

Reader Views

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Interview with Betsy Durkin Matthes

Author of *Dressing the Man You Love: A Woman's Guide to Purchasing, Coordinating, and caring for His Classic Wardrobe*

Today we are talking with Betsy Durkin Matthes, author of "Dressing the Man You Love." Welcome to Reader Views Betsy.

Betsy: Thank you. I'm delighted to be here.

Juanita: "Dressing the Man You Love" is a thoroughly detailed compendium of information. How did you go about researching and compiling the information into book form?

Betsy: Actually I compiled the information in very much the same way I wrote term papers while I was in college. I poured through massive amounts of material, filling out index cards with information, always making sure to list their sources and page numbers. Later, when I began my actual writing, I was able to divide my subject matter into chapter headings and could always refer back at any point to double check facts. I also spent a great deal of time talking to women, taking notes on their ideas and suggestions. I think you could say that I assembled the book piece by piece much as a brick layer constructs a building.

Juanita: Betsy, what inspired you to write "Dressing the Man You Love?"

Betsy: Initially it was my desire to support my fellow actors. Three years ago Joan Jaffe, an actress and a lifetime friend, told me about a class in "on-camera techniques" that she was teaching at the Screen Actor's Guild Conservatory. I volunteered to do some research for her on various aspects of dress. It was at that time that I became fascinated with men's classic clothing.

Juanita: Why do you think there is such a lack of knowledge regarding classic men's clothing?

Betsy: I wouldn't say that there is a lack of knowledge really. It's more that it's spread about in many diversified locations. During the course of writing, I discovered many wonderful sources of information written by some of the acknowledged giants in the

world of men's fashion. What I felt was needed was to bring it all together for women in a form that would be easily accessible as well as enjoyable to read.

Juanita: What can readers expect from your book "Dressing the Man You Love?"

Betsy: They can expect to find down-to-earth information on men's classic clothing. I have tried to present useful facts in a non-intimidating way with a lot of easily understood illustrations. Some of the topics I cover in the book include, assessing a man's clothing needs, the best suit cuts for major body types, color considerations for different complexions, recognizing the important elements of quality and a great deal more.

Juanita: Tell us a little of your thoughts regarding how successful attire can equate to success in life?

Betsy: I think we would all like to believe that our various talents are all we require to win the opportunities for success in life that we seek. Whether we like it or not, first impressions open the door to these opportunities. When we don't take the time to care about how we look, we send the message to others that we approach our work in the same haphazard manner. Is this a fair assumption? Possibly not; but it is a fact of life.

Juanita: Why focus on 'classic' clothing for men as apposed to fashion and trends

Betsy: Classic is forever. Like a great movie we can experience it over and over again and never cease to appreciate its value. And buy the way, classic dressing for a man doesn't necessarily mean up-tight and conservative. What it does mean is tasteful styling that has stood the test of time. Trends come and go. Classic dressing for men will always be around.

Juanita: What could be the biggest stumbling block or challenge a woman may have choosing a new wardrobe for the man in her life?

Betsy: Getting his cooperation. Shopping, as every woman knows, is not a man's favorite thing to do. Still, when you love someone, you enjoy doing things together; so why should shopping for his new wardrobe be the exception? In my book I give women a few simple rules to follow that will not only get the job accomplished, but will allow her to do it in such a way that it becomes enjoyable for both parties.

Juanita: What advice do you give women that can not afford to immediately purchase a whole new wardrobe? Any tips on essentials or how they can integrate new pieces as the budget permits?

Betsy: When shopping for a new wardrobe especially with a major change of career involved, a few standard core pieces should be selected initially. After these purchases he can then move on to expand his inventory. For example, a young man graduating from college and moving into the world of corporate business is going to need the "ultimate power" solid navy blue suit with complimentary shirts and ties for a start. His second purchase should be a charcoal gray suit. Once he gains a foothold in his new profession with the accompanying salary increases, a lighter gray or navy pinstripe is in order. Buying selectively, and knowing what to purchase first can help him to look his very best on a limited budget.

Juanita: Do you talk about dressing different body types in “Dressing the Man You Love?”

Betsy: Yes, I do. The entire first chapter is dedicated to assessing men’s various body types and the best suit cuts for each. I also discuss the most appropriate fabrics, patterns and colors, not only for his suits, but for his accompanying dress shirts, ties, belts, shoes and pocket squares. For example, a shorter, heavy set man will look best in a dark, solid or vertically striped suit, made up in a smooth woolen fabric, with side vents in the jacket, and cuff-less trousers. For him the object is to create a long un-interrupted line from his jacket collar to the floor. This in turn will help him look taller and slimmer.

Juanita: You talk about the triangle of interest. What is that exactly?

Betsy: The triangle of interest is the area just below a man’s chin. It includes the labels of his jacket, the collar of his shirt and his tie. This is the most important area to focus on when putting together a man’s outfit. The color, angles, and proportion of the items in this triangle will either enhance or detract from his facial features making or breaking that all important first impression.

Juanita: “Dressing the Man You Love” is geared towards women dressing the men in their life. Is it also written in a way that a man without a significant female in his life could read it and change the direction of his wardrobe?

Betsy: Absolutely. Although my original intention was to direct my book to women shopping for their men, I have been delighted to find that men are reading the book as well. It seems that men know less about their own classic wardrobes than I had thought, and they are anxious to know more. From my point of view this makes “Dressing the Man You Love” a more than useful resource for women; it makes it a resource for single men as well

Juanita: Betsy, you have had a significant and successful career as an actress, singer/dancer and as a lyricist. Your work has included Broadway, off-Broadway, touring productions, day time dramas, over 100 television commercials, and songs that have been recorded by major artists. What has this impressive life experience taught you about the importance of “dressing for the part you want?”

Betsy: As a young actress, I learned very quickly that “dressing for the part” gets you the job. As you have so kindly pointed out, I have done a lot of television commercials over the years. I don’t believe for a moment that I was always the best actress auditioning; but I certainly did take the time to present myself as the character for which I was being considered in each of the winning commercials. I think that holds true in any and all professions.

Juanita: I understand that you went back to college and received a degree at the Marymount Manhattan College in 1996. Tell us about your scholastic history and what led you back to college at this point?

Betsy: Much to my parent’s horror when I graduated from high school I decided, instead of heading off to college, to accept a scholarship to The American Theatre Wing in New York City. After attending the wing for only one year, however, I obtained my first

professional job as Polly in “The Boy Friend” with the Cherry Lane Theater. From there I went on to have a long and rewarding career. Still, I always felt very badly that I had never received a real college education. So later in my life, I decided to enroll at Marymount Manhattan College. I wasn’t even sure that I was college material, but I was determined to give it a try. It was a tremendous experience for me. I even graduated in 1996 as the class Valedictorian. Aside from all that I learned from getting my degree in both International and Women’s Studies, I discovered that there is never any one time in person’s life for doing anything. If you are willing to put in the effort, wonderful and surprising things can happen to you at any stage in your life.

Juanita: Well Betsy, with a whole new audience evolving from your writing talents, you will continue to be an inspiration for many years to come. Thank you for talking with Reader Views today. Your book “Dressing the Man You Love” is a classy, definitive, easy-to-follow guide that is not only highly informative, but a complete joy to read. Please let your readers know how they may find out more about your endeavors, and do you have any final thoughts for us today?

Betsy: I have really enjoyed sharing this time with you. For any of your readers who would like to obtain more information on “Dressing the Man You Love,” they can visit my website at www.dressingthemanyoulove.com. I have included a little peek into my chapter on men’s shoes, some additional tips on selecting men’s classic clothing and a listing of any up-coming events including book signings where I hope women will join me in sharing their own unique experiences. There are many expressions of love, but I believe that helping your man feel better about himself by assisting him in looking his very best is a kind of love that men never fail to recognize and truly appreciate.