

Inside track

When to stop showing off



David Tang
Agony Uncle

Sir David Tang, founder of ICorrect, globetrotter and the man about too many towns to mention, divides his time between homes in Hong Kong, mainland China and London. Here he invites readers' queries for his advice on property, interiors, etiquette at home (wherever you live), parties and anything else that may be bothering you.

What could you do to someone (and it has happened twice in the last week) who, at a small friendly party, produced a cigar and started to explain to everybody how good, special and expensive it was, and started smoking it without offering another one to anyone?

The only way to deal with selfish show-offs is to expose their vulgarity. There are two approaches: the elegant way, and the blunt way. For elegance, you might turn to one of your friendly group and make it fairly clear that you are referring to the braggart by quoting a bit of Shakespeare when everyone is listening: "I do not much dislike the matter, but the manner of his speech." This of course comes from *Antony and Cleopatra*, and a description of Enobarbus, who was extremely blunt with his soldiers. If, however, your company is rather

uneducated, you might choose the blunt approach, in which case, you might bark out something like: "If your cigar is so good, why don't you stop talking and give us one each, and we will tell you if it is any good."

While cruising through Tuscany's vineyards as a wine journalist, I could not help pondering about a proper though temporary place for sunglasses in short moments of sun-absence. Shall I keep them in hands, which I find inconvenient and slightly annoying, or shall I hang my shades on the upper button of my shirt, which I consider not-viewy? Thank you.

Learn from Karl Lagerfeld how and why he keeps his sunglasses on even in the darkest eclipses. But I suspect his propensities are different from yours, and since yours clearly lean towards the *vino*, your best solution is to act like a sommelier. So dangle your sunglasses at the end of a chain round your neck. I know this might look a bit old-fashioned. On the other hand if you were to carry the *tasse de vin* as well as your sunglasses, you would be able to boast about the practical ingenuity of killing

two birds with one stone. And if you were to be dramatic, you might even add to the chain a small napkin with which to do your wiping of both. But try not to clash the colour of your napkin with your shirt.

In a recent column you described Tangier as Tangiers. I realise it may have been a typesetter's error, but in case it wasn't, please allow me steer you away from the possibility of making a similar toe-curler. If you find yourself referring to Shepherd Market, please make sure you keep it in the singular. (I had to get Westminster Council to replace their street sign a few years ago after they'd put up one saying Shepherd's Market.) I write this in the spirit of your column which I enjoy reading.

Did you know that the famous nightclub Tramp, which has now been going on for 40 years, is always pronounced "Tramps"? If you don't know that, then you are as ignorant as you are trying to make me and my editor out to be. Actually, many learned sources give "Tangiers" as an alternative spelling. And if you would care for some entertainment around this subject, Wikipedia carries a rather

beautiful picture of the town under which the words "The Bay of Tangiers" appear. In any event, I trust my FT editors who should get these things right. If he had left the "s" in, who am I to complain? As for "Shepherd Market", I have always called it the "Shepherdess Market". Perhaps I should write to the Westminster Council, like you did, on grounds of accuracy.

May I ask you advice about the suitability of tight jeans on men over 36 years of age? I am reaching my mid seventies and still have an enviable figure for a man of my age and have a suitcase full of trendy admittedly fashionable and slim cut tight black jeans which I am prone to wear – I find that my wardrobe is often commented on favourably by the opposite sex, but one friend (female) recently announced, in front of a house full of guests: "Oh for goodness sake – your jeans are FAR TOO tight." I was embarrassed and so were the others around – is it wrong to still be showing off one's figure at my age? Yes.

E-mail questions to david.tang@ft.com

A beacon in the Borders

Mark Muller Stuart uses the historical weight of his Scottish home to boost cross-cultural understanding. By Izabella Scott

Traquair House, home to human rights lawyer Mark Muller Stuart QC, is the oldest inhabited house in Scotland. It's a sunny day in the Scottish Borders and the turreted house, speckled with tiny windows, sits at the end of a long grass avenue footed by the Bear Gates, which have remained closed since the house was visited by Bonnie Prince Charlie in 1745.

Traquair, a royal hunting lodge, has stayed within the same family since 1107. Muller Stuart met Catherine Maxwell Stuart, the 21st Lady of Traquair, at the London School of Economics in the 1980s. They remained close friends and married in 1999, moving to Traquair in 2000. It is an architectural and historical jewel – a Catholic house that fell into decline in Protestant Scotland – and has been visited by 27 kings and queens of England and Scotland.

Muller Stuart sits in a scruffy kitchen at the back of the house, entered through a narrow corridor clouded by drying sheets. The kitchen feels entirely different to the highly decorated rooms of the house that are visited by some 40,000 tourists each year, since Traquair was opened to the public by Catherine's grandfather in 1953. Can this historic house really feel like a home?

"The house is open for seven months of the year, from April to October," explains Muller Stuart. "We share part of it with the public but it still feels like our own, especially over the winter months."

In some respects, the house is frozen in time; we walk into the dining room, which Muller Stuart concedes has barely changed since the 1880s. The table is decoratively laid with 18th-century finger bowls, lace and candelabra. "There are small additions," he says, pointing to the far wall. Camouflaged amid hand-flocked wallpaper and gilded Stuart portraits sits a photograph of a young girl – his daughter, Charlotte. "It's a living, breathing house, but one that has its own serenity. It's caught in the mists of time and you feel that."

Muller Stuart was called to the Bar in 1991, having lectured at an American uni-

'We have preserved the content and interiors, but the role of the house in Scottish life is subject to change'

versity in Cyprus for three years. He quickly moved into human rights law, helping to establish the Bar Human Rights Committee in 1991, and later joining Kerim Yildiz's Kurdish Human Rights Project in 1992. He then turned his attention to conflict resolution and has helped to mediate a number of conflict situations, most recently during the Arab uprising. He travelled to Libya in March, just days after the no-fly zone was announced, to negotiate with the rebel leadership in Benghazi. He is now a senior advisor at the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, an independent mediation organisation based in Geneva.

After climbing a spiral, stone staircase to the second floor, Muller Stuart sits in the high drawing room, another ornate space filled with decorated armchairs and frayed books. "We have preserved the content of the house and its interiors," he says, "but the role of the house, and where it sits in Scottish life, is subject to change." His wife has run Traquair estate since 1990, as well as an 18th-century brewery, rediscovered by Peter Maxwell Stuart in 1965 and expanded in 1993 to produce around 700 barrels of ale per year. "I, like Catherine, wanted to bring the house to life, to resurrect certain themes. At a number of points in history, Traquair has played a significant role in the life and times of the country, and I felt that it could once again play a notable role in the national dialogue of Scotland."



FAVOURITE THINGS

Rules of the game

Gamesboard: "This strange relic was given to me by my father, who was orphaned in 1948 during Partition India. I know next to nothing about his early life or family. This game, a cross between pool and drafts, is something that we played together. The odd thing is, I never asked what it was called – or if I did, I don't remember. I intend to play it with my son, but I have to rediscover the rules of the board – just as I

have to rediscover my father's life."

www.traquair.co.uk/beyondbordersscotland.com



Magisterial Clockwise from top: Mark Muller Stuart QC in his dining room; Traquair House; the lower drawing room; the library; the high drawing room

Martin Hunter



In March, a group of Georgian judges visited Traquair as part of a Scottish tour. Muller Stuart's relationship with Georgia began last year, when the Rustaveli National Theatre from Tbilisi came to Traquair as part of an initiative called Beyond Borders. "I realised that Scotland had enormous potential, particularly in relation to small nation dialogue and cultural reconciliation," he says. He brought together a group of Scottish statesmen and women, including Des Browne, former defence minister, and Baroness Elizabeth Smith, chair of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. "We established Beyond Borders last year [as] a platform for small nation dialogue and cultural exchange. We run events across Scotland, but mainly here at Traquair House."

Muller Stuart travelled to meet the Georgian Supreme Court in 2010. "I suggested they come to study Scotland – since it has clear parallels, from a similar sized population, to comparable issues of outlying remote communities." The group toured Edinburgh and dined at Traquair.

"Twenty of us sat round the dining room table. When the candelabra are lit, it's an extraordinary atmosphere. The shimmering light catches the faces around the table, and occasionally the paintings, while the rest of the room is shrouded in darkness. I most vividly remember the Georgian toasting [in which the toastmaster, or *tamada*, introduces a series of toasts]. It's a wonderful ceremony, which allows for reflection of all the personalities around the table," he says.

Traquair is at once a museum, a home and an international conference facility. The house has a disarming quality; the experience of being within it is unexpectedly cosy, yielded by low ceilings, thick stone walls and faintly slanted floors. The grand furniture is eroded by time and use.

"At Traquair, I think we understand the responsibility of running a big house – and of the hospitality that is expected. We invite people into a home, and those that stay here come and experience some of the fabric of Scottish life."

