

# Style Wise

## Expressing Your Unique Self

Skye Moody, our usual Style Wise contributor, has contributed the feature essay on page 22 of this issue. Look for Skye's column in Style Wise in our next issue.



*The wisdom is passed from generation to generation, like a strand of well-loved pearls.*

**by Beverly Ingle**

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There is something uniquely perfect about the wisdom passed down from mother to daughter in the South.

Sure, mothers share their wisdom with their daughters in all parts of our country and have been doing so for generations. But if that wisdom doesn't include when and where to wear pearls — real pearls — and how old you must be for those pearls to be an appropriate choice, all that can be said really is, “You poor thing.”

The South follows its own rhythm, and it's the women of the South that set the cadence.

To keep in time with that cadence and ensure that the Southern lifestyle flows along smoothly, they share bits of knowledge and invaluable insights among themselves. While that knowledge may have originated as anecdotal tales from previous experience, the lessons within them seeped deep into the Southern psyche and became codified.

As an eighth-generation Southerner, it is my honor to provide you with a primer to Southern wisdom so that you, too, may adopt the hospitality, impeccable manners, and perfectly sugared snark of today's modern belle.

*“If you have pearls, wear them.”*

— Janice, a true steel magnolia

### Family

In the South, family is everything. They are also likely to be the same people who drive you crazy. You might fight like cats and dogs among yourselves, but you'll always close ranks when faced with an outside threat. Whether you're 9 or 93, Mama and Daddy are and always will be “Mama and Daddy,” and you likely can recite your lineage back at least three generations.

Perhaps most importantly among Southern families, the definition of “family” is quite broad. Aunts and uncles aren't always blood relatives or in-laws; every good friend of your parents with whom you grew up earns the title too.

### Friendship

Friendship among Southern women is a remarkable case study in resilience. These friendships withstand the trials and tribulations of life, and the more commonplace stressors of marriage, kids, jobs, church and volunteer commitments; among all of this, time with friends gets lost.

Southern women know that the friends they love and who love them back can and do pick up just where they left off — no matter how much time has passed. They also know if they truly need help or support, those friends are just a phone call or text away. As with families, Southern friends may bicker or play a little one-upsmanship, but heaven help the soul who tries to come between them.

### Manners

Southern women in particular have a well-earned reputation for the warm, welcoming way they interact with others. Ma'ams and Sirs pepper conversations with elders, smiles are always sweet, and handwritten thank-you notes are fundamental.

Even if a Southern woman cannot abide your presence, you likely will not know as she will never let her manners falter. Mamas teach their daughters to “kill 'em with kindness” and “slop sugar” more than usual on those whom one cannot stand. After all, anything less would be tacky, and there's nothing tackier than being tacky.

### Public Persona

Fashionable taste abounds in the South, but one's public persona extends well beyond knowing the rules for wearing white and the seasonality of straw versus felt Stetsons — although that knowledge is considered critical in many places.

There's been many a mama who has tutored her children on speaking in low, even tones, using proper grammar and engaging in topics that are interesting yet uncontroversial. For all intents and purposes, that Southern persona is completely ingrained and unshakable, until alcohol is involved. Then, all bets are off.

### Cocktails and Cake

Southerners are trained from a young age to be the epitome of hospitality. While unannounced visits are still considered in poor form in the South, the modern reality is that they happen more often than not. Even prior to the pervasiveness of the “drop-in” visit, every proper Southern home was well equipped to welcome guests.

Iced tea is always at the ready as are fresh cookies or cake that will be served on the nice china. After 5 p.m., the perfect cocktail can be whipped up in less than two minutes.

### Southern Snark

The best, most useful Southern wisdom I've saved for last: Southern Snark. To many, there's no more valuable knowledge that can be added to one's arsenal. A perfectly timed, perfectly delivered, “Bless her heart” speaks volumes in just three little words. Quite simply, it is the best thinly veiled insult in all of the English-speaking world.

Yet, it is not to be confused with, “Bless his baby heart,” which is meant as an expression of sympathy. Other notable Southern snarkisms include, “How nice,” “My word” and “Oh, honey ...”

Whether understood through explicit instruction or simply learned by observation, this Southern wisdom is the premise on which a happy, good life is lived. To live any other way would not only betray our Southern style, but would also be, well, tacky.

Oh, and P.S. — pearls are appropriate if they're worn before 6 p.m. and if you're over 18 years of age. You're welcome, sugar. ♦