



# 'A schlub in an expensive suit is still a schlub'

Availing of some style advice for men as part of the **Dublin Fashion Festival**, Eoin Butler discovers the colourful and costly world of high fashion – and that he has more in common with Dan Aykroyd than he'd like to admit



**L**ET'S SAY you have a job interview. Louis Copeland runs his tape measure around my back, pinches it at the chest and squints. "My first question to you would be: what line of work are you in? Because it depends, doesn't it? Architects go for a wacky, modern look. Solicitors tend to prefer a classic style. Whereas journalists..." He looks me up and down and trails off, somewhat despondently.

The adults talk among themselves a while. Copeland turns to his assistant Cathal O'Brien. "Something dressy?" he suggests.

The photographer certainly concurs. "We'll be doing before and after shots," he says. "So the more you can smarten him up, the better the contrast looks."

Seriously lads, I'm standing right here.

Although best known as Ireland's tailor to the stars, Louis Copeland will be holding a Style School workshop for ordinary schlubs at luncheon today, as part of the **Dublin Fashion Festival**. What is the most common fashion blunder committed by Irish men?

"Not getting fitted properly," he says. "Not selecting the proper colours. Not choosing the right label. There are different manufacturers out there, and every pot has a different lid.

Without professional advice you won't get the suit that's right for your particular body type."

As you'd expect, Copeland is a firm believer in the maxim that it is the suit that makes a man. Personally, I think a schlub in an expensive suit is still a schlub in an expensive suit. Either way, our respective theories are about to be put to the test.

While we await the return of his assistant, Copeland asks how long I've worn a beard. Only a few months, I tell him. Why does he ask? "It makes you look older," he says. "But on the other hand, it does deflect attention from the fact that you're bald." I laugh. Believe it or not, that was my thinking too. I call it the comb-under.

O'Brien returns with a pink Eton shirt, a black Louis Copeland suit and a pair of shiny black dress shoes. Copeland helps me with the buttons and cufflinks but draws a line at fastening the top button for me.

(They'll traipse around your groin like it's Heuston Station, but heaven forbid someone trespass upon the sanctity of the Adam's apple.) I turn to face the mirror. Good God, I look like Zorro's gay uncle.

Why this particular cut? I ask. "Compared to a striped suit," O'Brien says, cautiously, "this might be more flattering, you know?" He pauses a moment. "Don't get me wrong or anything," he adds.

Huh? Copeland spells it out a little more plainly. "Not to put it in as many words, but this might bit a slimming look for you."

Ah come off it Louis, I scoff. Do you want me to fade away entirely?

The tie O'Brien has selected complements the shirt perfectly, at least insofar as it takes everything that I feel uncomfortable about in the shirt and multiplies it by a factor of 10. It is an explosive purple, like something Burt Reynolds might have worn in *Boogie Nights*. "The tie is a Duchamp," says O'Brien. Be that as it may. *Ceci n'est pas une item* I would be caught dead wearing.

After Zorro's Gay Uncle, the next outfit we assemble is one I'm calling College Professor Gone Wild. It's less ostentatious but no less expensive than its predecessor. The brown slip-on shoes alone cost €340. This is definitely more my speed, though.

## AFTER

### Look 1 Zorro's Gay Uncle

Louis Copeland suit (black): €499  
Eton shirt (mauve): €129  
Duchamp tie (purple): €85  
Handkerchief (purple): €29.50  
Shoes (black): €160

Outfit total: €902.50

As O'Brien helps me into the grey Gant jacket, I ask if it would be okay to wear the shirt outside my trousers. "Maybe when you're falling out of Copperface Jacks at half-three tonight," he says. "But for now I'd tuck it in."

Oh yeah, he thinks he has my number alright.

As we pose for more photographs, Copeland again stresses the importance of wearing clothing that is fitted to one's particular body type. Which of his illustrious clients might be cut from the same cloth as me? He mentions two celebrities, 24 and 28 years my senior respectively. Not mentioning any names here, but if Brendan Gleeson or Dan Aykroyd ever fancy swapping fashion advice, I'm buying the chips.

Across town in Hacketts of South Anne Street, the

assistant manager, Alice Dunne, has different theory about Irish men. "They're very traditional. They don't take risks. They stick with bland colours like navy and grey. Whereas at Hackett we would stock things like coloured flannels, moleskin trousers and merino knits."

Truthfully, I share the qualms of my fellow countrymen. But there is no photographer in tow this time, so I invite her to, by all means, make an instrument of change.

The check shirt she offers has some nifty elbow patches, which have a cool, mid-1970s Woody Allen air that I very much appreciate. Of course, I'm not sure anyone will see them under the fitted chalk-stripe jacket she helps me into, but at least I know they're there. The chinos test my resolve, but that's nothing compared with what comes next: a cravat.

In what social context might I wear a cravat, I ask? (The unspoken postscript to the question being "... and not get beaten up?")

**'If Dan Aykroyd ever fancies swapping fashion advice, I'm buying the chips': Eoin Butler before being fitted for his suit. Photographs: Dave Meehan**

"Social clubs," she replies. "Race meetings. A lot of people would wear one instead of a tie if they were going to a slightly casual wedding, particularly abroad."

I turn to look in the mirror. Oh, I'm lord of the manor, all right. Definitely abroad, though. Definitely abroad.

Before leaving, I have a peek at some of the price tags. Like Zorro's Gay Uncle and College Professor before it, the Who's Taking the Horse to France? look is absurdly out of my price range. It's been an interesting day. But, barring an unforeseen windfall, I'll be persevering with the Unemployed Lighthouse Keeper for some time to come.

Style School For Guys with Louis Copeland takes place at Fashion HQ, Dawson Street (former Waterstones building), Dublin 2, at 1pm today. Free fashion consultations are available all weekend at Hackett, South Anne Street, Dublin 2



## AFTER

### Look 2 College Professor Gone Wild

Gant jacket (grey) €339.50  
Jacques Britt shirt (check): €149.50  
Gant jeans (navy): €120  
Stamar slip-on shoes (brown): €339.50

Outfit total: €948.50