

But where does taste come from?

By Christine Lemmer-Webber on Sun 30 August 2026

Another day, another blogpost [reflecting on "taste"](#). It's not a bad post, but there are a billion of these now, and the irony of that is that this has tended to leave them fairly tasteless and bland for me.

We've probably all seen [the Rick Rubin meme](#) by now. Or maybe even better, [the parody of the trend](#). People are afraid they can't do useful things anymore, because AI can do them better, so they hope they have some sort of edge over it with taste.

To highlight the [previous post](#)

But what is taste? I would define it as some kind of sense of aesthetics and judgment coming from experience and intuition, being able to say whether something is good or bad without necessarily being able to explain why.

This seems like a reasonable explanation. "Aesthetics and judgement"... coming from "experience and intuition". Okay, interesting.

But *where does taste come from?* Every now and then there's a famous Rick Rubin or (sigh) Steve Jobs type character, who is a non-practitioner who undoubtedly *does* move mountains around their sense of taste, and so I think lots of people are hoping they can rely on maybe being such an exceptional figure themselves.

But it's important to realize that in the case of Rick Rubin or Steve Jobs, these are people who had strong taste who were also in positions of power and themselves were *curating practitioners who themselves had exceptional taste*. Which means that in order to produce something interesting and exceptional, they were curating *practitioners* who operated *away* from the averages who did the actual work.

But if your practitioner is an LLM, then you're not a Steve Jobs or a Rick Rubin. Your practitioner *is* the averages.

So you'd better have exceptional taste yourself, and here's the thing: ultimately, taste in terms of *practice* has to come from *doing the practice yourself*, and trying and failing and thinking something will be interesting and then you find you actually don't like it, or you try something and you end up having a wonderful accident or make up for some sort of thing that you're *not*

good at, and that becomes your style, and your style defines the taste and preferences that you shape around it.

So... I'm afraid that to develop taste, you're going to need to spend a lot of time *not using generative AI* to develop it. Which a lot of people are finding themselves having a hard time motivating themselves to do.

In fact, I'd even say that *using* generative AI tools results in becoming nose-blind to their bad smells. And speaking of taste, here's an interesting example: here's an article called [Taste Is All That's Left](#) which sounds not only tastelessly like every other article advocating for "taste" right now, but even worse, has all the smells of an LLM-written blogpost. It rose to the top of Hacker News and Lobste.rs and in both, people were pointing out left and right how much it sounds like it was LLM written. But the author swears it wasn't written by an LLM! And I believe them, but it *sounds* like it was written by an LLM. Why?

And so the most interesting part to me was that the author themselves acknowledged the problem with a good heaping of self-realization in [a thread on lobste.rs](#):

AI detector or not, I have been *feeling* the same drop in quality and insight in my posts and I, well, can't pretend there hasn't been a shift. I'd be lying to you and to myself if I had said I didn't see it. Consequently, I have re-read my post after it hit Hacker News and a friend kindly informing me of it. I'll tell you this much: the only thing I had in my mind was "how the FUCK did I write like this". hilariously, I was thinking "I have not written anything with real depth in a while" to myself earlier this week.

[...]

I have spent a good while contemplating whether it was the machines that write like me, or if I write like the machines. I hesitate to say I think it is a combination of both. What I did do---without ever clocking it as a decision---was spend a year reading the things and working next to them daily, until their "cadence" was part of my mental archive.

Props, first of all, to the author for taking the feedback well. But also, this last sentence is really interesting to me, because it hints at something worse than just "you need to develop taste before you start using generative AI": that the use of such tools can *actively weaken* your sense of taste.

So the best way to retain taste is probably to use these tools as sparingly as possible.

Of course, which means that those practitioners who *don't* use genAI will become the favorites for the machine to consume and ingest. See also [David Revoy's piece on the matter](#).

So, your best defense against the blandness machine is to largely not use it. But if you produce something good enough, the blandness machine will eat you anyway.

I don't know any solution to that, but I guess: keep making weird art. It's the best way to stay interesting, and the best way to add taste to this increasingly averaged world.

Tags: [taste](#) [llms](#) [vibecoding](#) [ai](#)



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