

John Vizzone designs strong masculine menswear but says he's a softie

Menswear label Cifonelli's creative director John Vizzone will wear something nice even when he is going out only for a quick bite

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Clothing designer John Vizzone goes for a strong, masculine look in his designs, but he is really a softie at heart.

"I'm very drawn to a powerful, tailored look and I may come off as tough, but I'm really soft inside. I can't watch movies where people are getting hurt, for example," says the creative director of Italian bespoke menswear label Cifonelli.

"I think this plays into the way I design because clothes are very personal and sensual. They're fitting a body, so it's all about the comfort of the body and how clothing relates to that."

The 40something American was in Singapore recently to promote the label and its Fall/Winter 2017 collection at a trunk show at members-only business club Madison Rooms in Coleman Street. The brand is not available here.

Vizzone says he has never considered working outside of the fashion industry. "It's always been something deeply rooted in me. I love clothes and there was always this desire to create something I wanted to see on myself."

Clad in a perfectly tailored suit with a crisp white shirt for this interview, the dapper father of two, who is married to Sandy Vizzone, loves to dress up and admits that his attire can be a little over-the-top.

"Even when we're going somewhere for a quick bite, I'll put something nice on and everyone will go, 'Why are you wearing that, that's so unnecessary'."

He says his first creative influences came from Hollywood icons such as Cary Grant and Fred Astaire, and the character of Michael Corleone from The Godfather movies, who all possessed a classic style.



Designer John Vizzone goes for powerful, tailored looks, but he says he is really a softie inside. ST PHOTOS: DESMOND WEE

This air of timeless elegance echoes through Vizzone's designs. For Cifonelli's Fall/Winter 2017 collection, he drew inspiration from the Royal Palace of Madrid to create pieces with an opulent feel, choosing a neutral colour palette of camel, black and grey.

"I always use organic colours - things that are natural, lots of browns and greys. I also think men respond to those colours better and it infuses the clothes with an earthy substance that seems more real and comfortable."

Prior to joining Cifonelli in 2014, Vizzone was the creative director at American luxury clothing label Ralph Lauren for 28 years.

While he had to seek Ralph Lauren's approval on designs in the past, he says he welcomes the creative independence

at Cifonelli.

"I've learnt that I have to design through my own eyes now and be more true to myself than I've ever been."

Founded in 1880, Cifonelli has a longstanding history in bespoke tailoring. Its ready-to-wear line was launched only in 2014 and helmed by Vizzone, who gamely rose to the challenge.

"The fact that Cifonelli has a long history to work with actually made it easier to go into ready-to-wear. We're able to interpret what's already been created - like an open-book test - and people love that we can dig into the DNA of the brand to create something new."

Are there plans to bring Cifonelli to Singapore?

ON HIS BAG

This bag has enough space for all my things, it's just the right size. I love it because it's black and very functional.

Vizzone says a boutique is set to open here in the fourth quarter of the year, but a location has yet to be picked.

Asked about how he would like to be remembered as a designer, Vizzone relates an anecdote during his transition from Ralph Lauren to Cifonelli.

He says: "Lorenzo Cifonelli (the fourth-generation owner) makes Ralph Lauren's personal clothes and he was a little nervous when he hired me. Ralph asked Lorenzo if he had hired me and he went, 'He's really good'. It was a big thing for me to hear something like that.

"I'd be glad if I affected someone's life in a personal way and they feel good about themselves."

Things in his bag



CASHMERE SWEATER

This sweater is amazingly soft. It's always cold on the plane so I always take something warm with me.



SILK SCARF

My favourite print in the whole world is polka dots, so I love this scarf.



VINTAGE RAY-BAN SUNGLASSES

I love the retro-ness of these sunglasses.



LEATHER WALLET

I like this wallet a lot because it can hold my receipts and cash. It keeps me organised.



COLOGNE

This is Irish Green Tweed, which is the same fragrance that Cary Grant wore. It's clean, which is good because I can't wear citrus.



SILVER CUFFLINKS

They are from Cifonelli and I use them when I need a little something extra to go with my suits.