

“Think

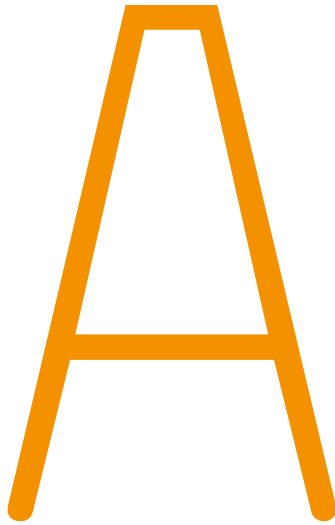
Dave Grohl

mixed with

Cary Grant”



Confused? You will be. We know what we want a woman to wear: short skirt, low-cut top, heels. But what do they – and don't they – find sexy on us? We asked **Christa D'Souza** to find out



n exquisitely cut navy suit over a light blue shirt. Black tie with the bow undone. Levi's 501s on a good butt. You know what you like on us; these are just a few of our favourite things on you. Some more? Let's see. My friend Charlotte likes an upturned collar. Another friend, Jo, likes the "preppy geography teacher look" of knackered but well-polished brogues and elbow patches. Many of us have a thing for a man in cashmere. Good cashmere, that is, preferably navy (what is it about navy?) and preferably not crisp-flecked or toothpaste-stained.

Tactility. Never underestimate the importance of that for us: the softness of multiple washed T-shirts, a good Harris Tweed, the nubbliness of an Arran sweater, the stiffness of a new shirt. Then there is smell. The combination, for example, of starch, whisky and cigarettes. Oh God, but don't get us going. What is it about smoking? What is it, for that matter, about driving? The way you reverse a car in rolled-up shirt sleeves, one hand on the steering wheel, the other across the back of our seat? The reversing camera: honestly, what a stupid, de-sexualising invention that is.

On the surface of it, a woman's definition of a well-dressed man probably does not deviate that much from yours. There are the obvious icons: Jean-Paul Belmondo in *Breathless* (1960); Cary Grant in *North by Northwest* (1959); more recently, Jude Law in *The Talented Mr Ripley* (1999). Then, of course, there is good old Don Draper. Ooh, yes, give us him with his shirt sleeves rolled up, mixing his lunchtime highball... And yet, is it not true there is a certain sort of man, Jon Hamm very much included, who could be wearing a Borat-style mankini and we'd still be wanting to jump their bones?

The impeccably well-dressed man. Thus far, I have to admit, he has never done it for me. The one spectacularly turned out man I ever actually did it with was my ex-husband and he, bless, turned out to be gay. This may

account on some level for the fact that the man I am with now — and have been with for the last 18 years — well, let's just say being immaculately dressed is not his top priority. But as soon as I first saw him walking up the stairs to my flat in his funny white suit, sleeves pushed up *Miami Vice*-style, *that* was the man I knew I was going to mate with.

Not that an immaculate, fastidious dress sense necessarily shouts "walker". Of course it doesn't, just as someone who doesn't have a clue in hell doesn't shout "sexy". But if being fashionably turned out is your thing, it needs to be tempered with a little insouciance, a little attitude, a little, *je m'en fous*. Have you ever noticed how a peacock always looks a little ludicrous, desperately trying to get the peahen's attention? There you go. To paraphrase the great writer and artist John Berger: men act, women appear. Not the other way round.

The female gaze is not that complicated. Like its male counterpart, it seeks Otherness rather than Sameness, and for all its theoretical appreciation of, say, a "granddad" cardie, a rolled-up chino and a chunky Tom Ford spectacle, it doesn't always find it sexy. Thus, the idea of you painstakingly putting your look together and leaving a mountain of outfits on the bed in your wake, the idea of you jostling with us for a go in the mirror, so you can see what you look like from behind, the idea of you closely following fashion, doesn't exactly make us melt.

My ex used to take more time to get ready of an evening than I did, which in retrospect ought to have been a clue. He also liked having his underwear ironed. Not as bad as having one's underwear sewn to one's shirts, as aristocrat Claus von Bülow used to, onesies style, to get that smooth line between trouser and shirt. Nor the man I once met on a boat who was overheard telling a member of the crew he needed his special Zimmerli briefs *hand washed*. "Statementy underpants," as a girlfriend of mine witheringly calls them: nothing worse.

But still. Trying too hard, being overly concerned, looking desperate to be photographed for a street-style blog (oh, God, just thinking about that!), a man who wakes up of a morning and thinks he'll try a bit of colour blocking — none of that turns us on at all.

On the other hand: a handmade shirt by Charvet which is crumpled, a hint of real as opposed to manicured stubble, a piece of manky string alongside the classic super-expensive watch, hair curling up against the collar of an exquisitely handcrafted Anderson & Sheppard suit, now you are talking. And on the subject of hair, what is it about you that the moment it looks

whoosh!, off you go to get it cut? A degree of unkemptness, an air of dishevelment (as long as it's all squeakily clean, more of which later), we're a sucker for that. Think Vincent Cassel all lived in and lined and yet tailored within an inch of his life. On the right man, in the right duds, maybe even a ponytail. Think Dave Grohl mixed with Cary Grant, if you will.

Style, then, bring it on. But it needs to be innate rather than learned and counterbalanced with a degree of Don Draper-style nonchalance. Not arrogance exactly, but an underlying knowledge that we will like you whatever you are in, and if you've put it together all by yourself, so much the better. Although there is something quite sweet about the idea of a man who needs to be taken in hand a little, it appeals to our maternal instincts and shows you have other stuff to think about. Nothing is worse than the man who smacks of female intervention such as the depilated cipher Shane Warne has become. That looks like domestic abuse.

Who else is sexy? Marlon Brando in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) or *On the Waterfront* (1954); James Dean in, well, anything. My favourite all-time filmic example of the species is Joe Dallesandro, he of the bandana and the ball-crushing chinos in Andy Warhol's cult classic *Trash* (1970). More latterly, there is always Ryan Gosling in *Drive* (2011), with that silk bomber jacket, those indigo Acne jeans and that toothpick dangling out of his mouth. A dangling toothpick, what a semaphore, somehow, for coolness and what a perfect counterbalance for those dinky driving gloves he wore throughout.

A spivvy detail here and there, like a gold tooth or a tattoo in a really hurty place (one

Nothing is nicer than a man's wardrobe filled with row upon row of exactly the same thing. You can be almost autistic in your choice of styles



Yes



Levi's 501s



Crew neck



Boxers

No



Skinny jeans



Deep V



Budgie smugglers

immaculately turned out man I know has his favourite football team's name tattooed on the inside of his mouth, for example) does it for some of us, although a velvet collar on an overcoat might be overkill.

And talking of coats, there are women who find a mac on a man devastating. I am not one of them. Ditto anything with a drawstring waist or a duffle. For me almost as bad, though in a completely different way, is the chisel-toed shoe with a seam down the middle of it. But then shoes and jeans are the equivalents of the bread and the loos at restaurants: if they aren't right, chances are nothing else will be.

On that thorny subject of jeans: please, nothing tie-dyed, embroidered, *ombréd* or overly distressed; I don't care how much it might be in vogue. As for skinny black ones encasing not so manly legs? Well, maybe if you are under 25 or married to a supermodel, but otherwise, got a bargepole? Ditto any that flap around the ankles. Kristen Stewart and I once decided that bootcut jeans are appalling, and she particularly hates chinos with *macramé* belts. As for leather: why would you wear leather on your legs unless you were Keith Richards? Or, need this even be mentioned, anything in any

way bulging or faded around the crotch area. Oh, the days of the Brutus Jeans... please do not let them make a comeback. Nothing is less attractive than a man who communicates through his penis. Unlike you, with your penchant for a cleavage or a short skirt, we are not quite as susceptible to the overt cue. If anything, it puts us off. It's why we overridingly prefer an old fashioned laces-at-the-front bathing short to a Speedo, and will almost always plump for a boxer as opposed to a brief. Perhaps there is a woman out there who prefers a brief to a boxer. If there is, do write in to *Esquire*, I am fascinated you might still exist.

We like a man who doesn't overly vary his look, too. Being able to do formal as well as casual, and casual as well as formal, is always a nice bonus. Look at the way Michael Fassbender looks as good on the red carpet as he does off. But if the dark polo neck under a jacket works for you (think Steve McQueen, 1968, in *Bullitt*) you can pretty much wear it every day for all we care. (In fact, please do: we love a uniform, all those boots to be spit-polished and so forth.)

Nothing, but nothing, smacks of insecurity more than a man who keeps changing his look. Nothing is nicer, conversely, than a man's wardrobe filled with row upon row of exactly the same thing. Indeed, you can be almost autistic in your choice of styles and labels. Sunspel only for T-shirts, Converse for sneakers, Church's for brogues and so on. As long as you know how to mix it all up, it shows conviction, it shows integrity, it shows you know what you like. Too much variety, the concept of different looks: leave that to us, please. Ditto an obsession with weight. You'd be surprised how many of us don't mind a bit of a pouch on the right bit of scaffolding. Or indeed how a spectacular six-pack, if it is not born out of either sport or genes, can look a little, well, gay. And if you do have pecs, please, no V-neck tees. Not even you, David Gandy. A nice crew neck, with no quippy signage and baby soft. That will do us just fine.

Counterbalance can be crucial. Think of the eyeliner Mick Jagger wore in *Performance* (1968), think of a beard on a baby face like actor Douglas Booth. A crumpled linen suit, meanwhile, can work, but the wearer must himself be uncrumpled enough to pull it off. Which brings us onto the subject of personal grooming, because if there is something that very definitely doesn't press our buttons it's a genuine slob. Cornflake toenails, grubby fingernails, crusty teeth: do not confuse this with insouciance. They are as inexcusable as "try-hard" underpants, or having a hand-washing addiction, or teeth that have been too obviously done. And woe betide any of you out there with any sign

of a pee stain on your crumpled light linen crotch. Decorum prevents me from telling you about the perfectly presentable office landlord I used to have to walk up the stairs behind, who didn't, it appeared, see the point of loo paper...

At the other end of the spectrum is the dedicated scruff, he of the sweater worn backwards and inside out, who nonetheless when he takes his mismatched socks off, reveals the most beautifully tended feet. Unexpected details such as

Nothing is worse than the man who smacks of female intervention, such as the depilated cipher Shane Warne has become. That looks like domestic abuse

this are like suddenly finding out you can speak another language fluently, or can play the piano or sing. It's such a deliciously sexy surprise. Unlike the banker type, all macho and thrusting in his suit from Monday to Friday, who come the weekend likes a nice sweater about his shoulders and immaculately pressed jeans. What is it about a certain man and mufti? And let's not even talk about the fortysomething dad in hoodie and sneakers and brand new jeans worn halfway down his bum like he was still in his teens. You know who you are. Please cease and desist.

In the end, of course, just as it is with us for you, it has much less to do with the clothes than the person in them. A confident stare, a laconic grin, the right laugh, a good gait (it's all in the knees), a Pied Piper effect on dogs and children, those are ultimately the things we pick up on. That female gaze is both more and less tolerant than you think. Look at the way Mark Ruffalo always gets his jackets slightly wrong or, indeed, the late John F Kennedy Jr, who had a "jewfro" and an absolute thing for a kaftan, and yet whom everyone — woman, man, rough-haired terrier — wanted to hump.

This irritatingly ineffable thing, charisma, can hide a multitude of sartorial sins. Not that that should be in any way an excuse. Confusing, aren't we? 🐾