

INSIGHT
text: wong kee soon

George Clooney in *Up In The Air*, flaunting a classic Brooks Brothers suit and an Omega De Ville Hour Vision timepiece

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

Fashion's intimacy with film has been a part-time business affair since the late 20th century. Is its sartorial chemistry with viewers ready for a curtain call?

Marlon Brando became a trendsetter for the rebellious rock 'n' roll generation with his leather jacket and denim jeans in *The Wild One*



The upturned collar seen on Robert Redford in *Three Days Of The Condor* in the 1970s continues to feature on today's runways



In the 1930s, Clark Gable bared his chest in *It Happened One Night*, resulting in the decline of undershirt sales in the US

1930s Italian fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli once claimed that "what Hollywood designs today, you will be wearing tomorrow". The late designer to the stars wasn't too wide off the mark.

In Elsa's time, the power players were obvious: Film stars played fashion editors and film-makers provided the runway. The audience worshipped the clothes and even the lack thereof. Clark Gable's bare chest in *It Happened One Night* was reportedly linked to the decline of undershirt sales in the 1930s. Marlon Brando's biker jacket in *The Wild One* inspired the rebellious rock 'n' roll look, while Robert Redford's upturned collar style in *Three Days Of The Condor* continues to be seen on today's runways.

The James Bond franchise is another example of silver screen's fashion influence. Savile Row tailoring was marketed by Sean Connery in *Dr No* and Brioni manufactured tuxedos for Bond in five films from *GoldenEye* to *Casino Royale*. The Italian label even rolled out a 'Bond tuxedo' with the protagonist's name sewn into the lining. After Brioni, Tom Ford stepped in for *Quantum Of Solace*.

James Bond is the Casanova of product placements, ditching his Brioni suit and Rolex Submariner for a Tom Ford tux and an Omega Seamaster in *Quantum Of Solace*



PICTURE COURTESY OF OMEGA



The Untouchables



American Gigolo

PICTURES COURTESY OF GIORGIO ARMANI

Giorgio Armani came into prominence in the 1980s when he redefined the power suit on Richard Gere in *American Gigolo* and manufactured stylish nods for the cast of *The Untouchables*



The Ray-Ban Wayfarer became a must-have in the 1980s after appearances in films like *Risky Business*, *The Blues Brothers* and *Less Than Zero*

Cinema also made household names out of fashion designers. Take Giorgio Armani. After designing Richard Gere's wardrobe in *American Gigolo* in the 1980s, he was credited for transforming the perception of suits from boring business wear to sexy wardrobe essential. Since then, the Italian designer has been actively involved in films, manufacturing suits for the cast of *The Untouchables* (most notably Kevin Costner in pinstripe dark suits), George Clooney in *Ocean's Thirteen* and Christian Bale in *The Dark Knight* (both clothed in Armani's Hand Made-to-Measure line).

EASY MONEY

By the end of the 20th century, fashion labels and film producers had an understanding: Fashion needed air time and movie studios needed funds.

In 1982, Ray-Ban signed a US\$50,000-a-year deal to have its sunglasses appear in films and television shows, sparking a sales boom. Tom Cruise's Aviator and Wayfarer-wearing days in *Top Gun* and *Risky Business* even inspired the likes of Marc Jacobs and Oakley to launch similar designs. Likewise, Keanu Reeves' wraparound shades in *The Matrix* had viewers requesting optical shops for something similar.

This seismic shift in the 1980s changed the landscape of cinema, leading movie buffs to begrudge overt product placements as "one long advertisement".



Keanu Reeves in *The Matrix* flaunted bold shades, sleek long coats and suits, capping the last definitive look of 20th century cinema



PICTURE COURTESY OF LOUIS VUITTON

A decade into the new millennium and silver screen collaborations are now calculated business affairs involving subliminal communication, whether it be a few seconds of Aaron Eckhart unzipping his garment bag to reveal an Ermenegildo Zegna suit in *Love Happens* or the countless scenes involving the 11-piece Louis Vuitton luggage in *The Darjeeling Limited*.

A study by Arizona State University last year revealed that marketing firms spent US\$722 million on product placements in 2005. The number is expected to double this year.

Kristin M. Burke, author and award-winning costume designer of over 40 feature films including *Bangkok Dangerous* and *The Cooler*, believes that product placements hurt the integrity of the film but acknowledges that they help cut production costs. "If the vendor agrees to provide an extensive wardrobe for the cast in return for dressing their clothes on a lead actor, you do it. It saves thousands of dollars and everyone looks good," she says.

FASHION FIZZLE

Ironically, fashion houses' increased involvement in the film business could be a reason for the lack of iconic fashion influences in 21st century films. It's far easier to reference an iconic look from past movies than in present ones. Before, we had James Dean in *Rebel Without A Cause* in his leather jacket, white T-shirt and blue denim jeans; and The Beatles in *A Hard Day's Night* dressed in Savile Row suits. Today, we have costume designers like Danny Glicker and Albert Wolsky parading designer labels in *Up In The Air* and *Duplicity* respectively. Stylish, but hardly definitive.

Perhaps cinema's fashion impact off-screen simply doesn't exist anymore. The audience can easily gain access to style tips from music, the arts, literature and new media for style tips. Plus, it's not exactly seen as trendy to ape the look of a film character.

Marketa Uhlirova, founder of the Fashion In Film Festival, believes that this decline in influence is due to film-makers' conservative wardrobe approach. "Films set in our time are probably less striking in terms of wardrobe. It might have something to do with the realism of cinema now – characters can't be too blatantly fashionable or dapper-looking because they need to be believable," she says.

In the past, costume award-winning films like *Roman Holiday* (1953), *The Facts Of Life* (1960), *Travels With My Aunt* (1972) and *Fanny och Alexander* (1982) were lauded for their point of view in fashion. Ever since the late 20th century, the Best Costume Design category of the Academy Awards featured period films (with the exception of *The Devil Wears Prada*). Perhaps modern cinema is turning its attention to period theatrics, hence a waning interest on ready-to-wear inspirations.

So what's next for this on-off relationship? It'll be some time before you or even Hollywood's next Elsa Schiaparelli can figure that out.

The 11-piece Louis Vuitton luggage with animal prints was specially designed for *The Darjeeling Limited*, and make appearances in almost every scene

Customised Louis Vuitton luggage strategically positioned in the acclaimed musical *Nine*



NEXT CHANGE

What goes around comes around. The fashion industry is now making inroads into the film realm on its own terms

Tom Ford's acclaimed debut as a film-maker paved the way for fellow fashion designers to seek the celluloid stage to express their ideas

The film-fashion collaboration is experiencing a role reversal. From short films to full-length features, fashion designers-turned-film-makers are winning admirers with imaginative viewpoints, exploring paths that film veterans eschew.

Recently, Tom Ford's full-length feature debut, *A Single Man*, garnered numerous industry honours. Such recognition opens the doors for others to show their versatility: Chanel's creative director Karl Lagerfeld shot a three-and-a-half minute short film to promote his latest Spring/Summer collection and Christian Louboutin became a part-time writer/director with his eight-minute interpretation of Hitchcock's *Psycho*.

Meanwhile, other fashion houses have crossed over on their own terms. Prada took an artistic route by collaborating with Chinese artist Yang Fudong; Dior and DKNY attracted celebrities to star in short films; and Gareth Pugh, Yves Saint Laurent and Y-3 worked with lesser known film-makers to translate their collection to celluloid.

Chris Laverty, founder of *clothesonfilm.com*, wonders if this is a passing fad. "It is another way to sell clothes. The irony is that the fashion industry in its earlier days didn't want to be connected with cinema. At first, Frederick Scholte wouldn't even make suits for Fred Astaire because of his association with show business. Today, one might have to be a celebrity to be dressed by a designer," he says.



Yves Saint Laurent's creative director, Stefano Pilati, has been showcasing short films since 2008's Fall/Winter Homme collection. Pictured here is his latest Spring/Summer 2010 release, *Melinda*

PICTURE COURTESY OF YVES SAINT LAURENT



PICTURE COURTESY OF PRADA



Karl Lagerfeld directed a Bonnie and Clyde-like black-and-white short *Vol de Jour* to promote Chanel's Spring/Summer 2010 collection

PICTURE COURTESY OF CHANEL

Prada's collaboration with Chinese artist Yang Fudong spawned a nine-minute black-and-white short film, titled *First Spring*, which showcases its latest Spring/Summer line