

WEAR AND TEAR

Dress Codes for Midlife Crises

Emmy-nominated costume designers of *DTF St. Louis*, *Black Rabbit*, *The Beast in Me* and *Beef* expose the spectrum of middle-age reckonings through clothes **BY FAWNIA SOO HOO**

In *DTF St. Louis*, meteorologist Clark Forrest has his morning routine down to a science. He bids his family goodbye, pedals his recumbent bike to work and changes out of his navy quarter-zips into dark suits for the forecast. His daily grind — and conventional wardrobe — express his midlife rut and marital stagnation.

“That was his weather-man persona,” says costume designer Molly Maginnis. “At home, he wore very staid, dark, somber colors too.”

Clark (Jason Bateman) finds a bond with ASL interpreter Floyd Smernitch (David Harbour), who’s also adrift in midlife — and is resigned to

a nonexistent sex life with his wife, Carol (Linda Cardellini). The seemingly vanilla Clark proposes exploring a local hookup app to “spice up your life” — only to begin an affair with Carol. Reinvigorated, Clark finds his bike rides more exhilarating — mirrored by his highlighter-hued sportswear.

“Those intensely colored outfits represent the spirit that had been compressed in middle age. His repressed spirit is finally allowed to burst out,” says Maginnis. “We used those hot colors and the cycling outfits to express that hidden part of him that drives him toward risky behavior.”

Meanwhile, Floyd’s clothes reveal a man still trapped by his

insecurities. Floyd wears his fears about his stalled career, low earning capacity and body image in polo shirts that ride up and taut, tapered khakis. He tells his withdrawn stepson, Richard (Arlan Ruf), that he wants to lose the weight, so he won’t buy new clothes.

“It was really important that his clothes not fit properly; they’re too tight,” says Maginnis. “They have a cheapness about them that tells us that he can’t afford good clothes. He’s really struggling.”

Floyd’s warm color palette — contrasting with Clark’s cool hues — telegraphs his empathy for others, while his affinity for horizontal stripes and graphic

patterns expresses the tailspin he can’t climb out of.

“He’s making wrong choices,” adds Maginnis. “He wears all these things that emphasize what he would love to hide.”

In *Black Rabbit*, slick DUMBO restaurateur Jake Friedken (Jude Law) also uses close-fitting silhouettes as a mask for his midlife reckoning — but for a different reason. His slim-fit Ralph Lauren Black Label suits and low-scoop, clavicle-baring tanks distance him from his humble Coney Island roots — and bring him closer to the man he imagined he’d become by 50.

“Jake’s physique was important to him — it was what he had agency over,” says costume designer Amy Westcott. “So he did wear the tight tank top. He thought about what ‘this guy’ who owned these bars would wear. It was all trying to be something, but at the same time, a little stuck — not really able to be it on his own terms. What fit him well didn’t necessarily reflect who he was inside at all.”

Jake must face his demons when his gambling-addict older brother, Vince (Bateman, again), rolls back into town. On the run and about to drag his younger brother into another perilous situation, Vince expresses frustration at having “nothing” at age 52. But at least he knows who he is — revealed through his plaid flannel shirts and vintage Pixies T-shirt, dug out of his mother’s attic after returning to Brooklyn with just the clothes on his back.

“Vince is not a front; he is really that guy,” says Westcott, who threaded his current-day grunge look back to the brothers’ late-’90s one-hit-wonder rock band. “Vince was holding on to his old concert T-shirts that meant a lot to him. He didn’t evolve into someone else;



Clockwise from left: Sketches and stills for the actors' costumes in *Black Rabbit*, *DTF St. Louis*, *Beef* and *The Beast in Me*.



he stayed Vince. The lovely part is that he's not trying to put on airs. He doesn't give a shit. He's just himself — and Jake is not."

Unlike Vince, who wears his past because it's genuinely part of him, Josh Martín (Oscar Isaac) in *Beef* uses nostalgia to escape his present. The general manager of a Montecito golf club revisits his glory days playing keyboards in a 2000s synth-pop band through an old concert tee — Hot Chip, in his case — layered under his trusty Baja hoodie. Self-exiled to his man cave to escape marital tensions in the main house, Josh smokes a joint, tinkers on his synthesizer and fantasizes about what he'll do with the money he's embezzled from his employers.

"That's his post-college, early version of himself," says

costume designer Olga Mill, explaining how Josh's "classic millennial" work suits and knit polos communicate his aspirational code-switching as he emulates the wealthy members he serves. "A

spiraling ego question would be: Was that really his true self at that time? Or was that also an aspirational costume? Like, 'I want to be a cool, joint-smoking Moog Music guy.'"

Like Josh, mercurial New York real estate scion Nile Jarvis (Matthew Rhys) in *The Beast in Me* also performs an aspirational version of himself with clothing — but his identity crisis is in his DNA. Nile intrigues — and intimidates — in his snug cashmere sweaters and, for a family birthday fete, a double-breasted blue suit paired with a tight black T-shirt, instead of the expected tie and button-up. His Armani, Zegna and Cucinelli-filled wardrobe flaunts the extreme wealth and privilege that have allowed him to avoid consequences. But Nile's menacing quiet luxury also manifests his petulant rebellion and desire to break free from the shadow — and control — of his father, Martin (Jonathan Banks).

"Nile was trying so hard not to be corporate because he didn't want to be his father's son," says costume designer Arjun Bhasin, who dressed Banks in similarly plush but neutral knits. "He wants to be like, 'Oh, I'm just a playboy. I'm a luxurious, casual, leisurely person.' Yet, he has fallen into that trap."

Because no matter how carefully these men curate their wardrobes, they can't dress their way out of a midlife crisis. **THR**

