

BULKY DOCUMENTS

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Part 2 of 2

That look, which was eventually named casual Friday, burst onto the workplace in the mid-1990s and promised to liberate men from the requisite white dress shirt and constrictive ties.

The Levi Strauss & Co. was just one of several clothing retailers that latched onto the movement. Casual became synonymous with Levi's Dockers clothing line as an aggressive marketing campaign pushed the image of confident men dressed in khakis and shirts minus ties lounging around the office or sharing a drink after a round of golf.

But for some sartorial minded, the look was anathema to professionalism.

A backlash arose as the style bled into other days of the week and people took even greater license with the intent. The poster child for everything wrong with casual Friday became the techno whiz featured in so many stories that came to work dressed in flip-flops, shorts, T-shirt and hair that looked as if it was styled with an egg beater.

Fashion experts say the pendulum is swinging back to a more classical look.

The double-digit growth in business clothing sales could partly be explained by men who are diving into their closets and finding that after years of wearing casual clothes, suits no longer fit or are out of style.

An NPD survey last spring found the top reason men shop is to replace worn-out items and replenish their wardrobes.

Injecting fusion into fashion

Traditional suits, however, aren't the target of the buying binge.

Fashion buyers say the new trend is to mix and match formal and casual clothing a look dubbed "fusion."

Brick said a number of factors are influencing the buying habits of men. Some of it is a reflection of pop culture, the emergence of the metrosexual and the reality show "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy."

Money is also influencing decisions as interchangeable pieces are bought to stretch shrinking wardrobe budgets.

"They are picking up pieces that play to a seven-day week," Brick said.

That translates to a sport coat teamed with a dressy bottom during the day and torn jeans at night.

Brick said business clothing sales at Meler & Frank's Vancouver store are up, but declined to discuss specific figures. The company's most recent filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission said that despite second-quarter sales that didn't meet expectations, "ladies' suits, men's furnishings and tailored clothing performed well."

Brick said the trend also holds true for the Pacific Northwest, where style trends are perceived to be dramatically different than those in other parts of the country.

It is not uncommon in Portland and Seattle to attend the opera, a traveling Broadway play or walk into a fine dining restaurant and find patrons wearing everything from tuxedos and formal gowns to casual clothes.

During "Miss Saigon's" recent run in Portland, one man attended the musical dressed in shorts, T-shirt and Teva sandals. He mingled with contemporaries decked out in suits and ties.

Brick said the only real difference in sales between the company's Oregon and California stores is that cold-

weather items sell sooner in the north.

The clothing shift doesn't mean an obituary for casual Friday, just that the attitude is taking on a more-polished look, Brick said.

In some instances, companies are forcing employees to adopt a more buttoned-up look. Target Corp., for instance, recently updated its clothing requirements for employees at its corporate office in Minneapolis.

The new policy ends the "business casual" dress in favor of a more formal look. That means a sport coat and tie for men and jacket for women wearing a sleeveless blouse. A more relaxed ensemble is acceptable on Fridays.

Dean Alsup, branch manager for the Vancouver A.G. Edward's office, said the corporate and numerous regional offices allow for a looser clothing standard on Fridays. Not so in Vancouver, where traditional suit and ties for men are required throughout the week.

"It's not what pleases the employee, it's what pleases the client," Alsup said. "I think the client expects professionalism and that is more readily expressed with proper business attire."

Brick said if history holds, this should be the decade of more elegant dressing as clothing cycles tend to run in 10-year increments varying between traditional and casual styles.

Did you know?

* Components of the business suit, the layered look of a shirt, tie, vest and coat, come from Europe and date back to the end of the 17th century.

* The modern necktie, considered the essential part of a man's suit, dates back 350 years to Croatia.

* Brooks Brothers claims to have introduced the first ready-to-wear suits in 1845, which the company says was a particular hit during the California Gold Rush in 1849 as men didn't have time to wait for a tailor.


Sources: Cornell University, neckties.com, Brooks Brothers.

GRAPHIC: A Lauren by Ralph Lauren sport coat with a Geoffrey Beene dress shirt and **Nautica** tie show off a fall look, with alternate tie choices at left.

Meier & Frank sales associate Donnie Fermenick tries on a charcoal suit from Jones of New York. Brian Bleasdell gets help picking out ties from his daughter, Heather Bleasdell, at Meier & Frank at Westfield Shoppingtown Vancouver.

Meier & Frank sales associate Lena Madson-Moe tidies a Perry Ellis pinstripe suit from the fall line.

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STYLE THAT SUITS HIM ;Coat, tie make young dad feel great Columbus Dispatch (Ohio) September 28, 2004 Tuesday, Home Final Edition

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BYLINE: Marshall Hood, THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

BODY:

Darrick Peppers used to spiff it up big time in one of his favorite six- or seven-button suits to hit the clubs with his wife, Deanna.

And when it came to shopping, Peppers was, well, hot.

"Before I had a family, shopping was one of my favorite things," Peppers, 23, said with a laugh. "Now, it's shopping for the family.

"When you have a child, you can't go out and get a lot of things you used to. I might go out and buy a couple of T-shirts, but. . . ."

But no regrets. Peppers and his wife, who live on the South Side, are the parents of 4-year-old Amari, and another little Peppers is on the way.

"If it's a boy, I might be finished if he likes clothes as much as me," said Dad, who has worked in the quality-control department at Insight Cable for three years.

Even though his social life has been altered, Peppers still steps out in style. Some things a well-dressed man just can't sacrifice.

"We don't do the clubs anymore," he said. "Now it's church and Bible study and Sunday school. I'll throw on a suit for church."

In fact, he likes dressing up so much that he would like to have a job where he wears a suit and tie.

"I just like wearing a suit and tie," he said. "It's a clean look."

His work uniform is shirt and jeans or khaki shorts with work boots. At home: jeans, T-shirt, cap and one of his three pairs of Air Force One athletic shoes.

"I may throw a (sports) jersey on, but I'm not into the hip-hop look," he said. "I just want it casual and comfortable."

But not the preppy-ish kind of casual and comfortable from, say, the Gap, where his wife happens to work.

"I really don't wear the Gap," Peppers said, good-naturedly. "Some of their clothes aren't really me."

mhood@dispatch.com

Box Story:What I wear

Fashion Reporter Marshall Hood takes an occasional look at what people are wearing and thinking about fashion. Today he talks with Darrick Peppers, 23, of the South Side.

Fashion Inspirations

- * Style mentors: "Jay-Z, Steve Harvey, Eddie Long, Deion Sanders. When Jay-Z comes out with French-cuff shirts and cuff links, everybody has to have them."
- * Favorite brands: "**Nautica**, Guess? jeans, Tommy Hilfiger. I've got a few Puffy (designer Sean 'P. Diddy' Combs) velours. But I try to stay away from the big names because they can be costly."
- * You love suits. What do you look for? "It has to have six, seven or eight buttons. I try to stay away from two- and three-button styles. (The former) are more fashionable, more stylish. I like the pants a little baggy and cuffed. And the shirt and tie I wear it with have to match."
- * How did you meet your wife? "We knew each other in elementary school, started dating in 1997 and got married (asks wife)...Feb. 14, 2002."
- * Last job you had before Insight? "Hanging drywall. I loved it."
- * Bengals or Browns? "The Browns. I think they'll do all right this season -- I hope they'll do all right this season."
- * Last movie seen? "Collateral. Good movie."
- * You're a golfer. Best course ever played? "Bent Tree."
- * Clothing item you will never give up: "My caps from Champs. I may throw it on straight back or to the side or to the front. Just depends how I feel."

GRAPHIC: Photo, (1) WILL SHILLING FOR THE DISPATCH/, Darrick Peppers dresses in style when he goes to church./, (2) Steve Harvey/, (3) Eddie Long/, (4) Deion Sanders/, (5) Jay-Z

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