



**I** ENJOY DISPENSING SARTORIAL advice because I have always been interested in the gradual shifts and changes in society in which fashion figures centrally. Besides, I was heavily involved in a retail business that thrives on fashion. So I have always made a conscious effort to educate myself in its history and evolution, not only in the mainstream West, but also in the peripheral East. Western fashion moves very quickly, in fact by the season, and so it is important to be consciously contemporary in order to be authoritative. This constantly changing landscape means there is always a plethora of opinions to consider, but essentially my advice would be to opt for the sensibilities of US *Vogue* under the laser sensor of Anna Wintour. Her thermometer is mercury sharp, and others disagree with her at their peril.

Fashion in the East moves much more slowly. For example, the djellaba and the burka have not changed at all as the years have gone by, and the Arab wardrobe today might well be identical to that of the time of Lawrence of Arabia. Indeed, the biggest changes of fashion in the past 50 years in the East – from the Middle East and across Central Asia to East Asia and even Japan – have come from the West. This infiltration is manifested through two items: gym shoes or trainers; and jeans. Trainers are now the universal footwear, whether in the city, town, desert, mountains or forest. They are worn alike by steady urban dwellers and precarious refugees running away from conflicts. Jeans have also become one of the most worn items in the world. The only question for the cognoscenti is whether the ripped versions invented in the West will now spread to the East, where people expect their clothes to last, and not

deliberately have them torn across the knees and the lower cheeks of the posterior.

Sartorial advice is led by icons, too. Coco Chanel banged on about simplicity as beauty and was renowned for her unfussy colours, cuts and patterns. She also put women in men's clothes, creating the androgynous look. In turn, Yves Saint Laurent was credited with putting women in trousers – although Chairman Mao did that before him in China, but possibly with a lesser sense of fashion, and certainly of the crease. Now, today's far-reaching social media helps fashion voyeurs to see what their contemporary style icons are wearing, from the Beckhams to Kate Moss, or from Kanye West to, at the other end of the spectrum, the Duke of Edinburgh. The reason why they lead is because of their sense of confidence: the confidence of mix and match, the confidence of believing that what they wear looks best on them, and the confidence of not really caring what other people think.

Mind you, some people end up with too much confidence. I am thinking of Liberace and Karl Lagerfeld and Kim Jong-un and Fidel Castro, for example, and their signature attires. The dress sense of these extraordinary people is immediately recognizable. I only wish someone had had the guts to tell them that what they were wearing was a bit over the top. I once had lunch in a tent in the Sahara with Colonel Gaddafi. He was in full uniform, with enough medals to decorate the Spartans at Thermopylae. The tassels from his epaulettes would not have looked out of place on Barbara Cartland's drawing-room curtains, and I certainly didn't dare ask who his barber was, as his hair dangled down like a tangle of seaweed, still less his facial beautician, as his cheeks looked like the surface of the moon. Another dictator, Robert Mugabe, once came to my house for lunch in the height of summer in Hong Kong. It was 33 degrees C with 98 per cent humidity. He arrived in a tie and a three-piece suit. I implored him to disrobe, perhaps not so much because we were going to be eating in the garden, which was very hot and humid, but

because his tailor must have been blind, and I didn't want the president lunching as a scarecrow.

There are, however, those who care a great deal about how they look. I was once on a boat anchored adjacent to another one belonging to a very good friend of mine who had P. Diddy, or Puff Daddy, staying on board. We all went ashore for dinner, and afterwards were about to troop off to a club for a nightcap when P. Diddy said he wanted to return to the boat first. I was rather curious why the rap star wanted to do that, as it involved getting into a tender and going out to the anchor before coming back again. His host was able to enlighten me that P. Diddy always wanted a change of clothes upon a change of venue. Not only that, he was given an extra cabin on the boat in which an ironing board with a valet was on permanent standby to facilitate these changes. P. Diddy, incidentally, was already dressed meticulously in an immaculate white suit with a silk cravat and his signature dark shades. Anyway, he came to the nightclub after about an hour, in a gleaming black suit and another silk scarf, which had obviously been pressed very shortly before.

In any case, the internet age has led to the traditional manifestation of wealth through clothes being superseded by 'geek chic'. Steve Jobs was one of the most visible proponents of this form of attire, in his jeans and pumps. So too were Bill Gates and other cyber billionaires such as Mark Zuckerberg, with the result that formal wear is no longer de rigueur among those for whom the internet has brought fame and fortune. But I am not sure I like this trend of dressing down. A dress code shows respect to others. I also believe strongly that society as a whole looks so much better when people take the trouble to dress properly. It's a rite that has done well for mankind. Confucius, who wrote his *Book of Rites* 2,500 years ago, encouraged people to respect formality as a good way of living. So I hope the pendulum might swing back the other way, and that those who can afford it take trouble over sartorial guidelines. Just remember Cary Grant or Stewart

Granger, or even Edward G. Robinson in his roles as a gangster: they all wore beautifully tailored suits and they looked incredibly smart. The same with Sophia Loren or Ingrid Bergman: they always looked resplendent in their dresses. And that is the joy of fashion: though it might sometimes be regarded as superficial, it has nonetheless been very effective in creating an endless kaleidoscope of visual feasts, not only on celluloid, but also in reality, which is living art.

## ACCESSORIES

**If unmarried, which is the proper hand on which to wear a signet ring? In what direction should the initials be facing – towards the wearer, or away? Same with initialled cufflinks – towards the wearer, or away?**

The signet ring, which has always been the symbol of the Sloane Ranger or the British upper-class twit, should always be worn on the last finger of the left hand. But snobbery dictates that it is one's family crest and not initials that should be inscribed on it. If you have no family crest, you shouldn't really be wearing a signet ring. If tortured for advice, I suppose the crest should face oneself, as it should be worn for pride and not for flaunting.

**Is wearing cufflinks on a single cuff shirt a complete sartorial no-no?**

Not at all. Double cuffs are only *de rigueur* on dress shirts. I have many shirts with single cuffs made by Charvet, the best shirt-maker in the world. In the company's bespoke room above its shop overlooking the Place Vendôme in Paris, Mademoiselle Anne-Marie Colban, daughter of the owner, is able to offer

104 shades of white. If she can make shirts with single cuffs for cufflinks, I'd be foolish to worry about any sartorial faux pas.

### **Wristwatch – battery, automatic, manual wind, or none? Or pocket watch instead?**

Nobody carries pocket watches any more. For those who do, they are usually pompous types who want to show off their gold or silver chain. However, I am prepared to make an exception of Hercule Poirot.

### **What would be your personal choice for a formal and everyday watch?**

I always prefer a thin watch to a thick one, if only because I want to wear it comfortably under my cuffs. The great Gianni Agnelli, who owned Fiat and was probably as stylish a man as Coco Chanel was a stylish woman, always wore his watches over his cuffs, which eliminated the use of cufflinks, which I rather like. Nowadays, the fad is for watches to be obese, not unlike most of the Russians and Arabs and Eurotrash who are invariably seen to sport these huge chunks of watch.

I also bemoan the disappearance of the fluorescent watches that use radioactive sources. In these days of pathetic health and safety, the mere suggestion of radioactivity would send regulating busybodies spinning, even though the amount employed was always infinitesimal. But, thankfully, the use of gas has managed to replace the radioactive method, and there is now a handful of watches which indeed fluoresce brightly in the dark.

But one must be careful about such efficient illumination. A friend of mine once woke up in the middle of the night, looked at his brightly lit dial and shouted out alarmingly: 'Oh my God,

I have got to go, I have to get home, it's so late.' Then a familiar voice was heard to say: 'Darling, you ARE home.'

### **Wallet – in hip or breast pocket?**

A wallet in a hip pocket will make your trousers look odd because hips on trousers are usually fairly tight, and therefore putting anything in them will create unattractive bulges or strange-looking contour lines.

**I wonder if you can advise me on the best article in which to carry one's spectacles, cigarettes and lip gloss when staying at large country houses, rather than to lumber around with my Fendi handbag from room to room, which seems rather Miss Marpleish and deeply middle class.**

A minor member of the British royal family once observed to me that the best way to conceal one's spectacles/cigarettes/lipstick is to shove them all into a pair of gloves which one would casually carry, but not wear, in one hand. Placing this pair of gloves on the table, which by itself suggests a sense of occasion, especially if they were made from understated embroidered black silk, would look very chic, doubly so with the dispensation of any bourgeois bag.

**What about briefcases/attaché cases? Or are you so elevated that some underling carries the briefcase that contains the fat enamelled fountain pen with which you sign deals with flourish and elan?**

This might well be your fantasy but it is not my reality. I do use a fountain pen, but it is thin and made of plastic by Pelikan,

which produces nibs so smooth they glide across even lavatory paper. The only enamel I come into contact with is when, after a hard day's work, I slide into a nice hot bath, resting my nape on this magical paint half-in and half-out of the water, feeling that unique sensation of equilibrium between the heat of the water and the coolness of the coated cast-iron bathtub.

I do not carry briefcases or attaché cases, because I am not a civil servant, and when travelling I prefer a shoulder bag slung across the opposing shoulder. The only time I might dream of having a lackey is whenever I arrive at Gatwick airport, which is too mean to provide any free trolleys at its departure terminal. Neither are there any porters to speak of, unlike every airport in the US. Instead, passengers are expected to lug their own loads and walk a fair distance up an incline before entering the building. As none of my old-fashioned suitcases are fitted with wheels, I end up checking in looking like a gorilla with arms stretched long by weights.

## NECKWEAR

**For someone so opinionated on style, why, in your byline photo, are the handkerchief in your pocket and your tie of the same material? I always thought that this was a real no-no.**

In all my life, I have never worn a tie and a pocket handkerchief of the same material. Of course it's a no-no. But then you are too clever by half by suggesting that I have done so. If you were to look closely, my tie came from Voyage, the shop that refused entry to Madonna and eventually went bankrupt; and my pocket handkerchief came from Etro, from one of its ladies' scarves which I cut in half. I must give you the name of my oculist.

**What is your view on bow ties? They seem to be well regarded in the US but not much in evidence in Europe.**

Bow ties look ridiculous, unless you are either Bob Hope or Robin Day, who looked ridiculous – the former with a hockey-stick chin, and the latter with Bavarian eyebrows. Bow ties are also rather effeminate, as they look exactly like a butterfly. Why would any real man wish to wear a butterfly round his collar?

**I am responding to your disdain for men wearing a bow tie. I am reading the August copy of *Vanity Fair* magazine and there you are in Robin Birley's Loulou's nightclub, resplendent in a beautiful bow tie. Since you say that bow ties are de rigueur with clowns, you now complement the trio of Groucho Marx, Jerry Lewis and Pee-wee Herman.**

I was, you fool, in my black tie, which is an evening ensemble with a black bow tie as a constituent part – totally different from a single non-black bow tie worn in the day with anything you like.

**Here's a new poser for you. I was told by my late Edwardian-era uncle that it is incorrect to wear a tie plus a breast-pocket handkerchief, 'an unfortunate habit affected by cads and well-dressed savages'. He proclaimed that a handkerchief in the top pocket is acceptable with a sports jacket or blazer with open-neck shirt. The real art, sadly forgotten by me, is wearing a hanky up your sleeve; pulling the handkerchief out with a flourish to mop up a spill or tearful dinner partner. You may be the only person who knows the trick of keeping the aforesaid linen or silk up the sleeve so it's available but won't, in the normal course of events, fall out.**

You cannot nowadays go round tucking your handkerchief up your sleeve as if you were Oscar Wilde. It is a fashionable affectation well past its sell-by date. It's like wearing a cravat with an open-neck shirt or having a saw-tooth pocket handkerchief without being the Duke of Edinburgh. As for your Edwardian uncle, he might have been more correct to observe that a tie and a breast-pocket handkerchief should never match. There are those who put on matching sets whom I imagine pull the handkerchief out of their breast pocket only to find its end attached to the tie! Study the Prince of Wales. He always wears a tie plus a breast-pocket handkerchief, but of course always different and never matching! Would your pompous uncle have called him a cad or a savage? I rather think not.

### **Can you tell me the best way to store neck ties?**

Not rolled up à la small bundles of hay and stuffed tightly into a drawer – if only because you then can't see the tie properly, and when one is extracted the whole lot collapses, with the inevitable bother of having to roll them like sushi back into order. Hang them, for God's sake!

### **Do you ever wear a cravat?**

Egad, no! Certainly not since Yves Saint Laurent died.

**I would not expect you to wear a cravat, but what are your views on the custom among men to wear suits without a tie? Once the preserve of hedge-fund managers circling Berkeley Square or members of the Israeli Knesset (at least**

**they have the excuse of sweltering heat), it seems that most men have now succumbed to this trend.**

It started with the yuppies, who regarded themselves as smooth enough to shed the standard City dress code of suit and tie. Next came the internet geeks who wanted to copy the likes of Steve Jobs and Bill Gates by ditching ties and wearing jeans. So now it is acceptable to go round, and even be admitted to a snooty nightclub, in an open-neck shirt without a tie. For the Israeli Knesset, or other parliaments in hot places, you are right that heat is the main reason why their members don't wear ties. In the case of Greece, it might be because none of them can afford one lately and are really feeling the heat under their collars.

## **DRESSING FOR HOT WEATHER**

**Is it ever permissible for a gentleman to wear sandals or even flip-flops? What footwear can one don during hot weather and still retain one's dignity?**

When Jock Delves Broughton shot himself in the heat of Africa, he did it in a three-piece linen suit because he was a real gent, suffering a wife who was blatantly unfaithful to him. Imagine asking him to wear sandals or flip-flops. Perish the thought!

Certainly, in his generation, particularly during the days of the Raj, everyone dressed immaculately in layers, in steaming conditions in that subcontinent. And they all looked pretty dignified to me. Yet we have all become rather sloppy in our dress sense, mistaking casualness for comfort, and conflating comfort with elegance. I just can't help thinking how elegantly people dressed in the old days. They must think that we are now all

pansies, demanding air-conditioning everywhere – and, worse, slobs who shuffle around in open shoes.

**I am writing to ask what you think of white suits. I am undecided as to whether they are acceptable or beyond the pale. Naff or natty? Before I commission my tailor to make one, I thought that I should discover whether or not one forms part of your wardrobe.**

White-white is not on. Off-white begins to be acceptable but there are really two antecedents for an off-white suit to be acceptable: first, it has to be in linen, and linen that is lined so that it does not crumple easily and become Berlusconi. Second, it should not be a suit – in other words, the shade of the off-white should be slightly different between the jacket and the trousers. You will notice that the Prince of Wales gets it spot on whenever he sports what might appear to be a white suit, but on closer examination, it's really a pair of off-white trousers and a slightly different shade of off-white jacket. For maximum effect, both pieces of garment should be used and old, but immaculately and freshly pressed. Needless to say, the trousers should have turn-ups of 1¼ inches, and the bottom no wider than 17¼ inches, and never have a break on the trousers, so as to be cool in a climate for which a white suit is required.

**While cruising through Tuscany's vineyards as a wine journalist, I could not help pondering about a proper though temporary place for sunglasses in short moments of sun-absence. Should I hold them, which I find inconvenient and slightly annoying, or should I hang them**

**on the upper button of my shirt, which I consider not-viewy?  
Thank you.**

Learn from Karl Lagerfeld how and why he keeps his sunglasses on even in the darkest eclipses. But I suspect his propensities are different from yours, and since yours clearly lean towards the vino, your best solution is to act like a sommelier. So dangle your sunglasses at the end of a chain round your neck. I know this might look a bit old-fashioned. On the other hand if you were to carry the *tastevin* as well as your sunglasses, you would be able to boast about the practical ingenuity of killing two birds with one stone. And if you were to be dramatic, you might even add to the chain a small napkin with which to do your wiping of both. But try not to clash the colour of your napkin with your shirt.

**Not long ago, Tom Ford remarked that shorts are not for gentlemen (or something along those lines). Do you wear shorts?**

Of course I wear shorts when I am on holiday on a beach, around the pool, on the deck of a boat or walking in the heat, none of which has anything to do with being a gentleman or not, but being practical and sensible. What Tom Ford might be referring to is the wearing of shorts in town, which indeed is unacceptable, if only because most of us have rather unsavoury hairy shins. They are usually a shocking sight. In Hong Kong, where I have a private club, I had to send out warnings to members not to wear shorts, even in the tropical heat, because men who choose to wear them seldom, if ever, have a shapely physique. But of course I would make an exception for the likes of David Beckham, who would look perfect coming into the club in his shorts as a mega-football star. How amusing would that be! If he did so, I am sure all of us

would burst into spontaneous applause. So there are occasions when even Tom Ford could be wrong.

**Advice please on what colour shirt to wear in a hot climate (or a tight corner). I love blue shirts, but they do tend to show perspiration.**

From a scientific point of view, white for a hot climate because it reflects heat. Any darker shade will absorb heat. Ergo, common sense dictates the lightest colour that also camouflages sweat. Certainly, no patterned shirts, particularly floral ones à la Hawaiian short sleeves. They are unacceptable at all times except for Jack Lord when he was alive.

**What are your views on linen as a summer fabric?**

I like the thought of wearing linen but abhor the reality. Linen garments tend to crease the moment you put them on. Crumpled linens always remind me either of all those majors with moustaches in the days of the Raj, or modern Eurotrash self-conscious about their Armani jackets. I can tolerate the former because their linens were invariably multi-ply and therefore less creased, and in their three-piece suits they stand for that stiff upper-lip spirit of ignoring the tropical heat and humidity for the sake of sartorial propriety. And there is something romantic about linens in the tropics. Creased-up linen sheets inside mosquito nets in Kenya, say, evoke for me the languid allure of a beautiful and young Greta Scacchi as the mistress of *White Mischief*, replete with forbidden romance and illicit mystery. So for me, I wouldn't mind linen sheets with which to improve my dreams.

The Eurotrash, however, usually contrive to accentuate the

crumpledness of their single-ply linen but end up looking anything but smooth, which is how they want to look. The Japanese designer Issey Miyake went further and constructed deliberately crumpled clothes with permanent accordion creases for those who don't mind walking round like failed pieces of human origami. His clothes are also made to be screwed up into small balls or rolls for ease of packing, the ingenuity of which German *Fräuleins* or Americans with plastic surgery are keen to brag about and demonstrate, often with tedium.

### **Is it OK to go sockless when wearing a suit?**

It is highly unpleasant to look at any sockless person, especially with a suit because it would highlight their naked ankles and possibly hair around the bottom of the shin. Both of these are as 'no-no' as Nanette! In any case, isn't the prospect of sweating in a pair of leather shoes altogether rather unsavoury? It doesn't take a great deal of imagination to smell the consequences.

## **SPECIAL OCCASIONS**

### **Is black tie for funerals?**

Yes, if you mean wearing a tie that is black. But not 'black tie' as an ensemble, which nowadays is regarded as formal wear, usually with ghastly bows already knotted, irregular lapels, dubious waistcoats and unacceptable colour handkerchiefs over the top pocket.

**Whenever I go to an open event like the Chelsea Flower Show, I am in a state of menopausal anxiety about my outfit. How can I make sure that I get it right?**

If you are not famous, nobody will care. Anyway, it's much more chic at the Chelsea Flower Show to appear in proper old and worn country wear, rather than a smart frock and a hat. Women overdressed, over-made-up and over-heeled should be arrested.

**Recently, I was invited to be the best man at my brother's wedding. I was told I had to wear a vest, but decided those who wear vests are better at serving drinks. So I decided on a cummerbund. I also ditched the studs and cufflinks. The bride was not happy. Thoughts?**

My thoughts are that you should know it is the ridiculous and cumbersome cummerbund that would have made you look like a waiter. The vest you mention is called a waistcoat, and at a wedding you would never wear a black one.

Instead, as for Royal Ascot, the waistcoat is de rigueur, often in light colours and smartest with contrasting piping. Studs? I hope you are referring to the stiff collar for which studs are required. So if you dispensed with them, you must have been in a limp collar. Cufflinks: one must have cufflinks on a pair of double cuffs for a formal occasion. No wonder it was not a good day for you. If you had been better informed and dressed, your sister-in-law might have been less displeased.

**The wedding party starts at 6.30pm, black tie. Should ladies wear long or short? I think long but advice is needed. Short would be longer than knee-length.**

When I founded and ran the fashion chain Shanghai Tang for seven years, I stupidly forgot to design a long dress that would transform itself into a short one, either by way of the bottom being lifted to the top or somehow camouflaged, or torn off

altogether. Such a dress, if done properly, would solve a lot of problems for women who seem to fret endlessly about long and short. It would save so much email space and telephone time in our increasingly vacuous world if women did not have to ring each other about what they wear. Unless you are incredibly famous and expect to be photographed all the time, and publicity is part of your livelihood, it makes no sense for mortals to over-fuss about how they dress. In the evenings, hardly anyone pays much attention to anything from the waist down. I would love it to be standard practice for women to come without any make-up or high heels, so that we can see them au naturel. Dressing up is designed to make women look prettier than they are, which is a deception; worse still, with a plethora of plastic surgery. I once shared a lift with a well-known socialite whose facial deception was rather alarming. I thought I was in a BMW wind tunnel.

**Where have you been? My run of lifetime luck continues as I get to meet the Potus. Please help! I don't know what to wear. I am only advised black tie is not required. Your wise counsel would be, as always, sincerely appreciated.**

You would need to elaborate on the circumstances of your rendezvous. There is 'meeting the Potus' and there is 'meeting the Potus'. If you are going to be in a reception of an ocean of people and might only get the chance to shake his hand, and perhaps pressing and not letting go his flesh long enough for a desperate snap, then I'd say it wouldn't matter what you wear. Nobody would notice or give a hoot. At these largish receptions, you would be wise not to wear black tie lest you be mistaken for a waiter. If, however, you are going to a small gathering or a fairly intimate repast (of no more than a dozen, say), then it would be perfectly in order to telephone the presidential social secretary

at the White House for the exact dress code: not to ascertain what you are not required to wear, but what you are asked to wear. You would look a bit old-fashioned if you turned up in cowboy boots and a lasso if dinner were in one of the state-rooms; or in full military uniform with miniatures while the Potus turns up in shirtsleeves and slacks and sneakers for relaxed al fresco dining.

Whenever in doubt, I would choose an ethnic garment such as a tailored Mao jacket which would pass cunningly as either formal (all buttoned up) or casual (unbuttoned). Such ethnicity also adds a touch of sophistication. But this could sometimes be turned into overkill if you were to be some incautious African chief, say. I have seen ‘fanfare’ attire that is more reminiscent of Eddie Murphy in *Coming to America* than any sartorial elegance. In the case of Barack Obama, he might even think, if you settled for flowing African tribal gear with rings jammed round your earlobes, that you were taking the mickey out of him.

### **When is it appropriate to wear ethnic garb – Scottish kilt, Chinese silk gown, Bavarian Lederhosen, etc. – outside one’s home country?**

It all depends whether you wish to bring attention upon yourself. You can certainly do that by dressing up, and you don’t need to go ethnic.

I remember the Duchess of York arriving at an event in a dress so incandescent, enormous and crumpled that she might have been mistaken for a work of art by Christo – or even for Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao.

That was a paradigm of how you don’t need to be in any ethnic mode and yet become the centre of attention. I often wear my Chinese silk or velvet outfit at black-tie dinners, and nobody

fusses. But a couple of exceptions: a ninja tight-fitting suit or a flowing burka would stick out like sore thumbs.

## IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

**I am in mild need of a new shooting suit but am hesitant in going to many obvious choices because of a reluctance to get threads similar to everyone else. You have a smart grey suit that I recall admiring. Where would you recommend? I imagine you to be the definitive expert on something so subtle and important.**

A new shooting suit is an open invitation to be mobbed up by others. Much smarter for your suit to be threadbare than for you to have new threads. Indeed, you will always find good shots in well-worn suits, often with noticeable darning or patches that *nouveaux* brands such as Dunhill put on to new jackets *ab initio*, which is exceedingly common. In any event, a gun would always wear an old Barbour over the suit. So why bother with a new suit? It is dangerous to dress too smartly at a shoot when you can't shoot properly. It's infinitely better to be a crack shot in shabby clothes than to be a crap shot in fancy gear.

**At a famous shoot, one of my fellow guests, known for his sartorial eccentricity, insisted that the only acceptable footwear for such an occasion was black brogues, citing as his authority one of our leading dukes. Thus clad, and despite clear advice to the contrary, he was forced to wade up to his calves through a freezing torrent of water. Should we admire his steadfast refusal to abandon his high standards; or should we ridicule his gesture as vainglorious foppery?**