


the death of COOL

NEXT BIG THING
THE



Three years ago, trend-trawling was all the rage. Though corporate America still clings to the hope that the clued-in kids know where mainstream taste is going, some are wondering whether it's time to call off the hunt.

TOYOTA'S COOLHUNTER IS A PALE, intense-looking man given to hyperbolic, stream-of-consciousness pronouncements. "Next year, everyone will be dying their hair silver, Warhol-style," David Wales declares, minutes

Photographs by Danielle Levitt

into our first meeting. Later, tugging at his faux-Burberry scarf, he proclaims that "fake is the new real."

Wales is wearing a long black tunic, flat-front trousers, and slip-on shoes of indeterminate fabric. "A bit of Prada, a bit of Comme," he says. He is 35 but looks 40, mostly because of his well-tended mop of prematurely gray hair. "It's not gray, it's silver," he says. "Silver is an active surface, a lenticular surface that glimmers and sparkles and changes color. Last year, I predicted that the new G4 was going to be silver. I was right."

In May of 1999, Wales, whose firm, Ministry of Culture, tracks youth trends for corporations, became Toyota's official coolhunter. Digital camera in hand, he scours the streets

of Antwerp, SoHo, and other chichi enclaves, keeping Toyota's top brass apprised of hookah parlors and BattleBots, Krav Maga and edamame. Then he writes sumptuous, coffee-table-worthy reports on his findings. "Some companies will go to a coolhunter, and what they'll get is endless reams of verbiage," Wales tells me. "That's the Marriott version. What you're seeing here is sort of the Ian Schrager version."

Snapshots are how one man tracks cool. But does this kind of scattershot stakeout convert to cultural and (actual) currency?