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The Eye of the Dragon

Television personality. Hotel and gaming CEO. Philanthropist. **Mitch Garber** has many roles but is still Quebec's best-kept secret

FASHION

Sneakerheads

Do athletic shoes make the corporate man?

“YOU CAN TELL A LOT ABOUT A MAN by his shoes,” goes the adage. These days, a gander at men’s footwear, whether at the office or black-tie events, often reveals not wingtips, oxfords or brogues but sneakers. Are fashion-forward men training for Olympic gold between business lunches and brokerage deals?

Not quite. While athleisure, the gym-meets-chic aesthetic, has taken womenswear by storm, sneakers have sparked a quiet revolution. Since the early 2000s, men have paired sports shoes with tailored suits, elevating the once sloppy gym shoe to haute heights. The look has grown in popularity in recent years, bolstered by designer labels such as Tom Ford and Balenciaga, which have shown classically suited models sporting sneakers on the runway.

Michel Brisson, whose two eponymous menswear boutiques in Montreal boast high-end labels such as Neil Barrett and Tiger of Sweden, believes the trend echoes a more relaxed approach to dressing among working professionals who also have an active lifestyle.

“It’s in keeping with work-life balance, so it’s only natural that it all comes together at some point,” says Brisson. “If they’re beautiful, well-designed sneakers, why not incorporate them into your work life?”

Well-designed, spiffy sneakers abound: from dressy versions of sports shoes — such as Converse’s Jack Purcell or the Adidas Stan Smith court shoes — to leather low tops by such upstarts as New York-based Common Projects and Toronto’s NobleSole.

But as versatile and polished as the new sports shoe may be, can it really bridge the gap between the personal and the professional, especially in more formal work environments?

“In a corporate setting such as banking or law, absolutely not,” says Dan Trepanier, creative director at Articles of Style, an online menswear shop based in New York. “When you’re handling people’s money or freedom, you should look nothing but sharp and professional. If you’re in a more creative industry, like the arts or technology, why not? It all depends on the message you are trying to send.”

And no matter the message, execution is key. “The trousers must be fitted to match,” says Brisson. “They must be a bit shorter and hemmed at the ankle.”

Brisson believes pairing sportswear with businesswear will gain more momentum, but Trepanier isn’t convinced. “I think we are gradually returning to proper menswear that exudes class, elegance and sophistication. It’s just going to take time for the extreme casual effect of the 1990s to wear off and allow us to return to a time when men dressed with purpose and occasion in mind.”

So will the sneaker-suit combination graduate from streetwear to a style professionals in more formal workplaces can adopt? We’ll have to wait and see, though according to JJ Lee, a Vancouver-based fashion writer, it has a way to go. “If it’s new, it can’t be considered traditional. If it can’t be considered traditional, it can’t be considered formal.” — *Katia Jean Paul*



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