, Swedish crowds gathered in a modern, minimalist hotel lobby. Yes, Downtown Los Angeles is looking a lot like Stockholm lately. Angelenos can now dress, groom, caffeinate and even party like the Swedes, no Allen Wrench required. Sleek, simple and refined are the true markings of Swedish design, fashion and, naturally, the takeover of L.A.'s Fashion District. In less than a year, the formerly gritty pocket of DTLA has transformed into the city's new upscale Swedish hotspot.

Even before a slew of Scandinavian retailers turned the neighborhood into a cultural hub, the takeover had been long in the works. Swedes first infiltrated American culture where we may have needed them most—over the airwaves and in our closets. How did we ever party without Avicii, Icona Pop, Robyn or Röyksopp? Swedes dominate the electronic dance music scene. And who can even remember what well-coiffed,



IL CAFFÉ



AUSTERE



good-looking men wore before H&M joined us stateside almost 15 years ago?

While sleek and sexy seemed unlikely and laughable in DTLA's Fashion District just a few years ago, it appears to be the new reality of the block bordering the ever-trendy Ace Hotel. It's not just the area's new high-end favorites—like Stockholm clothing brand Acne Studios or the Scandinavian retail wonderland Austere—adding to our insatiable appetite for all things Swedish; it's their signature minimalist look that has turned this former Broadway wasteland into an upscale destination.

DTLA has been the target of a Swedish invasion for a while, though to many it may have seemed to happen overnight. The driving forces behind it were the city campaign "Bring Back Broadway" and L.A.'s own Ace Hotel. The boutique hotel chain has seven locations and a reputation (much like the LGBT community) for jumpstarting rugged neighborhoods. The Ace recruited high-end European brands to join the party at 9th and Broadway, making it largely responsible for the neighborhood's expanding presence of Swedish influences, businesses and, naturally, resulting tourists.

"The Bring Back Broadway campaign has really done a great job over there," said a former City Council staff member who

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“Americans know maybe three big, general broad strokes about Sweden, but not so much the interesting intelligence and dark side and light side.”

—Amy Poehler

JOIN THE REVOLUTION

Here's how to build your own minimalist, Sweden-approved look



ACNE
\$220
acnestudios.com

A good button-down shirt is an essential part of classic Swedish style



TID WATCHES
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tidwatches.com



H&M
\$24.95
hm.com

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FJÄLLRÄVEN
\$150
fjallraven.us



TRETORN
\$75
us.tretorn.com

Spandex & Sidekicks



MEET OUR NERD PANEL From left: Independent comic book creator Josh Trujillo; Travis Richey as Inspector Spacetime; Charles "Zan" Christensen of Northwest Press, President of Prism Comics

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in *My So-Called Life* or Sammy, played by Steve Zahn, in *Reality Bites*.)

In contrast, Billy and Teddy exemplified the "New Gay Teenager" of the Millennials. When audiences first met the characters, they were already openly gay, in addition to relatively happy and psychologically healthy (emphasis on "relatively"). Admittedly, as one often finds in comics, both young men had their share of problems, with Billy's grandfather being the mutant terrorist Magneto (who even non-fans are aware was portrayed by Sir Ian McKellan in the *X-Men* movie franchise) and Teddy discovering he was actually the crown prince of two warring alien races, both of which are prepared to tear Earth apart to get their little green hands on him. Sure, both characters had their baggage, but none of that stemmed from their sexual orientation. In fact, their same-sex relationship was the most stable part of both their lives. Modern adolescent readers were quick to identify with this optimistic, refreshing presentation of young gay men.

The intersection of gays and comic books isn't even restricted to the characters. The profound effect this art form has on LGBT readers—especially confused, teenaged fans—can also be found within the letters page of *Young Avengers Vol. 1* #7. In that issue, a fan named Sef Farrow wrote:

"I got a frantic call from Florida. I packed quickly. Caught a flight. My sister and her husband were at their wits end. Their 15-year-old son—my nephew—had tried to commit suicide. A good kid—a bright one—and gay. He came so close... They thought of me. Also gay, but older. When I packed I threw in about a dozen comics. Among those dozen books, issues #1-4 of *Young Avengers*. During one of my catnaps, he had found and read them before I did. He woke me up. The look in his eyes. His eyes were so big! A comic—with teenagers—gay teenagers! In a comic! And I saw the hope...."

Certainly this is an extreme example, but at least one gay adolescent found solace in a primarily nerdy art form. According to Richey, this ideal—in this case shown through the positive portrayal of teen homosexuality that may have possibly saved a young man's life—is part of the appeal that attracts LGBT audiences.

"I think we are represented best in sci-fi," says Richey. "Science fiction has generally been a very optimistic and hopeful view about society. In general, a gay character isn't in a sci-fi story because they're gay, unless it's a way to tell an allegorical story about our modern culture." Richey adds, "It'd be nice to see a gay character again in a network show. If *Star Trek* comes back to TV (please, please, someone bring *Star Trek* back to TV!), it'd be fantastic to see one of the bridge officers be a gay character. But those things will happen. I'm not so much in arms about what should happen. I'm just enjoying the progress as it does happen."

Much like comics, sci-fi film and television traveled a long and arduous journey when it came to LGBT portrayals. Just look at Richey's example of *Star Trek*. Sure, they made cultural history by airing the first televised interracial kiss. Why not let George Takei portray TV's first Asian character and the first openly gay character?

Fortunately, the small screen has come a long way since the '60s. Sci-fi and fantasy shows have enjoyed their share of openly gay characters over the years. Look at Willow, the lesbian wiccan tech wiz on *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, and the tart-tongued Lafayette on *True Blood*. The biggest milestone may be the nascent appearance of queer characters on children's programming, the most obvious example seen on Cartoon Network's *Adventure Time*. Heavily influenced by elements of *Dungeons & Dragons*, the animated series chronicles the exploits of a tween-aged boy named Finn in the land of Ooo, a post-apocalyptic world brimming with dangerous magic and mad science. While marketed to a juvenile audience, the show contains much for the Gen X and Gen Y demographics as well, specifically with the incessantly bickering Princess Bubblegum and Marceline the Vampire Queen. While the 'L bomb' is never dropped, it's heavily implied that the two female leads were at one time in a lesbian relationship. Once again, geek culture normalizes queer culture, not only for adults but for the next generation as well.

Of course, we may just be overthinking things. Homosexuality, by definition, is characterized by sex. It's right there in the name. A cursory glance of any comic book will yield a plethora of musclebound men in skin-tight spandex. The homoerotic undertones inherent in nerd culture has been acknowledged by our panel of gay geeks. When asked about the gayest thing they've seen at Comic-Con, each strikes a similar chord.

"Although I wouldn't assume the orientation of anyone, I'd say the gender-reversed cosplayers are my favorite," responds Trujillo.

"I think it was last year that I saw 'Emmett Frost,' a male version of Emma Frost from the *X-Men* comics, and that was wonderfully gay," says Christensen, adding, "How come there aren't more men in provocative costumes? I think Namor's suit is the only one that really fits the bill these days."

"I think porn star Brent Corrigan went as Robin a few years back," replies Richey, "but the costume was painted on. That was gaytastic." ■

Retouching: Felipe Menezes, felipemenezes.com
Grooming: Nate Cooper, solarnoise.net
Model: Robert Bruce, dtmodelmanagement.com
Costumes: Will Brattain and Sean Elliott, Ret Turner Rentals, @returnrental

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wished not to be identified. "It's a totally different vibe down there from a few years ago. There was no real reason to be in that neighborhood unless it was for work or something, but now it's an actual destination I tell people about when they ask me where they should go Downtown."

In December 2013, Acne Studios became the first established Swedish brand to make its U.S. home in DTLA. Prior to that, the only place to find the Swedish fashion line stateside was in New York City. But not only did L.A. finally get its own Acne Studios; the 5,000-square-foot store housed in the East Columbia Building is also the brand's largest store worldwide.

Other Swedish businesses quickly followed suit. Il Caffé, a coffee chain from Stockholm, set up shop inside Acne Studios. Just a block over is Austere, the Scandinavian retail space marked by a Volvo parked on the sales floor. The superstore sells everything from home décor to cosmetics and is owned by Swedish native Fredrik Carlström. He will soon be joined by popular Stockholm barbershop Roy & Son, which will share a fraction of Austere's floor in its first U.S. outpost. Come 2015, DTLA will also see a members club called AYD (All Your Dreams) that promises a lineup of Swedish chefs and iconic club ambassadors.

But the Swedish invasion isn't limited to Downtown. Mid-City L.A. got its own sweet taste of the action when the candy store Sockerbit opened its first West Coast locale on 3rd Street back in March. The treasure trove of treats and flavors is enough to leave Swedish Fish swimming in tears.

Still not sold on this whole Sweden thing? Amy Poehler has a show just for you. *Welcome to Sweden* (starring her brother, Greg Poehler) snatched up NBC's 9 p.m. slot on Thursday nights—prime real estate for the network. "Americans know maybe three big, general broad strokes about Sweden," Poehler told *The New York Times*. "But not so much the interesting intelligence and dark side and light side. We were both excited to have fun with it comedically." The show is based on Greg's move to Sweden in real life for his current wife, and the comedy is already a hit there.

It's no accident that Los Angeles is the American city on the forefront of the Swedish invasion. "Scandinavia is austere, but out of that comes cool things," Austere owner Carlstrom told *The Wall Street Journal* in May. "I don't think it's a coincidence that some of the most amazing lighting designs in the world have come from a place that's so dark and cold." The abundance of sunshine and artists with an eye for aesthetics makes it an easy favorite among Swedes. (Just ask Avicii, who shelled out more than \$15 million on an amazing house in the Hollywood Hills last December.)

Rest assured, Los Angeles. These Swedish trends come pre-assembled and built to last. ■