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"thomas Crown': Tailored For His Times

July 27, 1999 | By CYNTHIA ROBINS

IN ONE OF the character-establishing scenes in "The Thomas Crown Affair," Crown (Pierce Brosnan), an international billionaire businessman with a taste for great art and grand theft, is being fitted for a bespoke suit. As he moves around his office with its panoramic views of New York City, he is oblivious to the two Italian tailors who patiently are chalk-marking the half-finished jacket he wears. It is the only unscripted scene in the film. And the tailors are real.

The Milanese bespoke tailor, Gianni Campagna, and his son, Andrea, had made suits for Brosnan's personal wardrobe and, at one time, he mentioned he wanted them to design a wardrobe for a future film. The opportunity presented itself last summer when they were called back from a vacation by the "Thomas Crown" producers, who requested that the Campagnas create the \$400,000 wardrobe the title character wears. Gianni Campagna, Milan's premiere bespoke tailor, was perfect for the part. His \$3,400 custom-made suits drape the shapes of such real-life gazillionaires as Mattel's Bill Rollnick, Revlon's Ron Perelman and the wife of arbitrageur Henry Kravis, as well as actress Sharon Stone, who considers Campagna "an old-world artisan at the finest level."

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The fashion look for the film was designed by MGM costumer Kate Harrington, who dressed co-star Renee Russo in strong, tough chick chic from Michael Kors for Celine - bulky-knit cashmeres, fox mufflers, mink-trimmed coats, suede and leather. And the costumes were to become to

"Thomas Crown" as important a signature as the theme song, Michel Legrand's "Windmills of Your Mind."

Clothing denotes class, income and station, and in this film - certainly with the body-revealing Kors clothes on Russo and the Campagnas' easy-fitting, second-skin suits on Brosnan - character. These clothes had to telegraph the message that Crown was not only relaxed, adventuresome and rich, but active, handsome and addicted to risk.

Russo's character, the insurance investigator sent to track the culprit in the theft of a valuable Monet from the Metropolitan Museum of Art (the remake is set in New York rather than Boston), also was delineated by her clothes - beautiful, peripatetic, rich, reckless and dangerous. (When a woman wears butter-soft black leather, black cashmere and silver fox, you can bet she's got more than an edge going for her.)

In the original film, Steve McQueen, whose sense of irony overcame his shortness, was dressed in clothes that probably were expensive for the time. But they were off-the-peg, preppy and boxy and did not send any messages except that this was not an international. "We saw that movie before starting this one," said Andrea Campagna on the phone from New York (he was acting as interpreter for his father, who speaks very little English). "The style was very classic, but the quality of the suits weren't handmade like we do. We tried to create something even better in terms of making it perfect on the body of Pierce Brosnan."

The elder Campagna knew exactly what he was looking for, having dressed a number of the international rich since he was a young man apprenticed to the most famous tailor in Italy, Domenico Caranceni, who dressed Gianni Agnelli, Aristotle Onassis, Cary Grant, Douglas Fairbanks Jr., Sophia Loren, Clark Gable, Gary Cooper and Tyrone Power. Before Campagna left Caranceni to go on his own, he made wedding



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clothes for Prince Rainier of Monaco and Prince (now King) Juan Carlos of Spain.

"(My father) knew how to make suits for movie stars already," noted Andrea Campagna. "He sewed suits for Gable and Cooper in the '50s and '60s, and he wanted to take inspiration for 'Thomas Crown' from that time with those kinds of vested, three-piece suits. Very elegant and classy."

So while we see Russo in hard-edged fabrics, welt-seams, boiled cashmeres and wools, leather and suede, Brosnan's clothes are relaxed-to-fit - a "softer suit that moves with the body, an important shoulder," says Gianni Campagna through his son. "We tried to represent the kind of character Crown would have been in real life - a rich man who was easy in his life and not stiff."

In the original "Thomas Crown Affair" in 1968, the look was designed by Theadora Van Runkle, who dressed Faye Dunaway (as the insurance investigator) in sophisticated suits, gowns and flowing chiffon scarves in palomino colors to go with her blondness and peaches-and-cream complexion. The look started several fashion trends. This version of "Thomas Crown" probably will set its own fashion precedents and ensure the success of Michael Kors, already a very respected designer - he recently won the Council of Fashion Designers Association award for Women's Designer of the Year - and that of the Celine line.

Watch as this fall's fashion looks all include bulky-knit, body-hugging sweaters with funnel or turtle-necks over some kind of animal pelt: leather, suede or pony skin. And look for the resurgence of redhead colors: rust, wheat, palomino, banana, cream and golden beige. Also, watch for the bespoke suit look translated into men's ready-to-wear. The Campagnas have created their own pre-t-a-porter line, Sartoria Campagna, which will come to San Francisco's Wilkes Bashford in the fall. The prices will be high (the line compares to Brioni at \$2,500 for a suit). But the look is: priceless.<

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