

# THE RADAR TRENDS

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HET SHOP BOYS: Patrick Dietzen, Romy Maxwell, Justin Michael and Johnpaul Cross on the prowl for the latest looks

## HOMME SHOPPING NETWORK *Male bonding hits the stores as straight guys learn to shop like girls*

It's almost like any other day on Robertson. L.A.'s trendier-than-thou are on the march from one cutting-edge boutique to another in search of the latest designer wares. One particular gang of fashion-fixated style mavericks, out for a day of power perusing and bonding, is making quite a scene. They're hot on the hunt for the latest arrivals at Kitson and Lisa Kline. The shopping bags are starting to fill up with high-priced T-shirts and intricately stitched denim. And the text messages are flying, too.

But there is something noticeably different about this picture. This is no girls' day out on the shopping circuit. In fact, there's no estrogen in this retail mix at all. It's a group of dudes. And just so we're clear, they are, in fact, straight men. "In Kansas, this would probably be frowned upon," says 27-year-old Johnpaul "JP" Cross, a Brentwood-based financial advisor and one of a growing breed of male shopper.

Forget Monday Night Football. On L.A.'s hippest retail streets, there's a new posse on the loose: guys who shop with their guy friends the way only girls are usually known to shop—as a social activity. Groups of style-conscious hetero men can now be spotted rabidly combing the trendiest stores en masse for that perfect vintage Trunk T or cult Raf Simons jacket.

In fashion-obsessed L.A., a guys' night out can now mean not only shopping from men's store to men's store, but even slinging back a few

cocktails along the way. "When I'm with the guys, it usually entails some sort of imbibing," says Scott J. Cook, 36, a model for the Next agency who hits the streets with his best friends two to three times a month. "The shopping starts with Bloody Marys at the bar on 7 at Neiman Marcus, and it all becomes a blur until you are trying on jeans with a beer in your hand at Lisa Kline on Robertson."

Darren Gold, co-owner of the hip Alpha men's store on Melrose, has noticed the arrival of guy groups as well. Nowadays, he says, men aren't happy unless they're rolling in something unique. "Sometimes they will even fight over who gets to buy what," he says. "Guys are less wary about shopping now. They like to look good, they like to impress their friends." Adds Jackie Brander, owner of Fred Segal Santa Monica: "In Los Angeles, the stigma is gone. Men notice fashion and they compliment each other and ask each other where they got it—with a 'dude' in the sentence, of course!"

It wasn't always that way, of course. "In the past, it used to be guys who were out shopping were either gay, or they were out shopping with their girlfriends, doing penance," Cook says. Or, men simply shopped alone. Once upon a time, a typical male shopping excursion meant a favorite pair of Levi's had finally disintegrated in the wash, so a trip down to Nordstrom to find a suitable replacement CONTINUED...





**CLOTHES HORDES** *From top:* Maxwell, Dietzen and Michael get some retail therapy at Kitson Men; the store's display of goods; hitting the pavement on Robertson.

...CONTINUED was in order. That's right, most men only had one pair and struck out—alone—to find it.

That all changed once the metrosexual tsunami took off, thanks, to a significant degree, to *Queer Eye*. Couple that with the rise of high-profile male BFF squads (Lance and Jake and Matthew, the *Entourage* guys), and the emergence of guys shopping with their best buds—call it Metrosexuality 2.0—was only a matter of time. Now men are looking to their guy friends for approval, perhaps even more than their girlfriends. "Your girl will tend to want you to wear more conservative items—polo shirts, for example, rather than velvet jackets. They don't want their mate attracting too much attention. They want you thinking about their beauty," says website entrepreneur Patrick Dietzen, one of Cross' shopping buddies.

The proliferation of stores dedicated solely to this newly savvy male demographic—places like Lisa Kline Men, Douglas Fir and All Purpose—also helps foster a nurturing environment. In other words, a place where boys can be boys. "Most stores are catered towards women, and the men's sections tend to be 40 percent of the size of the entire store," says Kitson Men buyer Jay Andrews. "So, the way to beat the feeling that shopping is more of a girls' program is to do stores dedicated to men. It puts them in a comfort zone. You will see groups of guys yelling across the sales floor. 'Hey man, come look at this.' That doesn't happen when there's a bunch of ladies shopping right next to a bunch of guys."

Back on Robertson, Johnpaul Cross, Patrick Dietzen and their friends are tearing through Kitson Men like a hurricane of impressively dressed testosterone. T-shirts by J. Lindeberg and Kowboys are piling up in the dressing room, and the store's "folder" is furiously trying to keep up. In fact, the two dressing rooms can't contain the spastic nature of the spree: The outfits are coming on and off at morph-like speed, and the line to get a changing room is starting to look like the 405 at rush hour.

According to the leader of the gang, 27-year-old entrepreneur and charitable event producer Justin Michael, he and his friends see themselves as fashion rebels. Says Michael, who, incidentally, is the son of infamous Earthlink cofounder and imprisoned Ponzi scheme concoctor Reed Slatkin: "Traditionally, men were only supposed to group over beer and sports—we're encouraged to be pragmatists, CONTINUED ON PAGE 121..."





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polemicists and pugilists! But my crew of close friends is on a whole other wavelength. We think for ourselves. It's fun to make wild statements that truly express ourselves. There's kind of a theme to us, a silver lining of self-expression like an uncensored gang of modern Andy Warhols."

Indeed, Michael, a confessed peacock, firmly believes in drawing attention to himself through his fashion choices, even to the point of annoyance. He is currently annoying Andrews, the Kitson Men's buyer, by matching a pinstriped Cassel Goorin fedora with his pinstriped Ben Sherman blazer. Andrews strongly advises against it—you know, mismatched pinstripes and all. "I'll be wearing this outfit five nights next week then," quips Michael in blatant defiance. "I'm a more rebellious dresser than most. I like pissing people off slightly, but not in a bad way. I want to go out and hear, 'You shouldn't do that.'" The fedora is definitely a go.

And, it turns out, the whole scene will later be documented online. While Michael is slapping on an Edward Dada embossed leather skull-and-crossbones T with sequined trim—"Is this intimidating, or does it look too much like Dia de los Muertos?"—Patrick Dietzen, the entrepreneur, whips out his cell phone and plants an instant live post on Facebook of Michael in the getup. For this shopping clique, sites like MySpace aren't just for social networking, but also for documenting their shopping excursions and posting quips and fashion tips. Especially Michael's. This post, for example, turned up on MySpace later that day: "I'll be rocking a fedora and blazer all summer. The signature paisley ties as well. As a statement of solidarity/camaraderie amongst the distinguished gentlemen I call friends, please join me."

The foursome takes nearly two hours to navigate just two stores, emerging with a fedora, three designer T-shirts, one button-down and two pairs of Paige PPD jeans. Total on the CC: \$600. Granted, four girls together could have easily racked up a much bigger bill. But Dietzen thinks that's only because guys aren't naturals at the game—yet. "When I see girls shop, the process seems to move so much faster and involve more prospective items," he says. "They are more self-sufficient when it comes to shopping. They have all these instincts—they see things, grab them and can rapidly validate back and forth with each other. I think men are slower at it and more calculating. It may be even more important for men to shop together in a group than it is for women. I think it's less certain of an experience for us."

After all, you'd never want to be caught wearing last month's hot denim line. "Like everything else in your life, you want the opinion of your peers," says Andrews. "Nothing is worse than wearing something you think is cool, and your boys rip on you all night long. **A**



SHOP SHOP: The Ts at Kitson Men.

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