

Fashion's new narcotic accessory: Socks by V.K. Nagrani

MY ADDICTION to vibrantly patterned socks started on a temperate autumn day while shopping at one of those famous (and frequent) Macy's one-day sales. I was rummaging through the table of highly reduced odds and ends in the men's section and came across a pair of light blue socks with yellow stripes and found joy in a black pair with ornate red paisleys.

I didn't realize the adventurous departure I was taking from the bland world of six-to-a-pack tube socks, but after that day, my eccentric sock purchases started escalating — a red pair here, some green argyle ones there. Then I was introduced to the socks designed by V.K. Nagrani — and that was the point of no return.

Nagrani might as well be the king of male hosiery with his collection of luxury items that not only include socks but also underwear and leather goods. He has carved himself a niche in the menswear market that started with his simple solution to accessorizing.

"I couldn't find a good pair (of socks)," says Nagrani. "At the time, designer denim jeans were getting really big, and I asked myself, 'What will I wear



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with them?" So I created some socks that could go with denim. People started getting a kick out of them, so I started making them for suits."

His sock styles range from modest sartorial charm to quirky cotton candy wit. No matter how outlandish or conservative, his meticulous socks tend to be a "match-with-everything" kind of accessory for one reason: character.

"It (socks) adds personality," says the rakish New Yorker with Indian roots. "They express more dimension to an outfit."

Talking to someone about something as ordinary as socks has the potential to become stale, but after five minutes of chatting with Nagrani, you begin to share his passion. From his enthusiasm, you can tell he is wearing one of his own designs.



FABULOUS FEET: Nagrani's line of Phillip socks can provide a delightful splash of color and personality to any man's outfit.

Nonetheless, why would a "real guy" go out of his way to wear something so flashy? Would a pink pair of socks from Nagrani's Italy collection compromise a man's masculinity? Would they make a fine gentleman the laughingstock at the office? The answer to that is: Who the hell cares? If it's stylish, then it works.

It is not often that a man can be adventurous with his clothing. Wearing a wild pair of socks provides a means for a man to be a little off-center in his wardrobe without looking

like a fashion circus.

"Not everyone wants to look like everyone else, but they don't want to draw attention," says Nagrani. "My grandfather once said, 'Your presence should be felt and never heard.'"

Whether you're sporting a pair of his olive socks with lavender roses or a pair of his Peruvian stripes, wearing Nagrani's savvy socks is like being a sartorial tease. People get a sneak peek of them with every hem-rising stride. But the full-monty cross your legs ex-

poses something Nagrani describes as that something different for an elegant refined look.

I have crossed my legs many-a-time and received "oohs and ahhs" at the sight of my delectable foot adornment, but choosing a pair of Nagrani's goods proves to be a difficult, yet delightful feat of shopping.

Stamped with his trademark "circle-triangle-square" signature, each pair offers something for every personality. The "Gatsby" is a perfect choice for a top-of-the-ladder socialite, while the "Thomas" from the Italy collection is good for the eccentric appreciator of fine art. For those whose personalities change at a chameleon pace, opt for the "Dirty Dozen," a variety pack of socks where "no two boxes are ever the same."

If you still need help deciding, Nagrani is personable with his consumers and is willing to provide a "sock consultation" and point them in the right direction. From there, you won't be able to stop buying the candy-colored accessory. Before you know it, you'll have 21 pair and be eligible to join the "21 Club," a gentlemen's community of Nagrani sock aficionados who receive prototypes of his new works in exchange for their suggestions on future collec-

tions.

Nagrani's efforts to stay grounded with the people also expand to the philanthropic world by working with groups like the American Breast Cancer Society. The modest boutique mentality of Nagrani is not only a great way to be socially responsible, but also a way to stand out among his competitors.

"Because we are so focused on the consumer relationship, it's hard to compete with us," says Nagrani. "You can't find something like we offer anywhere else."

Without a doubt, Nagrani has achieved his goal of transforming a commodity into an object of desire. Fred Segal said Nagrani's luxe items "are like crack; once people start buying them, they keep coming back for more."

If this is the case, then I need to go into rehab.

► *V.K. Nagrani socks are available at Chic, 5414 College Ave., Oakland. (510) 547-8820; Vendetta, 950 Mason St., San Francisco. (415) 397-7755 and at www.vknagrani.com.*

Contact Dino-Ray Ramos at dramos@angnewspapers.com or (925) 416-4856. For more on V.K. Nagrani and his swanky socks, visit www.insidebayarea.com/fashion.