

HUMOR

Aesthetic Engineering

Gay men and makeovers

Gay men frequently complain that we're not portrayed accurately in the media: The boys on *Queer as Folk* get laid too much, the boys on *Will & Grace* don't get laid enough, *SpongeBob SquarePants* refuses to come out, blah blah blah.

But finally there's a TV show that reflects the true essence of gay life—a groundbreaking series that probes all the nuances of sexual orientation. I'm talking, of course, about *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*.

The new series on Bravo strives to "make over the world, one straight man at a time," an impulse that runs deep in my psyche but that troubles me nonetheless. You see, on the one hand, I'm definitely a proponent of the *Legally Blonde* philosophy of improving the world through beauty. Nothing makes me cry quicker than Oprah's makeover episodes—you know, the ones where some mousy matron is given a chic Marshall Fields outfit and a stylish 'do she'll never be able to redo when she gets home.

The moment when she cries to Oprah, "I've never felt beautiful before" makes me melt like wax (bikini wax, that is). It's better than therapy and definitely preferable to those annoying segments where Dr. Phil tells people to confront themselves. Confront yourself, Phil, I want to see the chick with the dark roots get decent highlights.

I can't help it. I was born with the makeover gene. To this day I still don't understand why Dorothy would give up a pair of ruby slippers and a hair extension just to go back to Kansas. I was the little boy who tried to convince his mother to wear velvet hot pants like Shirley Partridge. And I was the teen-ager who, for his 16th birthday, asked to get his colors done. (I'm a Winter, by the way.)

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARC
by Marc Acito



Yet, strangely enough, like many self-appointed arbiters of style, I've been known to espouse a personal look bordering on the extraterrestrial. Look at Joan Rivers, if you dare. The woman's eyes are on the sides of her head, like a mackerel. And the quintet from *Queer Eye* dresses like the touring company of *Rent*. Just go to the show's Web site and you'll see Carson, the "fashion savant," wearing a blazer I could swear was made out of my Aunt Gloria's sofa set.

Regardless, those of us who pore over *Genre*, *Vogue* and our own pores get a bum rap. You can idle away as many hours as you want cultivating a beautiful garden, and you'll get compliments galore. But spend the same amount of time cultivating a beautiful body and everyone calls you shallow and narcissistic. (Of course, they also call you for dates.)

Critics of beauty fail to understand that admiring a gorgeous person is one of life's great pleasures. I, for one, regularly endure *The Other Half* just so I can fantasize about subletting space in Mario Lopez's dimples.

But the idea of re-creating straight guys in

our own image also concerns me. While gays have been telling the world what is beautiful since the Greeks, it's only recently that straight guys have listened. More and more you're seeing heterosexuals who are so exfoliated they shine like precious stones and who spend enough on hair products to pay off the national debt. Madison Avenue calls them Metrosexuals.

By increasing the number of fashionistas in the world, the standards for male stylishness will become even more exacting, not to mention exhausting. As it is, with all the plucking, shaving, dying, gelling, bleaching, moisturizing and exfoliating, personal grooming is a part-time job. The morticians on *Six Feet Under* prepare a body quicker.

All this Aesthetic Engineering makes me wonder whether I'm a pawn in Abercrombie &

Fitch's nefarious plot for world domination. If so, maybe it's time I put my energy toward something nobler, like joining those hairdressers bringing beauty relief to Afghanistan.

With this thought in mind, I went to lunch with a do-gooding friend of mine, a spiritually evolved man who values good works over good looks. "Nelson," I said to him, "you obviously don't care how you look. What's your secret?"

He regarded me in that glassy-eyed way that New Age people do and replied, "Marco, you need to look beyond the surface and concentrate on the things that truly matter."

I gazed into his soulful eyes—so full of experience and wisdom—and one thought sprang into my mind as the thing that truly mattered most. "Nelson," I said, my voice trembling at the notion, "have you ever thought about waxing your eyebrows?"

What can I say? Deep down I'm very superficial.

And that, my friends, is *The Gospel According to Marc*. ☐



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