

YOUR MOST UTILIZED FASHION ACCESSORY

CELL PHONES GET AN EXTREME MAKEOVER

text by Gerard T. Barry

Take a moment to think about what you take with you when you leave home. Certainly the first two items are keys, for the all-important ability to return home, and your wallet and/or purse, for the all-important ability to transact while you are away. For many—especially the MTV generation and those younger—the third most important item is a mobile phone. A bastion of only business executives and stockbrokers in the early '90s, mobile phones are now virtually ubiquitous throughout your work, social, and family circles. Love them or hate them, mobile phones are not only here to stay, but have become a necessary part of life. They not only serve the public as safety devices, they also serve individuals. From making and changing plans to getting text message updates and directions, mobile phone uses are becoming endless. And now that almost everyone who wants a mobile phone has one, the phones themselves are changing.

Along the path of ingraining themselves in our everyday lives, the very manner in which mobile phones are developed and sold to the consumer has changed. Now a mobile phone will express style and function every time it's used. Today a phone is as unique and modifiable as cars in the 1950s. Like the cars of the past, phones can qualify as a status symbol and expression of individuality.

Like other fashion accessories, your mobile phone is not a part of your garments. Given their frequency in your hands, however, they can complement or add detail to your outfit or provide insight into your personality. As with sunglasses, there are almost as many choices as there are people, so the phone you choose can often say (or not say) a lot about you. Think about the impression you may have of someone pulling out a mobile phone with a Hello Kitty screen wipe attached.

Not only are mobile phone manufacturers aware of this fashion trend, musicians and luxury retailers are keying in as well. Motorola recently partnered with Baby Phat and Dolce & Gabbana to release exclu-

sive versions of the hugely popular **RAZR** mobile phone. Previously, Motorola partnered with famous musicians to release its **ROKR** phone that plays mp3 files, and keep an eye out for the soon-to-be-released Prada **KE850** from LG Electronics. Can Gucci, Louis Vuitton, or Yves Saint Laurent be far from designing their own phones?

While many simply choose a phone based on the fact that a phone is a device that can make and take calls, others see it as a convenient form of other communication and entertainment. These are the people that use mobile phones not just for calls, but for browsing the internet, watching TV, text messaging, listening to music, transporting files, taking pictures, and so on. These are the people who are moving forward with technology and will be most interested in reading further.

No longer confined to the bulky and expensive phones of a decade ago, there is a wide variety of devices available to the average consumer. The most basic choice is the "open face" or "candy bar" style phone that business users and men seem to favor. Or females tend to choose the "flip" or "clamshell" style phones. However, a lesser-known style—the slider—is poised to make a much larger impact in North America in the coming years.

Slider-style phones are already popular outside of North America. They resemble a flip-style mobile phone when closed and an open-face mobile phone when they slide open. On a slider phone, the screen is exposed. When the phone is answered or about to be utilized, a simple flick of the finger will slide the screen upward and reveal the keyboard beneath. The advantage here is that the screens can be larger than flip phones themselves, and the overall phone thinner than most open-face models. Prediction: The slider style will soon become the most popular mobile phone.

A slider phone already available around the world is the **Chocolate** from LG Electronics. Slightly bulky and not incredibly user friendly,



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
Black Carbon, D&G
RAZR, iPhone, Motorola
RIZR, Samsung Trace, LG
Chocolate, LG KE850 Prada

Chocolate phones have impressive screens and doubly function as mp3 players. Currently, Chocolate has quite a bit of marketing muscle behind it, and the phone takes all the buzz when it comes to sliders.

Coming soon from Motorola is the **RIZR**. A heavy slider, this device will take a beating, as it utilizes more metal components than most phones today. As a slider it will initially be seen as a unique phone, but its weight may be a hindrance to sales. A similar phone is the **Samsung D900**. The thinnest slider on the market, the phone is also one of the lightest and has a brilliant screen that is sure to attract a lot of attention.

The mobile phone juggernaut on the horizon is the Apple mobile phone, sometimes referred to as the **iPhone** (though iPhone is currently a registered trademark name of Cisco Systems). While this device has a lot of positive buzz and will sell thousands of units when it becomes available in June 2007, a great mobile phone and fashion statement it's not. When the device was officially announced in January, it was announced as "a revolutionary mobile phone, a widescreen iPod...and a breakthrough internet communications device." All three of those it is. However, as a phone it is lacking. The "iPhone" has a short battery life and a touch-screen interface that should prove annoying to anyone who has long nails or big fingers, not to mention the grease factor of holding the screen to your face, the annoyance once the screen is scratched. The "iPhone" is slightly wider than the Palm **Treo** (but much thinner) and the size and weight will prove cumbersome to the average user. It is a slick piece of Apple hardware in a pretty package—just not a highly usable accessory.

A similar phone hitting the market from Nokia is the **N95**. An unofficial challenger to the "iPhone," it will be released only in Europe in 2007, although there are ways to obtain and use them on GSM (Global System for Mobile communication) networks elsewhere in the world.

Like the mobile phone from Apple, the N95 is a phone that can play music and connect with other devices and the internet via Bluetooth and Wi-Fi. The product design is not as sleek as Apple's; however, the dual sliding motion is very unique. Slide the large color screen in one direction and it turns into an mp3 player. Slide it the other direction, and you have your standard, fully functional and easy-to-use Nokia phone. The five-megapixel camera that takes DVD-quality video will separate this phone from Apple's, and both devices will sell for over \$500.

As important as the look, what makes a fashion accessory truly sexy is what it can do for you. While one day your mobile phone will be able to make payments at stores (already happening outside of North America), unlock doors, and serve as a form of identification, today's phones are already amazing compared to those of yesterday. MobiTV and Sling Media's Slingbox bring streaming TV to your phones. Most service providers worldwide are now sending stock, weather, and other sources of information directly to your phone in slick graphical interfaces. Face it: A cool-looking phone is surface beautiful. Being able to have a deeper connection with it will make the phone a device that you'll want to use more often.

Buying a mobile phone today is both easy and complicated. If you are looking for a device that can make and take calls, the entire world of phones is at your disposal. Every mobile phone on the market today can perform the basic tasks a user demands of it. With basic needs covered, the fashion of your accessory comes into play. Now you are considering not only subjective opinions, but also personal tastes. With so many choices and modifications on the market, you should have both an easy and a hard time having your phone make the statement you choose to have it make about you, from no statement at all to a sleek and sexy device that others just have to notice. As with clothing, remember: Fashion fades, but style remains.