

STYLE EXPLORER: PRO CHOICE

Our columnist Arthur Tam talks about the need for progressive change in menswear

PHOTO: NICK CHAN

BY ARTHUR TAM



Arthur Tam is a stylist, former lifestyle editor of *Time Out Hong Kong*, frequent contributor to *Dazed and Confused*, and editor of *Fashion Statement*. Check out more of his work at www.arthurity.com.



Fashion Influencer Nick Wooster
PHOTO: EDWARD BETHELOT/GETTY IMAGES

Fashion is a powerful thing. Sure, there's the whole 'looking fabulous' element of it, but through history, it's also played an important role in redefining society and broadening the scope of self-expression.

This has largely been limited to womenswear, however. Sadly, in the men's sector, fashion is yet to find such an influential role because the industry is lagging behind our modern zeitgeist and has left us at a critical crossroad between progression and regression.

In terms of regression, on some levels, it feels like the men's market is shrinking. There's talk of getting rid of men's fashion weeks altogether and, off the catwalk, major men's publications like *Details*, *Free & Easy* and *Four Pin* have all bitten the proverbial dust.

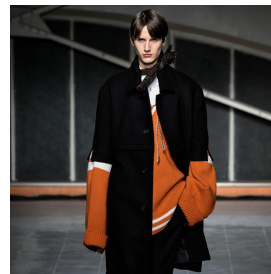
On the flip side, however, there's been an undeniable change in the male fashion psyche - a shift from style inhibition toward style exploration. This can be seen from the emergence of social media male fashion icons like Nick Wooster (610K Instagram followers), Mariano Di Vaio (4.8 million Instagram followers) and Han Huo Huo (five million Weibo followers). And don't think that you have to be in fashion to show off fashion: basketballer Russell Westbrook's Instagram has 4.3 million followers, and it's more focused on his stylish sensibilities than his incredible game.

These numbers show that the world is changing and fashion isn't just seen as frivolous pursuits for women, flowery gents, celebrities and men that knew not of the shame of being emasculated by a V-neck or above the knee shorts. The tide is shifting against schlumpy, entitled, hyper masculine men that have an ill-fitting wardrobe.

There lies the dichotomy: a tension between what the public desires and the direction of the industry. 'I find it a pity,' says revered designer Raf Simons in a recent *New York Times* interview. 'I wish [men's fashion] was where women's fashion is. Most men's brands only represent a classic wardrobe and then they give it a twist with styling.'

Simons himself has tried to revolutionise men's fashion, with, it should be said, great success. Gucci's Alessandro Michele (see [what he did for the Milan Fashion Week this year](#)) and Saint Laurent's Hedi Slimane have become revered designers of our time by showing the same kind of vision as Simons. Yet innovative luxury menswear and even edgy provocative style from independent designers like Shayne Oliver of HBA, Craig Green or Junn J don't trickle down to the mainstream the way womenswear does.

The question is - how can the industry translate cool designs from a few avant garde brands to broader everyday wear for men?



Raf Simons FW16
PHOTO: IMAGINECHINA

Don't get me wrong though, there is nothing wrong with a man that can rock a simple white T-shirt and jeans with a pair of black boots, or one who is sartorially sleek and suited, but men need more options. However, the industry needs to not only reflect the changing perception of fashion, but lead it. It should champion the view that fashion should be fun for men too.

I look forward to the day when menswear has elevated to the same level as womenswear. I find immense glee thinking about all the endless designs and potential styling options that could be available for men, everywhere. If I ever make it onto the red carpet, I won't be wearing a tuxedo. I'll be in a Batik print men's kimono by Edward Hutabarat with a wide brimmed hat. That's partly because I know someone is going to stick a microphone in my face and ask what I'm wearing. I want to have fun with fashion - and we deserve at least that. More importantly, I'm excited to see how fashion can influence and redefine the notion of masculinity because our current definition is putting a strain on the world.



HBA FW16
PHOTO: FRAZER HARRISON/GETTY IMAGES FOR NYFW: THE SHOWS

For a men's wardrobe update, check out [Shop The Boulevard](#)

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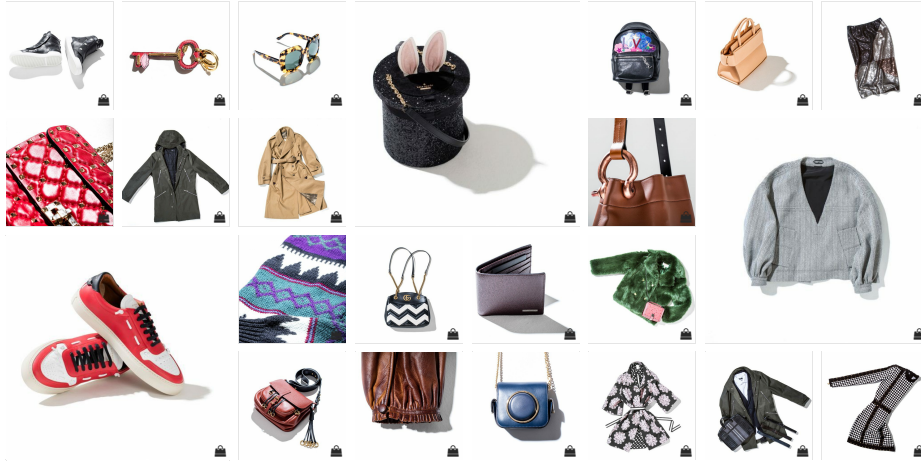
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