

Bernhard Roetzel

A Guy's Guide to Style

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THE SUIT IS THE BUSINESS UNIFORM OF THE OFFICE WORKER AND SIGNALS THE STATUS AND POSITION OF ITS WEARER.

What do we mean by “business?”

A good deal is talked about business fashion and there is no shortage of style experts expounding their knowledge on the subject on various websites and in seminars. Generally speaking, their comments refer to a code of dress which is only observed in a limited number of business fields, such as banks, insurance companies, law firms, and consultancy companies. We will be discussing the fashion rules for these professions in this chapter. Other working environments have completely different guidelines in this respect. People who work in research, for example, or teachers, IT specialists, and sound engineers can more or less wear what they like. They might well choose to wear a suit and necktie but it would not be obligatory.



Have you ever found yourself in the financial district of a big city around lunchtime? Restaurants and cafés tend to be packed with bankers dining on all kinds of delicacies, whether fast food or a more elaborate business meal. They are identifiable from the way they are dressed: often a dark-gray suit, white shirt, necktie, and black shoes. However simple this description may sound at face value, there are actually far more complicated issues at stake here. Business wear—in the sense described here—is a uniform, which in turn implies standardization and recognizability. Yet, for all its outward similarities, a uniform must also indicate distinctions in status. Military uniforms carry badges of rank but what happens in the business sector? How does one distinguish between the business world’s equivalents of sergeants, officers, and generals? The answer is that they, too, carry badges of office. Though perhaps not as conspicuous as stars or stripes on epaulettes, they are unmistakable nonetheless.

Perfecting the art of business attire means wearing this uniform in the right way while also conveying your position—at the correct level—within the hierarchy. Furthermore, a person’s business outfit should also be an indication of where he is coming from and, above all, where he is heading—information which can be gleaned from details such as the cut and material of his suit, his necktie and shirt, his shoes and socks.

The suit is one of the greatest design objects of the 20th century. Its basic shape has not altered since the 1920s and remains fashionable to this day.

The necktie: what it signals

SINGLE-COLOR NECKTIES are available in every possible shade and color and numerous types of weave. The single color certainly simplifies the issue of matching the necktie to a shirt. A plain, dark-blue Jacquard silk necktie was the understated preference of style icon Gianni Agnelli.

What does the dress code say? Office: yes, e.g. in navy blue or wine red. Elegant dining: yes—lighter colors also acceptable. Special occasions: yes, e.g. in muted blues and reds. Smart weekend look: yes, e.g. in rust brown or green.

STRIPED NECKTIES signal that the wearer has a distinct affinity with Anglo-Saxon fashion style. They also permit a conservatively dressed man to make a personal statement through his choice of bright, bold colors.

What does the dress code say? Office: yes—preferably in muted color combinations for important meetings. Elegant dining: yes—all colors are acceptable. Special occasions: yes, but in muted colors. Smart weekend look: yes—in country combinations of green, wine red, brown, or yellow.

SPOTTED NECKTIES A timeless classic. The rule of thumb is: the bigger the spots, the bolder the effect. Classic color combinations consist of white spots on a dark-blue or bright-red background. Tiny white dots on pink or pale yellow are also suitable for summer wear.

What does the dress code say? Office: yes, e.g. in dark blue or black with white polka dots. Elegant dining: yes—a paler background color is also acceptable depending on the season. Special occasions: yes, but only with small pinhead dots on a dark background. Smart weekend look: no.

PAISLEY is regarded as a typically British design but it is actually of Oriental origin. The wildly swirling patterns based on fertility symbols are seen to best effect on fine matte silk. Paisley neckties are acceptable business wear provided the design is elegant and the colors are appropriate for the office, such as wine red or dark blue. A sports jacket can also be teamed with a Paisley necktie in strong shades of brown, green, or yellow.

What does the dress code say? Office: only muted and elegant designs acceptable. Elegant dining: yes—even strong reds and yellows are permissible. Special occasions: yes, but preferably in more muted colors. Smart weekend look: yes—as this is the natural setting for a Paisley design.

GEOMETRICAL DESIGNS Some of these are so cleverly woven that they almost appear three-dimensional, while others shimmer dizzily. Such illusionary effects can make this style of necktie a real eye-catcher but try to avoid imposing excessively hypnotic designs on your opposite number at the negotiating table.

Evening dress or tails

Tails have formed part of a gentleman's wardrobe longer than any other item of clothing. They have remained relatively unchanged since the 18th century. Long pants are a much more recent element, as the tailcoat was originally worn with knee-breeches. This type of outfit was originally designed for horseback riding, hence the angled points on the front panels to allow the legs more freedom of movement.

The bow tie worn with tails is always made in white cotton piqué. In addition, the dress shirt must have a wing collar, cuffs, and front made of the same material, full evening-dress pants with silk stripes, and evening shoes (pumps with a corded silk bow).

The stand-up collar is obligatory with tails. To be precise, this should be a starched wing collar. For a really formal look, it should be very stiff and cover a large amount of neck. Button-down shirts are naturally softer to wear but if tails are the order of the day, the wearer will simply have to put up with some discomfort. A stiff, high collar will encourage a man to hold himself proudly and upright. If you

are wearing tails, you cannot simply pull any old dress shirt out from the wardrobe, as this will have a different type of cuff. The appropriate shirt to wear with tails has single cuffs, which fasten with cuff links. The dress shirt required for a tuxedo should have double or French cuffs, similar to a suit shirt.

Since the days of Fred Astaire, tailors have been debating how tails should be cut and whether or not the vest should show below the dress-coat front. It must be borne in mind, in this respect, that in the Thirties, the waistband was expected to sit on the waist, which meant that the vest could also be high. Even today, pants tailored in this style are still considered elegant, although many men now prefer pants which sit lower on the waist. The vest then slips down and inevitably shows beneath the lower edge of the tailcoat. This has the effect of shifting the optical center of the body downward, thus dividing the figure into two unflattering halves.



A cape would provide the finishing touch for anyone who enjoys a touch of the theatrical.

Shorts

Many style experts would ideally like to banish short pants as city wear and only permit them on the beach. And rightly so. For a long time, shorts were exclusively children's wear, and grown men in shorts cannot really be taken seriously. What is more, shorts exhibit far more leg than anyone wants to see. They also draw attention to your socks and shoes, which are very prominently on view on the end of a naked leg. And, finally, those opposed to shorts are constantly citing the dress code, which

does not sanction the wearing of shorts in towns. All this may very well be correct but the subject can also be viewed in a completely different light.

Individual items of clothing are rarely unattractive or style-less in themselves; more often than not problems arise as a result of the fact that clothes are worn by the wrong people, at the wrong time, and in the wrong place. Bathing thongs may be fine to wear at the swimming pool but not as footwear to wear with a suit. Shorts



Plaid shorts suggest golf or board sports.



Khaki shorts, the all-round classic.



Cargo shorts in olive for an outdoor look.



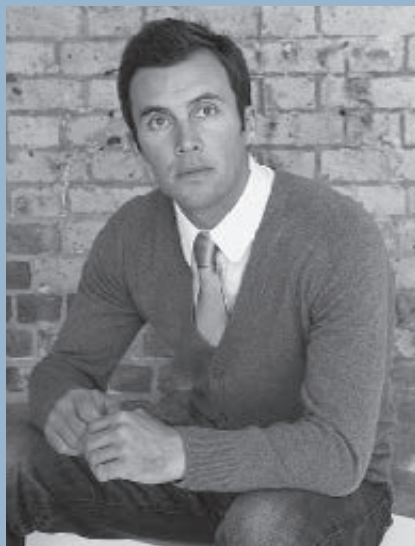
Dark blue: indispensable for the summer.



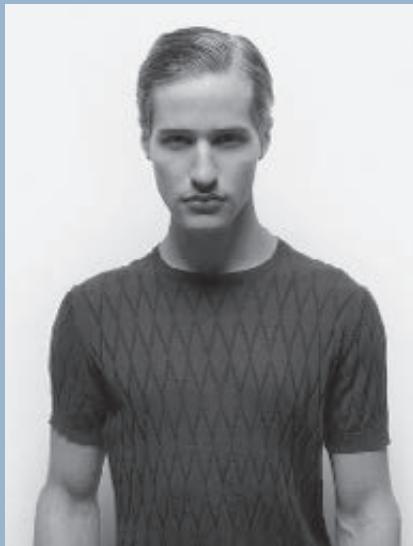
V-neck pullovers are a classic basic of a gentleman's leisurewear wardrobe. Worn with a T-shirt, they reflect a modern, urban look.



Even if worn without a shirt, an elegant knitted pullover with a polo-shirt collar looks more dressed-up than the round-neck style of sweater.



Knitted jackets (or cardigans) have become hugely popular since their design adopted a more body-hugging style.



A T-shirt-style sweater is pure understatement. Made from finest cashmere, it feels as light as silk to wear.

Casual



Bermuda shorts: leisurewear for hot summer days.

Jeans: Brand names like Levis, Lee, or Wrangler are the most authentic.



Chinos: lighter than jeans and more appropriate in many situations.

Driving shoes with studded sole: slightly more sophisticated than the boat shoe.



Boat shoes with a raised sole: yuppies all over the world unite!

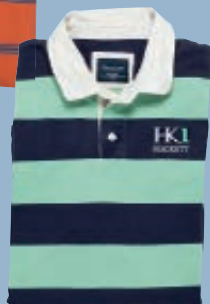


The T-shirt should only be worn in very informal company.

The polo shirt is a more stylish version of the T-shirt.



An excellent modification: a polo shirt with long sleeves.

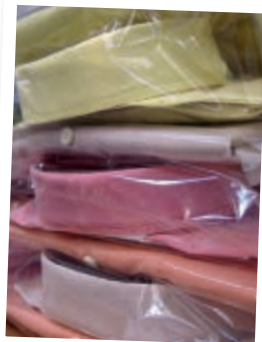


The standard British leisurewear garment.

AN EYE FOR COLOR AND A GOOD SENSE OF PROPORTION WILL HELP YOU ACHIEVE A BETTER LOOK.

It's all about looking good

The colors we wear can have a decisive influence on our outward appearance. A pale blond man wearing a beige summer suit and white shirt, for example, can end up looking very unprepossessing. It is common knowledge that the way colors and patterns are coordinated is also key to the right image. What is less widely known is that proportions are also one of the prime factors which determine what sort of impression we make in our clothes. Squat, stout, slender, young, old, confident, or clownish—our appearance depends largely on whether our clothes emphasize our good points and conceal our problem areas. An “off-the-peg” suit may be well-proportioned in itself but may not flatter the wearer’s figure once he has it on.



Good custom tailors are past masters at dealing with proportions. Clothes designers also have a good grasp of the subject and will certainly try to optimize a garment’s proportions—although this only applies to ready-to-wear sizes and not to the idiosyncrasies of individual figures. A custom tailor must adapt what are essentially the same basic suit models to different body shapes in a way that will flatter whatever figure he is presented with. A double-breasted suit in Size 38 should fit all men of a medium build with a chest measurement of 38 inches (96 cm), whether or not they have long or short arms, a broad pelvis or narrow hips, a hollow back or hunched shoulders. A custom tailor can optimize the fit of a double-breasted suit to take account of any of these eventualities.

Just because someone has a good grasp of proportions, however, does not mean they can perform miracles. Not even the best custom tailor can turn a short, fat person into someone who is tall and slender, but a master of the art of proportions will be able to give a barrel-shaped client at least the fleeting illusion of a waist, broad chest, and slim legs. Anyone who knows the basic rules relating to the question of proportions will be able to avoid many mistakes when buying “off the peg.”

Everyone perceives red and green differently, which makes colors almost as difficult to discuss as emotions. That is why color samples are so essential.

ACCESSORIES OFTEN HAVE A GREATER IMPACT THAN CLOTHES AND SHOULD BE CHOSEN WITH EXTRA CARE.

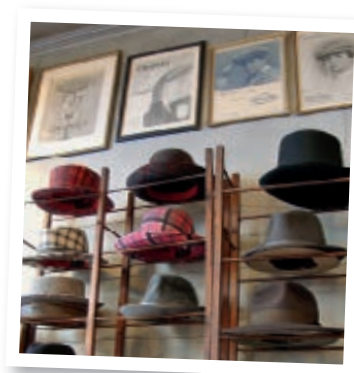
Accessories

What would happen if the President stepped up to the podium one morning with his nose pierced? The media would not be able to resist commenting on that tiny piece of ornamentation. When it comes to appearance, small things often have a significant impact. The item in question may be nothing more than a necktie motif, which is only discernible close to, a cuff link, a discreet ankle tattoo, or a ring.

In the world of fashion, such minor additions to our clothing are called “accessories.” Some of them, for example, purses or belts, may not be all that minor but what they do have in common is that they make all the difference to the total look. A yellow leather strap on a classic wristwatch cannot fail to attract attention. So, although you do not always have to do very much to create an impact, it is important to know exactly what you are doing—like a chef who knows precisely the right amount of each spice to use.

Jewelry is likewise classed as an “accessory.” Many men have long considered it perfectly normal to adorn themselves with bracelets, earrings, finger rings, chains around the neck, and even hair bands. Business or formal wear, however, demands a more restrained approach to this kind of ornamentation. What might be admired on a football celebrity or a rock musician might be frowned upon if worn by an ordinary member of the public.

If you want to play it safe, stick to a wristwatch, wedding ring, possibly one other ring, and cuff links. Anything more might be viewed as excessive—at least if worn with a business outfit. Jewelry is regarded as distracting. People are also quick to disapprove of accessories that are overly trendy. Better to leave your fashionable sunglasses in their case.



With the role of accessories steadily growing in importance in recent years, famous firms like Belvest now present their collections complete with matching accessories.

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Glossary

A

Adjustable waistband Pants waistband which has a method of adjusting it inside the waistband. It replaces the pants belt. Adjustable waistbands are generally found on pants which are held up by suspenders (see also Stretch waistband).

Ascot An old-fashioned form of necktie, once worn with a morning coat or frock coat. Nowadays, would only be worn, if ever, with a wedding suit.

B

Batiste A lightweight, plain weave fabric made from very fine, high-grade yarns.

Beefroll American penny loafers, which get their name from the way the leather is sewn closed—reminiscent of a beef roll being tied.

Belt Strap, usually of leather, which is guided through loops around the waistband and designed to keep pants in position. The color of the belt should be coordinated with the shoe color.

Bemberg silk Brand name for a silk-like cotton lining used for suits, overcoats, and sports jackets.

Bespoke British term for custom tailoring. Originally used to mean that the fabric for the garment was “promised” to the client.

Blazer Dark blue double-breasted jacket with two side slits and gilt brass buttons, a style copied from the naval uniform. Can also signify a single-breasted, solid-color club jacket, usually with patch pockets and brass buttons. Occasionally striped to denote club colors.

Blucher A shoe with open lacing, also known as a Derby. The side parts of the shoe are stitched to the front section of the shoe. This part is also known as the vamp, and covers the instep and toes, extending into the tongue of the shoe.

Boat shoe A moccasin with leather shoelaces and a slip-proof, synthetic sole, developed for use on board a boat.

Bowler British term for a hard, felt hat with a rounded crown, known in the US as a derby. Originally created for William Coke by Lock’s, the celebrated London hatmaker, it was designed as a protection for his gamekeepers’ heads. Typical colors are black, gray, or brown.

Breeches Knee breeches or riding pants.

Brogue A type of Oxford shoe (see separate entry) with decorative perforations and wing tips. Also known as a Budapest

because this style was also manufactured in Hungary. But the term “Budapest” is misleading, since the shoe was invented in Scotland.

Buffalo horn Material for buttons on top-quality suits and sports jackets. Lower-priced clothing will have buttons made from synthetic material.

Business casual A casual form of business attire, e.g. a combination of sports jacket and pants. Usually worn without a necktie. In many business sectors, this has now become more familiar than the dark suit.

Button-down shirt A shirt, the collar tips of which are buttoned to the shirt front. The original version of this is the button-down shirt with a “soft-roll collar” made by Brook Brothers in New York. The shirt can also be worn with a necktie and teamed with a business suit.

C

Caban Double-breasted, short coat, often in dark blue.

Cashmere Yarn or fabric made from the fine undercoat of the cashmere goat.

Cavalry twill Extremely durable and warm woolen fabric with a characteristic diagonal structure. Often used for pants, which are traditionally teamed with a sports jacket or blazer.

Chalk stripes Classic pattern for suit fabrics, consisting of white stripes on gray or blue,

most common in double-breasted suits. They are so-called because the stripes look as if they have been drawn with chalk.

Chesterfield Business coat with concealed button panel, traditionally single-breasted in gray herringbone pattern with a black velvet collar. Also in blue, black, or beige.

Cheviot A hard-wearing, coarse, woolen fabric made from the wool of the Cheviot sheep. A fabric typically used for English sports suits and jackets.

Chinos Light-colored, cotton pants of military origin. Typical colors include khaki, beige, or light, coffee.

Cleaning This normally means the chemical cleaning (also termed “dry cleaning” of non-washable clothes with the aid of fat- and stain-removing chemicals. If this method is used too often, it will damage the garments as the cleaning process also removes natural oils from the fabric. Pressing also takes a considerable toll on the fabric. Brushing and airing your clothes are much kinder options.

Club necktie Originally a necktie sporting the colors of an English club and only issued to members. Nowadays, it is a general term for striped neckties.

Cordovan Another term for horsehide and a rare and expensive raw material for shoes. The part of the hide that can be used is the leather from the hindquarters of the horse, which only provide enough for just two round pieces of leather for two to three pairs of shoes. The American



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