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Suits and sneakers

It may be a controversial combination, but should that put you off?



Magazine editor Ahmad Daabas in Valentino trainers; fashion stylist Christian Palmer wearing New Balance; retail coordinator Keisuke Ikeya in Vans trainers

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Holiday season is over but the struggle back to work continues. And sometimes it’s hard to make that abrupt transition. Sometimes it’s hard to lose the sneakers.

But maybe you don’t have to just yet; the smart suit with trainers turned up as a key look on the men’s runways for summer at the shows of sartorial heavyweights Hermès, Bottega Veneta, Salvatore Ferragamo and Valentino; and it cropped up again for autumn at Lanvin, Trussardi and Marc by Marc Jacobs. In stores and online it is clear there is no end of big-brand sports shoes with “luxury” price tags. Mr Porter has everything from Bottega Veneta tasselled and woven “intrecciato” suede high-tops (£535) to Lanvin metallic leather and mesh sneakers (£505) to high-tech styles including Raf Simons’ multicoloured collaboration with Adidas (£220) and ultra-luxe statement styles such as Balmain’s shearling high-tops (£800).

“Teaming trainers with a tailored look is something we’re seeing more and more guys embracing – it’s an inherently cool and really modern aesthetic,” says Richard Sanderson, menswear buying manager at Selfridges. “The impact is in the unexpectedness of it.”

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Yet just because something is a trend does not mean we should all follow – even allowing for the fact that the rules for office attire have undoubtedly become more relaxed since Swiss bank UBS made headlines in 2010 with a comprehensive 44-page style guide that instructed staff on everything from what colour your socks should be (grey, black or “anthracite”) to what tie to wear (something that matches “the bone structure of the face”).

Indeed, an unscientific straw poll of City of London denizens yields a variety of sceptical responses to the sneakers-with-suit look.

“Apart from walking to work in trainers and then changing to smart brogues when I get to the office, I can’t see it myself,” says consultant Joshua Brown. “It reminds me of the trendy kids at school showing off their box-fresh Nikes with their school uniform.”

Trader Richard Evans says: “Men have only just got their heads around looking good in smart clothes. It seems like a backwards step to start messing with that formula.”

Accountant Paul Anderson agrees: “Trainers belong in the gym – and with jeans, at a push, at the weekend. Mixing them with a suit feels like trying to make too much of a statement.”



Suede ‘intrecciato’ trainers by Bottega Veneta, £535; camouflage trainers by Valentino, £430

But others – particularly in the creative industries – might disagree, and retailers say sales would indicate they are not alone. “Trainers are a huge trend,” says David Walker-Smith, managing director of Fenwick of Bond Street. “It’s about individuality. When the recession first hit, it was about keeping your job and conforming. Now it is about standing out from the crowd and showing some personality. Men have always been fascinated by trainers; there’s a certain snobbery about them, about being ‘in the know’.

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“Personally I love the look and have bought a pair of Balenciaga trainers and black leather studded Prada ones,” adds Walker-Smith. “I’ve worn them with a double-breasted suit and relaxed the look with a collarless shirt – or even gone for the whole shirt/tie/waistcoat thing. People have liked it and always comment on the trainers. It seems fresh. Would I wear it to a board meeting? Not yet. But for a wedding? Definitely!”

Valentino’s Pierpaolo Piccioli says: “The idea of trainers came from a desire to create a male aesthetic of effortless elegance. It was challenging to come up with a modern object of desire that maintains the authenticity of sport while giving it a new ‘couture’-like angle.”

Selfridges’ Sanderson says: “When we launched our men’s shoes concept department last year, we expanded our range of trainers by over 40 per cent – and sales are already exceeding our expectations. The endless possibilities in terms of styling are contributing to that success; they can be worn any number of ways. From statement high-tops – Lanvin [£485] and Moncler [£375] do some great options – to casual trainer shapes from brands such as Vans [£44.99], sport shoes across the board are a runaway success.”

“The trainers trend has never disappeared,” says Mei Chung, menswear buyer for Browns. “It quietened down for a while but it’s back, with Lanvin setting off the trend using evening tailoring with semi-smart sneakers in playful colours, patent leather and velvet. We have a clear mix of clients of all different ages that have bought into the trend but advise men to choose a semi-smart sneaker to create a balance; overly sporty gym styles can kill the tailoring.”

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