

The Wong Way

Mr Wong is a practising solicitor in the Hongkong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Because he is a solicitor, he is very proud of his position in society. He wears only the latest fashionable clothes, which he purchases at a very fashionable departmental store, the same fashionable departmental store from where he purchased all of the furniture for his home. Solicitor Wong lives on The Peak, a very fashionable part of Hongkong. He lives in a house. He is married to a former teacher of the English language. He has a teenaged son who attends an international school. He is the proud owner of a white Rolls-Royce, which he purchased, second-hand, about 8 years ago.

The following are just some of the things that Solicitor Wong does; and, the reasoning (or lack of it) for his actions.

Solicitor Wong only wore suits of the best material – the more-expensive materials are, always, perceived to be the best materials – and, being somewhat on the short side – about 5 foot, 2 inches – Italian styling was preferable to English styling because it made his shoulders look a little bigger than they actually were. Donned in his brand-name Italian suit, he felt equal to any man even though his hair was thinning on a daily basis. From head to foot, Solicitor Wong determined to be the personification of the well-dressed solicitor of Hongkong. Sartorial elegance was his aim, and spending between \$HK25,000 and \$HK50,000 on a new suit was nothing for this socialite of the legal fraternity. As he would explain to Judy, his wife: *'I have to look the part in order for my clients to have confidence in my ability. Looks are important to a man of my standing.'*

But there was one facet that Solicitor Wong had completely forgotten: His shoes. For many decades, Solicitor Wong had been in the habit of purchasing any kind of shoes and his 8 pairs were either made in China or made in America. He came to realise his great mistake when, on a shopping trip to Pacific Place, he discovered the Timberland Shop. He could not help but wander round this shop because he had heard that the lasts of Timberland were among the best in the world. Admiring the shiny pairs of leather shoes, arranged in racks and on little pedestals in the shop, Solicitor Wong bought 3 new pairs of shoes: One brown; one black; and, one blue-suede pair for leisurewear. The next morning, adorned in his Versace suit and his black, Timberland shoes, polished to a high gloss, he felt that he was on top of the world. That evening, after a difficult day in trying to find a legal loophole in a tricky case, he sat down at the entrance to his Peak home and, very gingerly, took off

his new Timberland shoes so as not to smudge the polished topsides – only to find that his feet were stained black! Examining his black feet, fear spread throughout his entire body. Was it leprosy? Could it be gangrene? ‘Judy!’ he yelled. ‘Help me!’ Judy came running on hearing her husband’s cry for help. There, sitting on a wooden chair, was Solicitor Wong, obviously afraid to move off the spot.

On learning of his fears, Judy examined her husband’s feet, then the new Timberland shoes, and, then, announced: *‘The dye from the leather on the inside of the shoes has gone right through your socks and stained your feet. It has been a hot day and, because you walked a great deal, you sweated and the black dye stained your feet. You are not ill.’* ‘But ... but these are new shoes!’ exclaimed Solicitor Wong. To which, Judy responded: *‘So is the Timberland dye, used in staining the inside leather of your new shoes.’*

Solicitor Wong was embarrassed by his experience with the new Timberland shoes, all of which had found their way into the dustbin within one week of being purchased for fear that the dye could contain arsenic or some other lethal dying agent. He had only worn the one pair of Timberland shoes on one occasion, but, as far as this Officer of the High Court of Hongkong was concerned, once was once too many. That weekend, Judy took her husband to the John Lobb shop in Central and, there, introduced him to English shoes. They, certainly, looked elegant and the leather, definitely, was more than a step up from the Timberland shoes that he had refused to wear. The price of the John Lobb shoes, however, was very high: Upwards of \$HK20,000 per pair. He had paid only about \$HK1,000 for his Timberland shoes. Nevertheless, he bought a pair of brown shoes and was more than delighted when he was handed a pair of shoe trees with his purchase. Shoe trees, he learned, helped to maintain the shape of one’s shoes. For the next few weeks, Solicitor Wong wore his John Lobb shoes and was delighted that his clerk recognised them for what they were: *‘John Lobb shoes, Sir! They are among the best of the best, you know.’* Graciously, Solicitor Wong smiled admiringly at the extent of

knowledge of his employee, who only wore inexpensive shoes, made in China ... which is only fitting and proper, considering his rank in the solicitor’s firm. When, after a few months, Solicitor Wong was invited to meet the master last maker of John Lobb, who had come to town for the weekend, only, Solicitor Wong could not wait to trade stories with this expert, European craftsman, stories that would include, of course, his ingrained fear of Chinese-made, Timberland shoes. At about 11 a.m. on a Sunday morning, Solicitor Wong met the man from Paris. He was John Lobb’s master last maker! What an honour! But it was an honour that would set Solicitor Wong back \$HK50,000.

The master last maker encouraged the Hongkong solicitor to experience the epitome of shoe splendour: A pair of handmade shoes, fashioned by the top last maker in the world.

It took about 6 months for the shoes to be made for Solicitor Wong, but it was all worthwhile for, on a Friday night, he unwrapped the box of John Lobb shoes, specially signed by the master last maker.

‘There!’ he said to his wife, *‘The best of the best in the world of shoes: A John Lobb original’*. Having admired the shoes for a full 5 minutes, he took them carefully away to polish them. One hour later, a scream went up: The polish on the shoes was peeling off and no matter what the deflated solicitor did, nothing helped the situation. He took them, the very next morning, back to the John Lobb shop and told the young lady of the situation, holding the half-polished shoes up as evidence. The young lady explained: *‘You have to use cotton wool to polish these elegant shoes,’* she started.

‘And you must rub the leather in one direction, only. If you rub the leather in the wrong direction, of course, it will harm the leather. Were you not advised of this?’ In truth, nobody had told Solicitor Wong that there was a special procedure to follow when polishing a new pair of John Lobb shoes. ‘I did not know,’ he stuttered to the lady. ‘What shall I do, now?’ And so it came to pass that Solicitor Wong’s John Lobb shoes were sent back to Paris for remedial work on the leather. When they were returned to Hongkong, however, the uppers of the shoes still bore the marks of peeled leather. ‘In time, all will return to normal,’ the accompanying letter explained, signed by the master last maker, himself. *‘Just polish lightly with a damp, soft piece of cotton, rubbing in one direction, only, after each wear and do not use too much polish.’* The months passed and, in spite of following the orders of the master last maker, religiously, there was no improvement: The John Lobb shoes could not be

polished to a high sheen. And so, the shoes sat on a shelf where they could be admired as the only unique pair of John Lobb shoes, specially crafted by Paris's best shoemaker for an important Hongkong solicitor. As Solicitor Wong commiserated: *'They may not be the shiniest pair of shoes in the world, but they were made especially for me by one of the best shoemakers in the world.'*

*'Oh! Vanity, vanity!
Thou art not a woman, but a craven man!'*

.....*yaW gnoW ehT*

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