

By GRACE CAIN / Stylist JACK REID
Photographer ANDREW WOFFINDEN

Going her *own way*

Fusing off-beat chic with vintage and luxury, Bettina Looney's personal style is all about wearing what makes her happy and owning only what she loves

They say the key to a great outfit is the accessories. In which case, Bettina Looney is the new name to know. A scroll through Looney's Instagram feed reveals a flurry of achingly aspirational outfits, peppered with close-up shots of the contemporary fine jewellery she employs to finish each look. It's the editorial (yet attainable) styling of these pieces, as well as her easy cool-girl approachability, that makes Looney so instantly appealing for her legion of followers – a surprising turn of events for someone who used to hate fashion.

"When I was little, my mom used to try to get me to go to the mall, and I would kick and scream. She'd be like, 'What little girl doesn't want to go shopping? It makes no sense!'" Looney laughs. "I never thought I'd be in fashion, and now my whole world revolves around it."

Looney's route to becoming a fashion insider has been full of unexpected twists. Living permanently in London, for instance, was not something she anticipated after she graduated from the University of Florida and decided to come to the UK on a six-month visa. "I chose London because there was no language barrier, and I thought it would be the only time I'd be able to travel before diving into whatever my profession was going to be," she says with a shrug. "But then it all just unfolded here."

Her first job – selling an online reservations platform to restaurants in east London – was far from successful. "I was the worst salesperson ever," she admits. In a serendipitous twist, she

was fired on the same day that she was introduced to her now-fiancé's friends – one of whom worked for a personal-shopping and styling company. She convinced Looney to apply for a role as an intern. "I ended up working there for two-and-a-half years. It was completely accidental, but that's where everything came together and I finally figured out my passion."

Quite the turn of events for the little girl who wouldn't go shopping. "Looking back, I guess I always enjoyed putting looks together," Looney says, thoughtfully. "I loved vintage shopping, and everyone would always say I dressed a little differently to the average person – but it was only while working at that company, where I had the opportunity to play around with fashion, that I came up with my own style."

And how would she put that style into words? Looney gives a good-natured laugh. "That's always a weird question. I'd say it's a little quirky and always evolving. I'm not afraid to experiment: I love pairing different prints, or different colours, while still keeping an element of chic."

Flared jeans and boots are her staples, something Looney attributes to her upbringing in the "very southern, very equestrian" city of Ocala in northern Florida. "It's the equine capital of the world," she laughs. "I kind of stick to that equestrian aesthetic. It's definitely where my love of boots evolved."

When it comes to her style icons, one name in particular springs to mind. "Bianca Jagger's style is everything I love and aim for in my own wardrobe," she says. "I love the pantsuits. I love how she's always so elegant and timeless." She thinks for a moment, before continuing, "But I find things I love in the styles of so many women."

Indeed, Looney is just as likely to draw sartorial inspiration from the community she has built around herself – whether that's her "incredible group of girlfriends" in London, or fellow fashion enthusiasts whom she finds on Instagram (she cites @louloudeaison and @luciazolea as her current must-follows). "When I want to find something new, I'll look on Instagram," she says. "I think a lot of people now are looking for things that are a little bit different, and it's the perfect tool for that."

Looney is very aware of how platforms such as Instagram have revolutionised the way the fashion industry operates, suggesting that fashion trends are increasingly propelled by hashtags and viral posts. "It's incredible to see how the buzz works. There's a network of amazing girls, and they do a great job of showcasing what's coming out. We'll all be at a showroom, posting about the same amazing piece – and then it will suddenly blow up."

According to Looney, one of the main reasons for this paradigm shift lies in the issue of relatability, something that traditional celebrities and models – with their styling teams and unlimited budgets – don't always possess. "It's a different type of fashion," she says. "Influencers are fashion-forward, but in a way that still feels attainable. People want to relate to what they're seeing."

Looney's own fashion knowledge is encyclopaedic, and she has a quick answer to every possible wardrobe dilemma. Lacking in high-quality, versatile basics? Looney recommends Vince or >



Bettina wears ZIMMERMANN dress £1,350 and JIMMY CHOO boots £995

HOW SHE WEARS



Theory. Need something flattering and feminine, but also a little quirky? Try Isa Arfen and Ganni. In terms of fit, she cites Chloé as a favourite. “I don’t know what the brand does with its jeans and suits, but they just fit a woman’s body perfectly.” For shoes, it’s always Manolo Blahnik. “I love everything he stands for,” she says. Other Looney favourites include Loewe (“I’m obsessed”) and past-season Celine. “Old Celine forever!” she exclaims. “There’s something about it that’s so special.”

Considering the part clothes play in Looney’s life, you’d be forgiven for assuming that her wardrobe must be bursting at the seams. This is not the case. In fact, Looney adopts an admirably thoughtful, less-is-more approach when shopping for herself, something that, again, she attributes to her formative years.

“I had quite a humble upbringing,” she says. “So now I never want to be excessive and have lots of things I don’t need or wear. I think it’s better to use your pieces, and to have only what you love in your wardrobe. I say: first shop what you’re missing, rather than what you love. Otherwise, you’ll never get to enjoy what you already have, because you won’t have anything to wear it with.”

As part of that, Looney is a believer in making investments – particularly when it comes to fine jewellery, which she employs to great effect. Her posts on @bettinalooney reveal a multitude of minimal bangles, chunky gold rings and statement earrings, all used to punctuate both daytime and evening looks in a fresh, often playful manner. “I love finding nicely curated pieces – Suzanne Kalan and Carolina Bucci are incredible. Then you have heritage designs from the likes of Pomellato. Those are pieces you invest in, because they’re not going to go out of style.”

Despite all her tips, tricks and snippets of sartorial advice, Looney is quick to point out that, ultimately, the most important thing is not what you buy, but how it affects your emotional state. “Wear what makes you feel comfortable and confident,” she says. “It’s all about finding what makes you happy.” □



“I think it’s better to have only what you love in your wardrobe”

Bettina wears, from left CHLOÉ coat £2,375 and trousers £675, CELINE shoes £550; GANNI jacket £590, VINCE shirt £340, LOEWE culottes £2,350, CELINE shoes £550

Womenswear, First Floor; Harrods Shoe Heaven, Fifth Floor; and harrods.com

Hair & Make-up TERRI CAPON at Stella Creative Artists using Chanel Les Beiges Eau de Teint and Hydra Beauty Camellia Water Cream, and Leonor Greyl Sérum de Soie Sublimateur
Fashion Assistant CHLOE STEWART
Digital Assistant WILL RICHARDS
Lighting Assistant MARIJA VAINILAVICIUTE

BETTINA'S STYLE RULES

Complete your wardrobe:
“Shop for what you’re missing, then for what you love.”

Made for walking:
“Boots are super-comfortable and a great way to gain height.”

The long game:
“Invest in outerwear, fine jewellery and accessories.”

Stay inspired:
“Instagram is the perfect tool for finding pieces that are a little different.”

To lift your mood:
“Wear what makes you feel comfortable, confident and happy!”