

Closet Case: Style Interview with AZ Restaurateur Joe Johnston

Written by Written by Corbin Chamberlin

Monday, 31 January 2011 15:24 - Last Updated Monday, 31 January 2011 15:54

New column alert! Stay tuned for more of Fabulosity's "Closet Case" articles from Corbin Chamberlin, who will be getting up close and personal with locals on their style!



This week: Corbin interviews Valley culinary pioneer Joe Johnston!

Every kingdom needs a king. Gilbert is no exception. With his conglomerate of culinary excursions in the East Valley, Joe Johnston takes the throne. It's not often that you find a fashionable character in Gilbert, I admit. With his emerald covered Chanel timepieces, Louis Vuitton murse (man purse) and signature staple of hats, Joe is the exception. His look is witty, confident and tasteful. Joe humbly describes his style as *"Appropriate and international"*. I sit down with the tastemaker to see what his look is all about.

How would you best describe your personal style?

Appropriate and intentional. I think the key for each person is to be comfortable with who they are, not being swayed by others and not thinking you have to somehow mimic the "ideal". Hey, I'm not skinny, not tall, not blessed with a full head of hair, and don't live on the beach. But: I am cool with who I am. As a matter of fact, I would not trade places with anyone I know. I intentionally choose clothing and accessories that work with my corpulence and warm weather abode. For instance: I do not wear tight clothing and I do look internationally for clothing men wear in warm climates. The guayabera shirt is kind of ideal and I wear them frequently. It is simple, has plenty of handy pockets, is not sold at Costco, comes in great colors, and hides what needs to be hidden while having a vertical line that flatters. It is clearly not a US item and goes so well with hats. That's just one example. I also work within the color-ways that enhance my skin tone. At this point, my wardrobe works very well together because I was careful in selecting each item. I could practically select items at random and they would work since there is a sense of cohesiveness.

Gilbert Arizona is not known for it's fashionable characters. How do the local's handle your witty look?

Most people seem to like my style or at least they don't mock me to my face. I do get the occasional comment about my hats, but you have to consider the source.

Where is your go-to store?

Well, I love Anthropologie. Sadly, they do not offer much for men in terms of clothes. However, their design sense is superb, so I enjoy just looking around. I also like shopping with Cindy there. For basics, Banana Republic is fine. In NYC, I really enjoy the nostalgic, American-made menswear at Freemans.

When you're not slinging espresso or ruling your BBQ-empire of the east valley, what do you do for fun?

I am an avid scooterist ... more precisely: a Vespa scooterist. It is such an iconic design and a scooter embodies freedom. A Vespa can take you anywhere (mine goes +80mph) and the ride is in technicolor: aromas, sights, noises, you won't ever experience in a car. I love working on old Vespas and we have formed an "Italian scooters only" club called "The Lions of Scoodah". As a group, we ride in style and often do food related tours, such as "everything I wanted to eat while I was dieting" (all the tastiest common food in the Valley).

What is the crown-jewel of your closet?

My "murse" has to be right up there. It is the perfect iPad sized Louis Vuitton "messenger bag". It is in the brown checkered pattern with a beefy bronz-ish LV plate on the front of it. The think is so practical and indestructible, plus we bought it in Paris on our 25th Anniversary trip. Not far behind is my Loro Piana jacket. It is that kind of muted goldenrod color favored by the Italians and is impeccably made. It goes well with so many things and I just enjoy looking at all of the details and savoring the way it fits. We bought it in Gavi, Italy at the LP outlet store, so it is an incredible value (for LP), as well.

What is the biggest mistake people make when it comes to fashion?

Being hopeful. People seem to gravitate to one size smaller than they should, in hopes that it will fit or that their diet will work. It's time to get real and accept your body shape plus general physical characteristics and dress accordingly. I'm pleasingly plump, so there things that do not work for me. I need to wear what clothes that are not tight and that do not emphasize things that I don't want emphasized. If I do happen to lose weight, THEN I will go shopping for clothes that fit that sort of body shape.

Balding men are always hopeful that they are not balding and, therefore, resort to the most glaring fashion faux pas (other than socks with sandals). Just cut your remaining hair off and enter the incredible world of hats boldly: this is something people with hair seem loath to do... So go for it.

If you could steal one person's wardrobe, who's would it be?

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I would steal yours, Corbin Chamberlin. I think that you really pull off some amazing looks ... daring looks ... that most people are just too afraid to try.

When I think of you, I think watches and hats. Explain your obsession with both.

Women are blessed with a much broader range of fashion options than men. This includes accessories. The traditional accessories that men can have a bit of fun with are hats, watches, ties, and shoes. Most men do not have any fun with these items, which is lamentable. Being an engineer by training (electrical and mechanical) I am fascinated by the technology of watches. The vintage ones were marvels of miniaturization in their time. I also like fully modern watches ... even digital. I wear all sorts of watches. My "go-to" vintage watch is a very simple leather strap Rolex Oyster from the 1940's, although I have been thinking about having Chrome Hearts customize it.

As for hats, they are a very practical item for a man without a full head of hair. There is such a broad range of styles to choose from. I like how one can express different moods through hats and even the positioning of the same hat. My roundish face is best with a fedora or a porkpie and a stingy brim at that. I also favor "cadet" caps. This probably stems from my interest in military themes in fashion (jackets, caps, etc.) due to my time at the Naval Academy. At this point, people come to me to help them choose a hat. Most people can wear a hat well, but as in all things fashion: be confident. Don't look sheepish in your hat!