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DOMINIC WEST

"I am constantly trying to not work hard"

50th
Issue

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by Oliver James

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PLUS

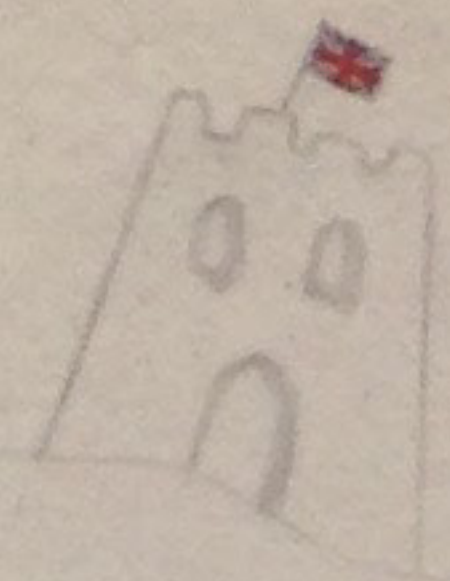
Michael Palin
looks within

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The Art of Exploring
Make Your Own Bacon
Elvis: The King of Loungewear
Hygge: The Danish Art of Doing Nothing





Fashion

Lounging with The King

When it came to sitting around doing nothing, Elvis knew exactly what to wear, says Zoey Goto

ELVIS Presley was a man who truly understood the art of lounging with style and panache. On the one hand, Elvis was prolifically hardworking during his legendary career that lasted over two decades. The dawn of Elvis' fame in the mid-50s saw him relentlessly touring across America, performing physically exhausting shows to the riot of fans that packed out the stadiums night after night. By the 60s he had established himself as a Hollywood leading man, making up to three films each year and dutifully churning out the accompanying soundtrack albums. The 70s saw Elvis return to live performance with a bang – headlining in over 1,000 high-energy, karate-kicking concerts – a venture that was only cut short by his death in 1977.

Yet when he was away from the

spotlight, Elvis treated his leisure time with equal devotion. In between tours, he would cocoon himself in his Graceland mansion for weeks on end, dressed in decadent silk robes. Elvis' signature pompadour remained immaculately groomed, thanks to his in-house personal hairdresser, Larry Geller. If Elvis were spending an evening unwinding at home, Geller would be on-hand to wash his hair in the Graceland bathroom, before blow-drying and setting it with lashings of hairspray. Elvis would then slip on a flamboyant shirt and bell-bottom pants and invite some of the fans waiting at the gates into his home for entertainment.

Elvis' lounge-wear of choice included floor-length embroidered kaftans – an incongruous style choice perhaps, given that Elvis

[opposite] Elvis enjoyed loafing around his Graceland mansion in this opulent silk-lined robe, with embroidered oriental dragons. Elvis was partial to embroidery and would often have his clothing embellished with his initials or his personal TCB (Taking Care of Business) logo.

was no fan of the hippie movement and the kaftan had become their uniform of choice. The King of Rock and Roll also maintained his regal air with a collection of elegant smoking jackets. These included a Teddy Boy version in red corduroy with a black satin lapel, and an oriental silk version, with a landscape scene depicted in gold and silver thread. The smoking jacket has long had an abiding association with debonair gentlemen, including Frank Sinatra, who liked to loll around Las Vegas in his, and Fred Astaire, who was buried in his velvet, shawl-collared smoker.

Another of Elvis' eccentricities involved wearing his movie costumes home after shooting had wrapped for the day. While starring in the 1965 musical comedy *Harum Scarum*, Elvis became so captivated with his onscreen image that he would stay in character until bedtime – conjuring up wonderfully surreal images of Presley enjoying his favourite Southern meatloaf supper, wearing full theatrical makeup and a dazzling turban.

When Elvis made an impromptu visit to meet President Nixon in 1970, an unlikely encounter that has recently been recreated through the

**ELVIS' RESPONSE TO
LIVING HIS LIFE IN THE
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WHOLEHEARTEDLY
EMBRACE STAGE-WEAR
AS DAYWEAR**

Elvis & Nixon film, he was dressed head-to-toe in stage gear. Presley coordinated a velvet jacket he had previously worn for the famous 68 *Comeback Special* with a black Cossack suit and white shirt with an outrageously large collar, which formed part of his Las Vegas stage-wear. In case it was not obvious who the real champion was, Elvis completed the look with a gold belt that had been awarded for breaking Las Vegas attendance records.

Presley also expected scrupulous levels of presentation from those around him. He kitted out his entourage of chums in coordinating black mohair suits and sunglasses, leading to them being named the Memphis Mafia in the press. Mealtimes at Graceland were often black-tie affairs, and Elvis was known to send his spouse Priscilla back upstairs to reapply her heavy make-up and fluff up her bouffant if it wasn't dramatic enough for the occasion.

Perhaps one explanation for the theatrical approach that Elvis applied to his domestic life was that for The King, it was always show-time. Unlike David Bowie, who used Ziggy Stardust as his on-stage rock-god alter ego, for Elvis the line



King of the jungle: Elvis' Polynesian chill-out den

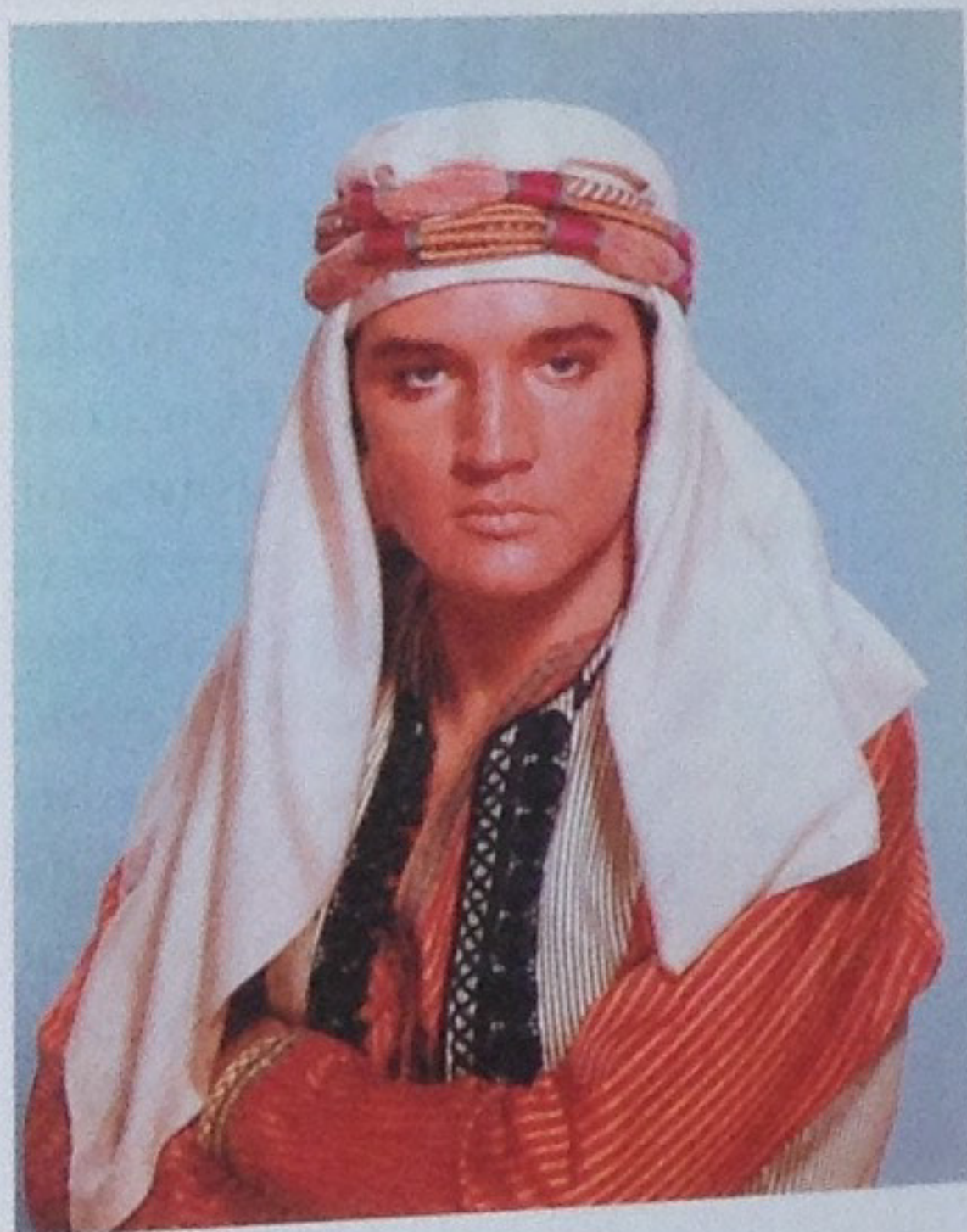
between on- and off-stage was far more blurred. This might have been partly due to Elvis' unprecedented fame, which attracted fans to stand in constant vigil outside the gates of his Graceland mansion in Memphis. Elvis' stoical response to living his life in the spotlight was to wholeheartedly embrace stage-wear as daywear. Rather than resist his stardom, it seemed easier for Elvis to simply ask his costume designers to also create his domestic wardrobe.

Elvis' sensational Graceland outfits demanded an appropriately theatrical setting – which he managed to create in 1974 with the noto-

rious Polynesian-themed Jungle Room. The eclectic Jungle Room was part man-cave, part Hawaiian stage set – a familiar environment for Elvis, who had made three films on the island of Hawaii. Legend has it that Elvis decked out the Jungle Room as a spontaneous gag after his father complained about the ugly furniture he had seen in a local furniture store. The wonderfully camp interior included green shag pile carpeting on both the floor and ceiling, fake fur upholstery and an indoor waterfall that seeped down the fake brickwork at one end of the room. Elvis would occasionally enjoy his evening meal in the Jungle

Room, eating from a tray on his lap, while surrounded by the lush, Tarzan-esque interior. Even television viewing became an intense activity, as Elvis had three TV sets mounted onto the wall of his basement and would watch them simultaneously, ensuring that he never missed a thing.

Ultimately, Elvis' extreme character became both a blessing and a curse. The women, the drugs, the adoration, the food, the lounging, were all taken to their absolute culmination. Perhaps if Elvis had shown a degree of moderation, guarded the boundary between



Rock the Casbah! Elvis dressed as a sheik for the costume picture *Harum Scarum*. Presley fully immersed himself in the role, wearing his character's clothing off-set.

the private and public self and embraced terry towelling away from the spotlight, he would still be alive today. Yet his unrestrained nature also resulted in those early carnal dance routines that had to be censored from the waist down, the pure theatre of Elvis' later jumpsuit era, and possibly the most awesome collection of loungewear in history.

Zoey Goto is the author of *Elvis Style: From Zoot Suits to Jumpsuits*, published on 31 July by Redshank Books. www.elvisstylebook.com



Elvis had a fine collection of smoking jackets and this Japanese-made garment became a favourite of his in the 60s.



Far out! Elvis owned a number of floor-length, embroidered kaftans. The Middle Eastern garment became all the rage in the latter half of the 60s, when The Beatles embraced both kaftans and Indian Nehru jackets.

All garment images courtesy of Heritage Auctions, HA.com