



## what about bob

Robert Clifford brings style to the courtroom

by tony peregrin photography by saverio truglia

Ask Chicago super-attorney Robert A. Clifford about the “Bragging Rights” golf award displayed prominently in one of the glass curios flanking his remarkably clutter-free desk, and the first thing he’ll tell you is that he’s not a betting man—and that he can count on one hand the number of times he’s been to Vegas. “This business involves cases where you are dealing with millions of dollars, and that’s enough gambling for me,” says Clifford. “When I play competitive golf with friends, it’s usually over bragging rights, which, to me, is just as important as winning a couple of bucks.”

In the courtroom, Clifford has won much more than a “couple of bucks” for clients in some of the city’s most high profile cases, including the \$35 million settlement awarded to Rachel Barton, the acclaimed violinist who was severely injured in a commuter train accident in the mid-’90s.

Although he’s considered one of the top 10 litigators in the country (he’s been involved in the litigation for every major commercial airline crash of the last 25 years), Clifford prefers a subtle approach when it comes to dressing for a jury or the media. When asked to describe his “look,” the typically verbose 53-year-old offers just a single word: neat. “Neatness is important to

me. I was with a friend of mine the other day and he’s one of the richest men in the community and I swear he was wearing a golf shirt that was decades old. He’s the shabbiest guy I know! Personally, I just don’t feel comfortable looking shabby.” The principal partner of Clifford Law Offices pauses for a moment while considering his next thought, his trademark blue eyes flickering with the intensity of pilot lights. “I can’t pretend to be shabby,” he professes. “I’d rather just be comfortable in my own skin.”

**When did you first become, as you say, “comfortable in your own skin”?**

It had a lot to do with my career. As a young lawyer I had an epiphany: It’s not about you, it’s about the people you represent. Now, I’m fortunate enough to be involved in almost every high profile case in this community, and that comes with a great deal of media exposure. But it’s important for me to remember that when the media seeks me out, it’s not because of me, but because of who I’m representing.

**You’ve made appearances on *Oprah* and *Good Morning, America*. How do your wardrobe decisions factor into what you want to accomplish that day, whether it’s appearing before a television camera or before a jury?**

If I’m involved in a jury trial, I carefully select colors and keep everything in check, again, so that I don’t become the focus of attention. I am aware of the tone of my skin and how well it matches with browns, so I’ll deliberately wear what we call around here “sincere brown,” which tends to give off a natural, easygoing appearance and, hopefully, helps people accept me and listen to what I have to say.

**Over the course of your career, you’ve traveled as much as 100,000 miles a year. How would you compare the style of the typical Chicago male with the style of someone residing in New York City or Los Angeles?**

I’ve always had the sense that the people from Chicago are more easy-natured. They’re not pretentious and they don’t feel like they have something to prove to people in cities like New York or L.A. I think, for example, our mayor is very comfortable in his own skin. His personality is reflective of Chicagoans in general.

**How did you become interested in collecting art from the Chicago Modern period?**

Chicago Modern is the period between the late 1800s to mid 1900s. I’m drawn to it because the work speaks to the history of our industrial urban environment. This body of work says so much about the strength of this city and its design, and the idea that Chicago is very much a diverse city that continues to be the melting pot of America.

**Reveal something about yourself that may surprise people.**

I throw nothing away. I don’t have the skill to throw anything out. Although, I do give clothes away. I belong to many clubs, and if there’s a maître d’ who happens to be my size... well, let’s just say the best maître d’s in the city are probably dressed by Bob Clifford. I also collect crystal.

**When did you start collecting crystal?**

When I started being able to pay for it. I like it because it’s elegant. It’s transparent. What you see is what you get, and I can identify with that. That’s how I try to be. ■





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