Keys to Buymanship: Men's Clothing

Cooperative Extension South Dakota State University

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MEN'S CLOTHING

Cooperative Extension Service
South Dakota State University
United State Department of Agriculture
MEN'S CLOTHING

By Elizabeth K. Easton, extension clothing specialist

When you're in public, only about 5 per cent of you shows!

The rest of your body is encased in clothes. Packaging is often a determining factor in the purchase of an item. What about your outer covering? Is your "packaging" a help or a handicap?

When we judge people by their clothing, our judgment probably reflects our own standards more nearly than those of the other person. Our judgment will never be entirely correct, for we cannot possibly know the other person's needs, his personal preferences, or other factors affecting his choice.

Clothing and styles, once almost exclusively within the realm of the woman's world, with changing times have now invaded the man's world as well. Designers and manufacturers have helped with more interesting styles, better fabrics, and a much wider choice. The new emphasis brings the consumer and his—or her—buying skills into the picture. This publication is designed to help the consumer of men's clothing by providing guides about fabrics, fits, workmanship, selection, coordination, and use.

RECOGNIZE SPECIFIC NEEDS

Whatever the occupation of the man of the house, some consideration needs to be given to the clothes he buys, not only from the standpoint of style or fashion, but for comfort and durability too. During the first half of the 20th century, fashion in men's clothing changed less frequently than women's. Perhaps one reason was his determination not to sacrifice comfort for fashion. However, changes in working conditions, more leisure time, and greater emphasis on men's fashions in the press have all had an impact on men's interest in clothes and in dressing fashionably and correctly.

BE A DISCRIMINATING SHOPPER

When it comes to buying men's clothing, its the women who should sharpen their wits. Few men like to shop, many have less time for it. Women decide or offer suggestions on about a third of men's outer clothing. Some wives buy most of their husband's clothing. Women must learn to spend clothing dollars wisely for men as well as children and themselves! Women, then, must help men of the family look well-dressed for work, business, or leisure.

Two main types of clothing will be considered: work clothes and dress or business clothes, including suits and sportswear.

Qualities commonly sought in clothing vary with intended use. Generally, one prefers good workmanship, comfortable fit, durability, and easy maintenance. The final choice may be affected by the effort or expense required to keep the garment in service. Quality, cut and construction often affect the ease of caring for a garment.

KNOW FABRICS

Care and durability are related to fiber content and construction of the fabric. The wise shopper becomes acquainted with various fibers and their characteristics (see Fact Sheet 473). Many fabric and garment manufacturers provide excellent information about their products. Make it a habit to buy garments that are accompanied by complete and useful information.

BE SIZE WISE

Fit is an important quality in all garments. Outer garments should fit the body comfortably without being tight or baggy or becoming excessively wrinkled when the wearer walks, sits, bends, or reaches. All garments should be cut straight with the grain of the fabric for comfort and durability as well as fit. The interpretation of "tight" or "baggy" varies with type of garment, purpose for which it will be worn, or current fashion. Size varies too, but is standardized for each type of garment. Finally, clothing should give pleasure or satisfaction to the wearer as well as to those who see him.

LOOK FOR SIGNS OF GOOD WORKMANSHIP

Work Shirts:

Fabric: comfortable to wear, smooth, absorbent, wrinkle-free and resistant to shrinkage.

Cut: full and roomy with plenty of ease, particularly in the elbow.

Seams: smooth, felled, or double-needle stitched
Shirt body is tapered or shaped for a smoother look at waistline.
Shoulders are sloped.
Tails should be long enough to stay in.

(Quality Fabric)
Fine, evenly woven fabric in either basic or novelty shirtings.
Color should be uniform.
To assist the shopper in buying garments which will perform well, the label should indicate such features as:
- Shrinkage control
- Wear resistance
- Colorfastness
- Special finishes, if any
- Laundry instruction

Suits
Pattern carefully sized for comfort and free action, including generous allowances at all outlet seams.
All parts cut on grain with plaids, checks, or stripes precisely matched crosswise and lengthwise.
There should be no piecings. Places to check for matching:
- Center back seam of coat
- Side seams
- Armhole seams
- Where edges of collar rolls over and meets coat in back
- Front closing
- Pocket openings
- Collar notches
Handwork is done with close, even, secure and neat stitches.
Shoulders slightly built up but natural looking.
Front edges firm, thin, and sharp with seam rolled slightly to the inside.
Armholes firm.
Lapels always roll back, never forward. V-line formed by lapel set close to the body regardless of how the wearer bends or moves.
Squeeze the coat front in your hand. If materials and workmanship inside are of high quality, the coat front will feel soft and springy, will resume its shape quickly when released.
In “summer” or strictly washable suits or the “unstructured” suit, coat-front construction is much simpler. Linings and paddings are reduced to a minimum or omitted if the suitting has good body.
Pocket Openings should be reinforced with lightweight material securely tacker to coat foundation.
The way a sleeve hangs is a visible guide to workmanship. A good sleeve is set so that it bisects the side pocket—that is, the front of the sleeve comes to the middle of the pocket as it hangs naturally. A well-set sleeve reduces wear.
Lining should be smooth-fitting and invisibly hand-stitched. A small fold at the lower edge provides give. It should be high enough to avoid showing below the edge of the coat.

Buttonholes should have close, even stitching on the underside as well as on the top. A firm edge and well-reinforced ends are clues to high quality.

Trousers should set up well around the waistband with sufficient belt support evenly spaced and neatly applied. There should be allowance for adjustment of the back rise seam. The fly should be reinforced with good curtain waistband construction. Bias darts from the waistband down to the back pocket give a shapely line. Trousers should hang straight from the waist with back and front creases on grain of the fabric. Legs should be just long enough to break at the instep in most styles. The crotch should be deeply curved for comfort and smoothness.

A well-fitted suit not only looks and feels better, but it wears better and costs less for upkeep than one which fits poorly. Manufacturers have developed a wide range of sizes and size variations. Better suits are fuller cut than poorer grades. Therefore, the same man may not always wear the same size, depending on quality. The make or style of a suit may also influence fit. Try on different makes to determine which looks best on you. To insure a good, comfortable fit, try on the whole suit then check how it feels in action. Walk, step up or down, flex your arms, bend, sit cross your knees.

Minor alterations are to be expected. However, shortening the coat or resetting the sleeves is never advisable. The suit that needs many alterations might prompt other considerations, such as a "made-to-measure" or "custom-tailored" suit. Standards for making customized suits vary, so there is a wide range in quality and price just as in ready-to-wear.

THE STYLE ZONE

Shirt, tie, and lapel often determine the impression a man makes. Ties are always worn with conventional suits. Knot size is determined by collar style. Pattern and color should coordinate with the suit.

Suit jackets hug the neck at the back, showing half an inch or more of the shirt collar, depending on fashion. The bottom button of a single-breasted jacket is never fastened. The lower edge of the jacket always covers the seat. Shirt cuffs end at the wrist bone. Jacket sleeve length should be one-quarter to one-half inch shorter than a long-sleeved shirt. The well-dressed man always has "linen" showing at the wrist when wearing a conventional long-sleeved shirt. Trouser legs hang straight in the back. The exact length varies depending on style. Hose always "cover," even when the legs are crossed!

One of the most common problems is combining textures and stripes, plaids and prints. Here are four points that can help:

1. Relate color. If you choose a plaid jacket and striped tie, repeat one or more of the same colors in both.
2. Relate line. Plaids and stripes both have straight lines. If you have curved lines in one item, repeat them in another.
3. Keep textures in scale. If the plaid is big, the stripe should be wide.
4. The collar is a frame for the face, so choose a style with that in mind. Fashions change, but generally the man with the longer face wears a wide spread collar better. Slim faces and necks usually go together and a shorter pointed collar with a high rise sets them off best. A man with a short neck and round face looks best in long, pointed collars.

WHEN IT'S ALL SAID AND DONE...

Buy according to need.
Consider suitability of the garment.
Decide on price range before you shop.
Shop around...compare.
Shop in stores having a reputation for quality merchandise and good customer relations.
Take advantage of sales.