



STYLE IS PERMANENT: Despite increasing age and decrepitude, I've never lost my interest in fashion

Lockdown gives way to dressing up

LOCKDOWN has knocked the stuffing out of us women. Months of shuffling about the house in baggy teeshirts, saggy jogging bottoms and down-at-heels slippers, knowing there's no danger of chance callers, have gradually sapped our determination to maintain self-care and grooming.

The worst cases of flabby resolve have even abandoned supportive underwear. The sartorial sins of our menfolk are a grievous matter too distressing to address. Suddenly, opportunity is knocking for us to go 'OUT out' and we're panicked into chronic indecisiveness.

Just as the weather turns autumnal we're emerging blinking into social light and the fashion gurus are determined we're going to do it in style. I'm inundated with unsolicited clothing catalogues (or "big girls' comics" as the Loving Spouse used to call them) making never-to-be-repeated offers for the new season. I flick through the pages thinking, "Why does it all look vaguely familiar?"

I note the return of the flared trouser, the double-breasted jacket (so unkind to the fuller busted), the how-to-look-instantly-dowdy tiered mid-dress in busy print; the *Dynasty* shoulder, the puff sleeve, the high neckline that gives the impression one's head is nailed directly onto one's shoulders. It's all 'retro'. I've worn them all before, whether they suited me or not, believing 'better out of the world than out of the fashion'.

The style carousel revolves eternally. Truly, there's nothing new apart from the current deplorable aberration of accessorising everything (including ballgowns) with bovine boots or gutties – which is just perverse. The young can get away with eccentric combinations of garments and footwear. The mature simply look ridiculous.

Anita
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Despite increasing age and decrepitude, I've never lost my interest in fashion. I walked in the wake of a grown-up, classically elegant, size-8 sister who was a pattern-card of good taste and did her best to educate my chunkier adolescent self in the art of dressing well. Alas, she was on a hiding to nothing.

In the mid-sixties, hemlines shot up, necklines slid down and fashion became cheap. Little boutiques sprang up everywhere. Oh, the undiluted joy of buying a wee frock on a Saturday and wearing it that very night! Dismayed elders chorused, "Omigawd! You're not going out in that!" I ran the gauntlet of my mother and Auntie Mollie standing sentinel in the front hall, hoping

to escape undetected in a modest-length button-thru dress, that unbuttoned to reveal matching hotpants. Fortunately, they focused on the chalky make-up and painted-on lower lashes that made me look permanently surprised. "Running away to join Duffy's circus are we?" came the cutting remark. I was not to be advised.

I blush still for the mustard corduroy flares with 14in bottoms flapping in the breeze; the riotously-patterned flounced frock that made me look like an upholstered sofa and the eye-wateringly aquamarine boilersuit with pockets down the legs that I wore to a formal 'do' and nobody said anything.

One thing I did learn was, 'what goes around, comes around'. Never throw anything out. My contribution to saving the planet is I could dress the female cast of any modern play from the mid-seventies onward, in sizes 12, 14 and 16. 'Fun' fashion and eye-catching trends have the brief life of a fruit-fly. True elegance is timeless, well-tailored and gimmick-free.

I opened a newspaper last weekend to a feature headlined 'New Autumn Trends' and beheld a near-duplicate of an outfit hanging on my roofspace dress rails for two decades. The twin drawbacks of rediscovering an old treasure are (a) will it still fit? and (b) the hazard of someone saying, "You wore that to Dave and Eileen's wedding." (Their youngest has just gone to university.) Yes, and I've still got the shoes and the bag to go with it.

Today's young are forsaking 'fast fashion' manufactured in questionable conditions and rummaging excitedly through charity shops for 'retro' fashion finds. I have my own vintage emporium. When I shrug smugly and say, "What? This old thing?" for once I'm speaking no less than the truth. "Keep a thing long enough."

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ON THIS DAY

OCTOBER 5 1971

Bishop Lashes Military

THE behaviour of British troops who fired CS gas and rubber bullets at St Agnes' Church, Andersonstown during the celebration of Mass and the arrival of the remains of a young man killed in a weekend explosion at Lisburn, brought a call last night by Most Rev Dr Philbin, Bishop of Down and Connor, for 'an immediate investigation into the sacrilege'. Troops fired rubber bullets through two Church windows and others into the porch where women and children were standing. The parish priest, Fr Thomas Cunningham, was showered with glass fragments as he stood in the Sanctuary and later a number of gas canisters and more than 24 rubber bullets were found in the Church grounds.

Bishop Philbin described the military action as an outrage and said he shared the feelings of the congregation and of many others besides at the unprovoked attack with rubber bullets and gas missiles on the Church and worshippers during the celebration of Mass.

The attack came shortly after the remains of 19-year-old Terence McDermott were received in the Church. Mr McDermott was killed in an explosion at Lisburn Rural Council offices. Troops had taunted over 1,000 mourners who followed the Tricolour-draped coffin to the Church. There was no provocation given for the taunts. Fr Cunningham said later: 'The military caused the trouble themselves from beginning to end. They began firing rubber bullets and gas canisters indiscriminately. They fired rubber bullets at women and children standing in the porch.'

It also became clear last night that two priests, Fr P Parke, CC and Fr P McWilliams, CC had made unsuccessful attempts to have troops withdrawn from around the Church. Negotiations had been carried out at a Saracen armoured vehicle. 'We got no satisfaction,' said Fr Parke.

Police Claim Evictions 'Exaggerated'

POLICE claimed last night that reports of Catholic families were forced to evacuate the Donegall Pass area were 'greatly exaggerated'. The RUC statement said that eight families were known to have moved 'and others may have done so without this being known to the police'. 'The RUC are giving the area very close surveillance.'

Protestant ministers were last night visiting homes in the area assuring the Catholic families that they would be protected.

BY THE autumn of 1971 The Irish News carried daily reports of provocative behaviour by troops in nationalist areas. In this case the mild-mannered Bishop William Philbin was moved to accuse the troops of sacrilege in a sharp protest to General Tuzo. The GOC defended his men who, he claimed, had been attacked. Meanwhile, thousands were fleeing their homes due to sectarian threats.

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