

Fashion . . . So it Goes

by Jason_Love

In junior high I was named "best dressed" in drama class, which immediately concerned my father. Fortunately, the testosterone kicked in and by twelfth grade my taste had so declined that "matching" merely meant that all my clothes were wrinkled.

For whatever reason—cultural, spiritual, X-chromosome deficiency—men are clumsy dressers. Most days it looks like we get dressed in the dark. While intoxicated.

When a woman stands in the closet, she is planning, inventing, dreaming. When a man stands there, he is wondering what time the game starts. So we keep things simple—three or four outfits max. Compare to women, who may wear that many outfits IN THE SAME DAY.

Men's fashion woes date back to the beginning, when Eve took one look at Adam covering and said, "No, that bougainvillea just doesn't work for you. It's so last season."

What men could really use is Garanimals for Adults so all we have to do is match the giraffe tops with the giraffe bottoms, the lion belts with the lion shoes!

The question is, Can men be taught to dress, or is it simply their nature to mismatch? We go In Search of: Fashion and a Peril for Men.

Meet Bob Carriere, owner of Carriere Menswear and guru to all who climb his mountain. Bob's store smelled like the inside of a Ferrari; and as with Ferraris, I tried not to touch anything. Bob deals in dressy garb from Italy—Zenga, Etro, and some you can't pronounce so don't even try.

Bob's Canali shirt peeled back to reveal a chic yet manly pendant, and his blue jeans flared at the bottom. He reclined against a rack of snakeskin shoes with an easy air, Pierce Brosnan without the groupies.

"How you dress," says Bob, "tells the world how to treat you. Your clothes say quite a bit."

My own outfit said, "I live with grandma." Bob suggested that my sweater could be smaller and slightly less blue, and that my khaki pants be "pressed" (I believe they have special machines for that).

This from a man who was selling pants WITH HOLES IN THEM.

"What's the difference," I asked, "between designer holes and the ones that occur naturally over time?"

"About two hundred bucks," said Bob.

And there's the rub: To be in style, you have to go shopping, a decidedly female activity. Most guys try to finish the entire year's shopping in one afternoon. In the same department store. Whatever's on sale is what's in fashion.

At Carriere Menswear we met Dylan Graham, owner of Tux n' Tails and all-around snazzy dude. Dylan had a savoir-faire that allowed him to wear sandals and still look more dressed up than I. So it goes.

“Men,” said Dylan from his fashion pulpit, “don’t spend enough money on clothing or health or foreplay.”

I was afraid to ask what he meant.

Dylan and I stayed after to discuss fate versus free will; and for a guy inclined to pardon the most egregious human error, he was downright hostile about people who wear brown belts with black shoes.

“You just don’t do it,” he said. “It goes against the order of things.”

Dylan would like to add that at no time is it appropriate, even in jest, to wear socks with your sandals.

Meanwhile, on the Other Side of the Racks

Most guys don’t share Dylan’s passion for fashion but concentrate instead on not looking stupid. I flagged down a few such blokes at the mall, where the teens were so casual that you could see a good portion of their underwear. (Do they try on new clothes to make sure they don’t fit?)

I grabbed 16-year-old Christian Belsky because he was the only one not talking on a cell phone. Chris wore an upscale T-shirt with baggy jeans and a fresh pair of steps’ shoes, people, shoes.

“It’s always a good idea,” said Chris, “to start with a nice haircut.”

This did not bode well for my balding peers.

Bill Henry, 41, had just bought a business suit at Macy’s. He was cruising the mall in a pair of Adidas Goodyears and flow-fitting jeans. None of his underwear showed.

I asked Bill to evaluate my own ensemble, which he did with the tough-love approach of Dr. Phil.

“I’d talk first about the color of that sweater,” he said. “It’s just not masculine enough. And those shoes—you must really like them, judging by their age.”

Bill was right: I kept these shoes only because we had been through so much together. In fact, I’ve got shirts that won’t leave my wardrobe till the threads wear down to their original fibrous state and blow off my body in a strong wind.

Local Katie Feltes said, “Most guys don’t take the time to dress well. They just roll out of bed and throw on a hat.”

In their defense, these same men do pause at the hat rack to ask, Which says more about me—the Nike

symbol or the Hooters owl?

Katie says that too much style is also a turn-off because then you run the risk of looking metrosexual (when a man sleeps with women but is, for all intents and purposes, gay).

“Never dress better than your girlfriend,” says Katie. “Ever.”

Back in the Closet

When I returned home, I couldn't look my clothing in the eye. The shirts seemed to slouch on their hangers, and my shoe rack smelled like the seventies. Sliding through the hodgepodge, I realized that my only hope was a closet fire.

They say that fashion takes only common sense, but that begs a question: Who the heck are they and why are they making our lives miserable? Is there a round table where They decide what is in like the Cool Committee from high school?

I suspect that They have been in the business so long that, like Roger Ebert at the movies, they're no longer qualified to judge. How else can you explain those faded-thigh jeans that make it look like you've been dragged behind a horse for several miles?

If you ask this frumpy dresser, fashion is whatever makes you feel more like you. As good as it feels to gussy up, I myself am tired of being profiled by the fashion police. If I followed their instructions, my wardrobe would finally dwindle down to one article of clothing—a straitjacket.

Remember, guys: Today's fashion is tomorrow's dirty laundry, and there's nothing as stylish as owning what you've got. Just don't outdress your girlfriend.

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