

# Getting the boys to dress as real men

Men need to look of the time and not a victim of time, writes **Constance Harris**

**N**OTSOLong ago, I was at the funeral of someone whom I had loved very much when I was a child. As we stood around the graveside, talking, one of the men said to me, "Breda always read your pages. She was very proud of you." But, quick as a flash, another man commented, "Yeah, but you're always slagging off us old fellas telling us we don't know how to dress. So tell us now how we should be dressing!"

Men, just like women, want to feel young. Just like women, they can get lost in time and wonder what they should be wearing and, above all, what exposes whatever generation they are and how can they avoid giving the game away.

If they were women, they'd hand themselves over to the care of a boutique who would advise them. But trendy menswear boutiques don't exist, right?

I thought so until I visited Gentlemen Please of Glashtule. Owned and run by Alan Kelly, a thirtysomething veteran of the rag trade, this shop is a little gem.

"I have been in this business a long time. Everything in menswear is dominated by labels. I want men to buy classy looks where no one looks for a label," Alan told me. "Smart casual is perceived almost as a dirty word, but I do it well. Guys say to me 'I feel I could wear this in a meeting.' They dress classical and they look and feel good."

Gentlemen Please is full of richly-coloured clothes that are merchandised to make the fashion accessible. Sumptuous browns, golds and creams with flashes of sky blue, evolve into rails of slate, black and royal blue.

"Mine is a very boutique feel — the dark wooden floors, the lovely dark leather couch, antique pieces around the shop," Alan told me. "I've travelled a lot and I can tell you men's shops in Italy and Spain are lovely — they're rich-looking, decorative, classy. I wanted to do that here."

"Since I opened last year, I am finding a lot of my customers are smart casual dressers. Lots of people need clothes that can be worn in the day but that move into evening too," Alan told me.

I hadn't realised that men's needs so closely mirrored women's needs. I also realise that Alan, like me, is opinionated, which when you are looking for fashion, is what people want — direction.

"What you are getting in this shop is me. My experience, my knowledge, my time," he tells me. "Every man should have a fine gauge knit in his wardrobe. It's a classic piece. It can be worn to smarten up an outfit or bring it back a bit."

Alan picks out a lovely brown, three-button collar knit, puts it with a pair of honeycomb-coloured drill trousers and a chocolate-coloured jacket. It's gorgeous. I know I'd definitely rate a man dressed like this, big time.

He reaches for another knit, this time a turtle neck in pale gold — it's pure Steve McQueen.

"Very simple, very stylish, very rich," Alan says, like a full stop to what he has just pulled together. The look is smart, yet rogue-ish and Steve McQueen and George Clooney definitely do come to mind as the type of dressers who would love this shop.

In menswear fashion, shirts are the most important factor in an outfit. They, like the accessories women invest

in, are the main indicators as to "who" you are. Hence in Gentlemen Please you can get a great suit for about €345, but you could end up spending half that again on a stunning shirt and it would be money well spent.

"Shirts are to menswear what shoes are to women. They are the place to play," Alan proceeds to pull out about 10 shirts, some of which are designed by him, and they are just gorgeous.

**T**HE block of lots of continental-designed shirts are too small and most guys are bigger than that," Alan told me. "I now design my own range and I've got a fit in my shirts that men love."

"I think flat-front trousers are much more flattering to men. If a guy is short, pleats can shorten him, especially when the fabric sits bulkily."

So Alan does an extensive range of flat-front trousers in a choice of denim, chinos and lots of cords.

"I do a nice soft denim," he tells me. But what really impresses me is all the colour and textures going on. This is menswear?

"The look might be smart casual but I try to enrich it. I want to get menswear that's classical with a twist. I ask men 'what business are you in, what's your social life' and I work out from that what they need."

"It sounds like a lot of work," I say.

"Yes, it is, but I think the customer appreciates it. We're a small shop — we can do it."

"I think women want to get their men better dressed. Men are often too busy to shop so often their partners come in. But what women want and

what men are prepared to do are two separate things.

"Women like a look, they bring the man in. He will be slightly hesitant at first but once we build up a rapport he can see the possibilities. Once he starts to trust me, let me choose, and I get it right the first time, I've been surprised by the reaction. I mean, people are so grateful."

Gentleman Please stocks labels from all over the world, from Filippa K menswear, a cool new Swedish label which is for the more fashion-conscious guy to the elegant Italian Nomi Bon knitwear, Alberto jeans, Caramelo, a great Spanish range, suits by Ito, some Fred Perry, Versace Sports and Versus.

The prices are not outrageous either for what is a rich, stylish look with a lot of personal effort put in. Here you can get a long sheepskin leather jacket for about €900, caramel suede blazer €395, suits for €350, shirts from €80 to €180, shoes and boots for about €200.

"I'm very fussy and I suppose the good side of that is that I have to be satisfied that someone looks good before I let them out!," says Alan.

Alan Kelly will navigate fashion and pick out the bits that will enhance a man, make them look of the time and not a victim of time.

That is how men should dress.

**All clothes from Gentlemen Please, 1 Adelaide Road, Glashtule Village, Sandycove, Co Dublin. Clothes worn by actor, Alan Devine**

**Photography:** Barry McCall

**Styling:** Catherine Condell

**Hair:** The Grafton Barber

**Make-Up:** Noelle Martin