

interview

# Fine & dandy

Do you know a shawl from a shahtoosh or a jabot pin from a tie pin? Neither did we until we met Mark Francis Vandelli, the distinguished authority on men's style

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Mark Francis Vandelli is a name that often has people rolling their eyes. He was made famous by *Made in Chelsea*, the Channel 4 socialite 'drama' full of It people with names like Binky, Toff and Habbs, hailing from South Kensington and Knightsbridge. One of the programme's most memorable characters has been Mr Vandelli himself, who replaces personal gossip with witty repartee: "Do you know what I find ghastly? People who jog in public", or "I don't have any resolutions whatsoever. How could I possibly improve upon myself?"

With this in mind it's hard not to imagine Vandelli strutting around ballrooms in bespoke suits and turning his nose up at any canapé with a toothpick in it. But when I was introduced to him at an awards ceremony, it became evident that half of this dandyish persona is a tongue-in-cheek exaggeration for the *Made in Chelsea* producers.

Weeks later, when I phone him, he's bunged up with cold but ever charming. I can tell certain comments are delivered entirely for a reaction; an embellishment of the character he has created. When I ask him how he's bearing up, he replies: "Colds – they're just so common." I titter down the phone and spend the next half an hour listening to his rolling 'Rs' and accentuated 'ohs' as he talks about his foray into fashion.

His mother, Russian model Diane Vandelli, was a muse of Yves Saint Laurent "at a turning point in London in the 70s when everything was changing and people were quite rebellious". Although Vandelli remarks that for someone who spent her life in couture, she cares very little about it now. In fact it is his father, Italian industrialist Marzio Vandelli, who seems to have passed on the mantle of debonair dressing. ▶





► Vandelli's abundant vocabulary has me Googling phrases (a shahtoosh, for your information, is a shawl), but despite the big words, he is unexpectedly self-deprecating. "Never overdo it. I should know, I've done it many times," he says. With a capsule collection for Hawes & Curtis under his crocodile belt, various television shows with his "best friend" Viscountess Emma Weymouth of Longleat, as well as endless public appearances and private party invitations, there's not a moment that a hair or handkerchief is out of place.

### ***How would you describe your style?***

As curated and timeless and, I suppose, elegant; but that's not really for me to say.

### ***What's your favourite item of clothing?***

An era that shaped my understanding of menswear was when Tom Ford was at Gucci – a fundamental epoch for fashion. I still wear those pieces a lot.

### ***How has your family influenced what you wear?***

My father was a bon viveur, a flâneur and a gambler. At my age, he was in black tie most nights. As a result he's left me an inordinate number of smoking jackets and a vast archive of eveningwear. It harks back to a bygone era of glamour and sophistication: two things that have unfortunately become increasingly rare.

### ***What would you never leave the house without?***

A watch and pocket square. They must complement an outfit and provide a subtle indication of taste. I seldom wear a modern watch. It's terrible when you realise there's someone wearing the same model.

### ***Do you have any favourite brands?***

Gérald Genta was a genius who designed some of the most iconic watches for Patek Philippe and Audemars Piguet in the 70s. Cartier was already creating timeless

watches in the 20s and 30s, which were recently reproduced in their Collection Privée. I collect those too, but you know what I really love that no one wears? Graff watches, they're fabulous for the evening.

### ***Any other accessories?***

Actually, I have to say – almost at any time of year – a shahtoosh goes down very well.

### ***How about ties?***

I'll wear a tie in the office, at a wedding or a funeral. I don't particularly approve of ties in the evening – it's not 'me'. But what I truly detest is the loosened tie, circa midnight, with shirt buttons undone. That's when you know a man's given up.

### ***Would you ever wear a pre-tied bow tie?***

I should really say I'd never do such a thing. For velvet, though, I make an exception. Tying one's own can prove quite disastrous: they can become a gigantic, cravat-like error hovering above one's shirt.

### ***What's the most sentimental piece that you own?***

My jewellery. Mostly family pieces, many of which I'm gradually converting into cufflinks, shirt studs, jabot pins and so on. I also collect Art Deco jewellery, mostly Cartier and Laclouche Frères that I buy at auction. Unfortunately, jewellery is also very easy to lose – a wonderful diamond and sapphire panther of mine went for a walk a little while ago and never came back...



markvandelli • Following



"Elegance never goes out of fashion"



"One should never clash with the artwork"



"Don't be fooled. I prefer receiving awards to presenting them"

## “There’s nothing as demoralising as feeling underdressed”

### *What do you dislike about current trends for men?*

There’s nothing worse than men having the hem of their trousers so high that you see their ankles. It looks totally uncivilised. A man’s best friend is a great tailor because they’ll always make him look his best, whatever the occasion.

### *Are there any colours that you like to avoid?*

Mustard. I avoid mustard at all costs. I find it absolutely abominable. There is nothing that could ever please me about such a colour.

### *Who is your favourite tailor?*

I adore Neapolitan tailoring. It’s really the birthplace of great menswear and a constant inspiration for my own collections. If your blazers are handmade in Naples you can throw them into a suitcase, pull them out and be sure they’ll look as though they’ve just been pressed.

### *What has been your biggest fashion faux pas?*

Overdoing it – wearing the whole look from the fashion show. It denotes a total lack of originality and

the demise of spontaneity. You have to think twice before wearing the velvet blazer, with the evening trousers, with the full length mink, with diamond stud buttons, with the jabot pin in your bow tie, with a patent shoe... sometimes you just have to pare it down.

### *How would you describe true luxury?*

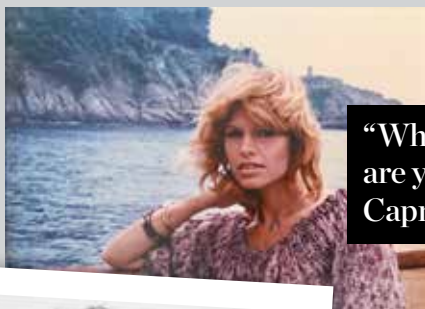
Finding something that no one else has: a cobbler in Portofino who makes beautiful suede loafers that are so soft you can roll them up. Designers and manufacturers who still produce unique pieces using artisanal methods – those are the chiciest luxuries.

### *What do you wear when you’re relaxing?*

I don’t understand the need to have a different wardrobe for occasions in which no one can see you. I was brought up to dress on my own the way I would at a dinner party. After all, you never know who’s looking...

### *Best piece of advice?*

Appropriacy. To dress in a manner befitting your figure, age (unfortunately), complexion – if you must – and lifestyle. That said, there’s nothing as demoralising as feeling underdressed. As long as one’s selective when accepting invitations, it’s really very difficult to overdress. And if that’s the case, it may just be a sign that one needs better friends. ■



“When your parents are your inspiration. Capri, summer 1980”



“Neptune’s back in the office”



“Like father, like son. St Tropez, 1979”



“Walking is such a chore”



“Minimalist? This is positively Spartan”