

Episode 5: Designing for men

Transcript of the fifth episode of the podcast The Gianfranco Ferré Lesson titled “Designing for men”. MOOC “Unfolding Gianfranco Ferré”, Polimi Open Knowledge, Politecnico di Milano.

This is “The Gianfranco Ferré Lesson”, a podcast curated by the Gianfranco Ferré Research Center, dedicated to revisiting notes, lectures, and conference texts delivered by the designer throughout his career. Each episode explores a different theme through the words of Gianfranco Ferré himself, enriched by references to books and writings that expand on his vision, along with a rich visual archive that transforms words into images and visual concepts.

In the fifth episode, “Designing for men”, Gianfranco Ferré illustrates the creative process behind the making of a wardrobe and a menswear collection, privileging functionality while rejecting the conformity imposed by industrial fashion.

I clearly separate the mental approach to the problem of designing lines for different subjects. While women suggest to me intuition, imagination, a poetic breath, dressing men is, for me, based on reason and a certain kind of disobedience to which feminine composure is less inclined: take for example the use – at times unusual – of the light blue shirt, one of the few socially accepted remnants of an aesthetic theory that was once brilliant and allowed for black tailcoats as well as red or green vests. Instinctively, I don’t like the idea of fashion applied to men, as I don’t plan collections but rather design pieces that align with my own sensitivity and only assemble them at the end. I am convinced that menswear expresses complex signals to be interpreted, made of nuances and sensations, of attitudes that echo a man’s natural gestures or his historical inclination toward uniform, in the broadest sense of the term.

Experimentation in menswear is very subtle and requires from the designer not only precise logic, but latent and almost surreptitious reforms. Fundamentally, one must preserve a certain structure for men, and work within that through shapes and with technologies that prompt new and different behaviors. Of course, trousers remain trousers. But one can invent different pockets, ones that don’t disrupt gestures or habits, yet offer more comfort. Designing for men means throwing a spontaneous idea onto paper and then verifying it to the fullest extent of necessity, stripping it down to its essential elements.

Today, men allow themselves to be standardized, not so much by a need for classical, anonymous uniformity, but precisely by the dictates of fashion, which packages and classifies them from head to toe, with a diversity and originality that is industrialized and pre-assembled by others. I believe instead that men must take part in shaping their appearance, expressing something of themselves that is imposed neither by tradition nor by designers. An elegant man manages to appear entirely natural, even if every detail of his clothing is deliberate and not casual. He escapes fashion dictates, possesses a good sense of humor and a sufficiently critical spirit when it comes to dressing, yet he

is aware and respects certain rules of good taste and male elegance, privileging quality and style. A kind of “constructive disobedience”, in short. A man doesn’t want to be labeled by fashion, nor – like me – has the time or desire to think too much about it when getting dressed: in his wardrobe, he has plenty of gray flannel trousers, a trench coat, perhaps a loden, vests, a few blazers. As for shirts, I conceived them by following two distinct paths. The first is a return to a certain classicism that is the keystone of formal dressing: collars in two sizes; shirts designed to be worn with a tie; shirts with an ergonomically correct form. The second path is that of the shirt for sports and leisure. I focused on the typical codes of the vest, without resorting to the fake vest or layering. So: more pockets and lower pockets. Even the tuxedo has its reason. From that total black emerge faces that shine with intelligence and wisdom, or charm, or power, and others that do not. The tuxedo is a timeless solution, an expression of male taste that, like many others, refers back to the principle of the uniform: codified rules, acquired values, canonical forms that respond to precise needs and, above all, to the distinctly male desire for determination, essentiality, and formal balance. Those who feel the need for more imagination can look to the dandy tradition and renew it with attention to detail, above all, the vest, or materials like velvet, or unusual colors...

In conclusion, I like to think that I am working on a global project that “puts objects into orbit” around the planet man; not just clothing, then, but also accessories that require study and an intuition for form and modus, the mode or method, of designing and using the objects themselves. Glasses and ties that I love to design and collect, ties that are synonymous with tradition and avant-garde, but also with imagination and style: striped, polka-dotted, or paisley.

Sources

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