Jack Carter, CIA

Style Guide for a Secret Agent

For author Jack Christophe

By Diane Weisbeck, 2/11/ 2014



Jack’s appointment with Gillian Maxwell, his loyal and dedicated fashion consultant at Saks Fifth Avenue was scheduled for this morning. Although Jack lives in San Francisco, he always relishes the opportunity to visit the New York Saks on Fiftieth Street, when on assignment in Manhattan.

Gillian was one reason. With her thick, shining, flaming red hair, cascading down her back and her voluptuous hourglass figure, she certainly wasn’t hard on the eyes. Of course the fact that she had excellent taste and unabashedly flirted with him didn’t hurt, either. Gillian was a rare breed; she could be adorable and a scholarly fashion teacher at the same moment. Jack wanted her advice on style and fashion and appreciated his lessons with her.

Undeniably the location was a luxury shopper’s paradise. Jack could swear his credit card would auto-set on vibrate, like his phone, when he passed that glorious edifice, Rockefeller Center and guided his gleaming black Bentley Continental GT southeast onto Fifth Avenue.

The retail gods must have been smiling down on Jack, for just as he was nearing the 50th Street entrance to Saks, a huge delivery truck was pulling out. Glancing over to St. Patrick’s Cathedral, Jack smiled and thought, “Thank you, Our Lady of Splurging,” as he vaulted out of his car. A neat looking young man was standing near the entrance to the store, seemingly waiting for someone. Jack waved him over.

“How long do you think you’ll be standing at this corner?” Jack inquired with an inquisitive grin. “My Mom will probably be in there forever!” complained the boy. “Well, here’s $50.00 now and I’ll give you another $50.00 when I get back in about an hour. All you have to do is stand guard over this car. Don’t let anyone even look at it, let alone touch it. Do you think you’re up to the job?” “A hundred dollars an hour?! That’s more than my brother makes and he works for Goldman Sachs,” exclaimed the young man, who had already assumed a military posture and a sentinel like stance.

“Terrific,” shouted Jack over his shoulder after paying the young guard and pushing open the doors of his favorite shopping emporium.

As the elevator doors open onto the tastefully decorated designer Men’s suits department on the sixth floor, there is Gillian waiting for him. Her face lights up when she spots him. “My favorite client,” she purrs. Jack gratefully takes in the snug fitting black dress Gillian has chosen; just for him, he assumes. That plunging V-neck would only be appropriate in two places; on stage at the Moulin Rouge and the designer men’s suit department at Saks. Jack keeps that thought to himself.

“I love the Herve Leger bondage, I mean bandage dress,” Jack jokes appreciatively and then gives her a friendly kiss on the check. “It cost a fortune, but I had to have it,” she confides. Jack grins his adorable impish grin at her. “I have made a few selections for you and I’ve pulled a few options together.” Gillian becomes business like, if you can call playfully leading him by his expensive Burberry silk tie to the back of the department business like.

As they reach the enormous, sumptuous yet understated dressing rooms, Gillian pulls out a rolling rack with a selection of savior-faire suits. Gillian knows that Jack wants a professional, power image in his suits, so she has chosen three urbane and modern pinstripes, Jack’s trademark style.

“Culture and class,” states Gillian, as she draws out the first suit, a polished grey pinstripe by Dolce & Gabbana. Jack fingers the fabric and examines the sleeve. “I do like the four button cuffs and the back vent,” muses Jack. “I know what you like,” whispers Gillian in her best baby doll voice. “And a four button cuff expresses elegance.”

Gillian reverts to her teacher role, “Now remember, when wearing a pinstripe, the vertical stripes elongate the silhouette. As you are already suitably tall, I’ve chosen a subtle, chalk stripe. Also, the shirt should complement the shade of the stripe. Do you remember the rule about the tie with a pinstripe? I know for professional reasons, you like to wear a very subtle pattern which acts as a solid in your ties. But if you were on holiday and wanted to wear a stripe tie, always remember, the thickness of the stripe must be a different width than the stripe in the suit. That’s why a very wide striped tie looks great with a very thin pinstripe suit.”

The next pinstripe suit she presents is a deep black, with ultrafine subtle stripes, by Ralph Lauren Black Label. Jack strokes the fabric. “I like this lightweight wool and gabardine and I like the side vents. It’s a flat front I hope; I don’t want to look like Fred Mertz,” Jack jokes. Gillian giggles. “Of course you work out and have a great body, but men who are heavier don’t have to wear pleated fronts either. They should find a waist size that fits correctly and then have the pants tailored to fit.” Jack stores this information away to share with a friend who could use some extra fashion advice.

The third suit is a navy blue pinstripe. It’s rich blue wool by Armani Collezioni. Gillian smiles as Jack caresses the beautiful, supple, lightweight superior Italian wool. He never has any hesitations with Armani and Gillian knows it. Armani is one of his favorite designers. “Of course the debate continues over which is correct to wear with a navy suit, brown or black shoes,” as Gillian resumes her lesson. “There are two schools of thought, but since James Bond wore black shoes with his navy suits, I think we can be comfortable going in that direction.” Jack nods in agreement.

“Show me the ties you’ve picked out for me,” cajoles Jack, anxious to see what she’s chosen. Gillian’s face lights up as she lays out the ties she has selected over each suit. She knows Jack appreciates the most subtle and rich fabrics, textures and details in a tie and considers a loud or brash print, somewhat of an occupational hazard, as it could be easily identified. She understands that. “As a general rule,” states Gillian, “there should never be more than two patterns in the combination of the suit, shirt, tie and pocket square.”

Gillian recommends adding the hint of a bold pattern in the choice of pocket squares and proceeds to show him the ties. “A gorgeous silver, grey, violet shining silk tie by Armani for the grey suit,” a triumphant Gillian exclaims. Jack nods his approval. “This Burberry London Rohan silk in a dusty grey pink for the black.” “Nice, very nice,” agrees Jack. “Red, white and blue is too obvious, for the navy suit, so I decided on a very up-trending rich, burnt orange with the tiniest zigzag texture. He studies the tie. “It’s Armani,” states Gillian. “No wonder it’s terrific,” declares Jack.

“I also have six white, crisp, Eton of Sweden dress shirts, with French cuffs of course, I’ll send along with your order,” says Gillian. “For the most professional and polished look, we must have French cuffs. And I saw the most exquisite cuff links at Alfred Dunhill for you.”

“You know I like to suggest Ferragamo for shoes and I know you are definitely not the wingtip variety of agent”…Gillian catches herself and clasps her hand over mouth, “Insurance agent!” she shouts, just in case anyone is within hearing distance. Jack finds this extremely cute. “Here’s an image of the shoe I’ve chosen for you from Ferragamo, it’s a double monk-strap, very modern and smart. I know Saks doesn’t carry this particular style, but I don’t mind popping down the street, over to the Trump Tower on my lunch hour and making the purchase for you.” “You know my size and my credit card number,” smiles Jack appreciatively. “The two most intimate things a girl can know about a man,” laughs Gillian.

“Now to return to our fashion lesson, always keep in mind the trilogy; fit, fashion and fabric. The most expensive suit will look dreadful if the fit is not correct. The pants must be hemmed so as not to touch the floor. Remember to examine all seams. Are there loose and exposed threads? Does the lining lie flat or does it pucker? Buttons must be inspected as well. Cheap plastic buttons are unacceptable. Only bull horn buttons will do. And of course a fine suit brush is necessary to property brush a high quality suit and keep the fibers clean.”

# Gillian artfully drops her goat hair suit brush and Jack gets the view she was hoping for. “That’s an attractive necklace, Gillian,” he declares. The fullness of her bountiful bosom highlights the delicate necklace that ends in a tiny star just where her lovely swan-like neck ends and the introduction of her décolleté and not-so-hidden pleasures begin. “That gives me an idea…what’s the length of the chain? It’s perfect.” “The chain, oh, it’s 18 inches,” Gillian explains.

# “As Valentine’s Day is just around the corner, let’s swing down to the jewelry department and we can pick up a few gifts for a number of my lady friends.” Gillian is a good sport and happily agrees. After all, she will share the commission with her girlfriend, Abigail, in fine jewelry.

# Studying the contents of the glittering display cases, Jack immediately spots what he wants. A large, natural black peacock colored South Sea cultured pearl on a slim, feminine, 18 karat white gold chain catches his eye. “How long is the chain?” asks Jack, holding up the glowing, lustrous dark pearl. “18 inches; this is a nine millimeter Mikimoto pearl,” whispers Abigail. Large purchases are kept discreet within the fine jewelry department. “Fabulous, I’ll take a dozen,” smiles Jack, visualizing where the shimmering bauble will nestle, once he secures the charming gift onto the graceful neck of one of his lady friends.

# “I’ll wait until she is just about half way done with the sumptuous breakfast I’ve made, a toast soldier just barely dipped into her soft boiled egg, balanced in an English porcelain egg cup. I slip around behind her, fasten the pearl and breakfast is forgotten in an ecstasy of gratitude…” Jack muses to himself.

# Jack plants a kiss on Gillian’s check, knowing she will have his pants hemmed to his exact inseam and all his purchases shipped to his home in San Francisco and he turns to leave. She is a valuable friend and fashion counselor and he knows he was lucky to find such a knowledgeable personal shopper. “What would I do without you Gillian?” Jack smiles and wonders how Saks Fifth Avenue can offer this fantastic service without charge. She thinks seriously for a moment. “I can’t begin to imagine,” she murmurs thoughtfully.

# He had intended to race across the street to Dunhill and order a couple of pair of their fantastic cufflinks that Gillian had recommended, but his time is precious and he decides to order them online, as well as order an updated selection of outstanding pocket squares from a new online vendor Gillian had suggested to him. He’ll take care of those details later.

#### As he heads for the elevator he considers where he can hide a dozen Mikimoto pearls, just in case his apartment is ransacked again, by that greasy counter-agent. “Let’s see, I have four eggs left in the egg carton. If I make a soufflé when I get home I can hide all the pearls in the egg carton and leave them right in the ‘fridge. He’d never look in there. That slob only eats take-out. Of course I’ll have to stop at Alioto’s on Fisherman’s Wharf when I get home for a live lobster. Then I can make Soufflé À l’Américaine.” A common cheese soufflé holds little challenge for Jack. Adding the lobster adds a recipe hurdle to overcome and Jack always welcomes a challenge.

Jack reaches in his pocket for his wallet, removes a fifty dollar bill for his trusty sentinel, whom he sees standing at attention next to the Bentley. “I really do love New York,” hums Jack to himself.