

Dress to impress

By Rick Moorman

It's a human thing to people watch. Go anywhere in summer and terraces are full of people enjoying a drink and looking at, among other things, the fashion sense of others. I am no different. I take another kind of enjoyment at keeping an eye on the attire of businessmen, partly for professional reasons, but mostly because I want to understand what possesses a person to dress the way they do.

A great place to observe and, especially, to be surprised, is Schiphol airport. It's a mad rush, and people are weaving past one another in rapid tempo: local and international businessmen who are on their way either to represent themselves and their companies, or to make the deal of a lifetime. They are probably well prepared. They know their product or service, speak the necessary languages and know that, on the home front, people are counting on the professional approach and performance of their often highly-educated employees. At first glance, they all look the same in the hustle and bustle, but if one studies their nationality without even speaking to them.

Italians often dress with class. They definitely never wear black shoes—those are for funerals only—but chose fashionable brown leather, preferably in combination with a tightly-cut suit and no matter what, the trousers end atop those shoes. Of course, when you spot a businessman like that, it could just be a Dutchman with broad horizons who has immersed himself in the trends of the present day, but there are unfortunately, few of them. The Englishman is above all things, businesslike. He definitely never wears brown shoes—because he thinks them entirely too casual—but he is always in a suit, even if that suit is often a little too thick. The businessman who is always easy to spot is the average Dutchman. It usually starts with his suit. It doesn't sit right, the pants are usually too long and in most cases, the whole package is riddled with wrinkles. Then comes the combo: the mix that preferably involves as many different colours as humanly possible. A striped suit, a striped shirt and a brightly coloured tie, or even worse, a tie that he thinks is supposed to be funny and, as a rule the shoes are purchased with the last of the clothing budget. And the worst thing is the ski jacket, worn either on top, or in place of a proper winter coat. This is a travesty. Like it or not, your appearance is a front for whatever product or service you are selling and, at the unconscious level, you will be judged by it. In this column I intend to hold a mirror up to the style sense of the international businessman of today, and to wrap things up by trying to give you a little practical advice. It's up to you to decide if you need it or not, but if all I've done is make you think a little more about important part of your overall presentation, I will be satisfied. For the Dutch business traveller in the wrinkled suit, try this: hang your suit up when you arrive at your hotel, fill the bath half-way with hot water, close the door behind you and the steam will remove the wrinkles without you having to do any work. And when you're combining different articles of clothing, adhere to the maximum of three colours at a time. It's more relaxed and makes you and your represent, comes across more professionally.

Rick Moorman has several clothing stores in Holland and Belgium, he gives advice and readings over clothing in the business world.