



CHINA SHOP

Sandal Scandal

In Australia's summer, thoughts of city workers turn to a more relaxed lifestyle—discarding the suit and sweaty shoes for cooler, informal garb. At last, the grime of frenetic CBD activity can be swapped for a few sweet weeks of tranquillity.

Shaking off the exhaustion of the year's work, we go through a check list of indispensable adjuncts to life on the beach or in the bush: swimmers, jeans and hat. Footwear is important, too. But, this year at least, good quality sandals were remarkably hard to locate.

Is there something vaguely disreputable about this functional cover for our feet? Sandals do seem to have had a bad press, despite their assistance in protecting us from dog drop-

pings, hot sand, glass and other hazards of urban living.

Orwell, that embodiment of English socialist propriety, condemned Fabians as vegetarian sandal-wearers. And, in the early 60s, Bob Dylan declaimed:

Don't wear sandals
We can't afford the
scandals.

In criticising Dr Hewson's GST package, the *Financial Review's* economic commentator, David Clark, argued that the winners from the Opposition strategy would be "irrational, sandal-wearing, Volvo-driving professors of sociology..." The pejorative connotations of wearing the sandal are obvious: eccentricity, unworldliness. The sandal-clad feet are not regarded as being really on the ground.

Yet what are the alternatives? The dreaded rubber thong rips off skin between thumb and next toe, while providing a pervasive flopping sound on beaches and footpaths. Our offspring demand the ubiquitous Reeboks, multi-coloured and with various 'pumps', at vast expense. Whole stores are set up to dispense these pretentious sandshoes.

Compared to such paragons of fashion virtue, the sandal is regarded as stodgy, and odd, certainly unfit for the vogueish.

They are virtually forbidden from the streets of Double Bay or

Toorak, or the hot sands of Palm Beach. Around the less respectable pavements of Balmain, Fitzroy and the university campuses, on the other hand, the sandal is *de rigueur*.

How much more sensible were the ancient Egyptians who, from 2000BC, donned papyrus or leather soles linked to the foot by a series of straps. The Romans would not allow slaves this comfort, but used elaborately designed sandals to clad the rich and powerful. The early Wyclif Bible (1382) recorded a command to be "schoon with sandalies". A later, 16th century, version of the scriptures contained a plea to "gyrde thy silfe and bynde on thy sandalles". And in *Hamlet* Ophelia sings:

How should I your true love
know
From another one?
By his cockle hat and staff,
And his sandal shoon.

For sovereigns and bishops, the half-shoe sandal of red leather and silk became an established part of the regalia.

Sandals remain cool, useful footwear: firm, tightly buckled, the pedal extremities are delightfully exposed to the breeze. That sandals lack fashionability can only be attributed to the sort of irrational 'style' which dictates discomfort in the interests of amorphous fashion. Let's rebel against the fad and defiantly wear our ancient, scandalous sandals in 1992—a robust rebuff to go to extremes and keep the sandals on—yes, with socks!—into winter.

JEFF SHAW is the NSW Opposition spokesperson on industrial relations. Penelope Cottier is on holidays this month. Next month she returns with a new column, *Moveable Feast*.

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