

ANOTHER FASHION QUESTION: MEN'S SUITS

Now that I'm thoroughly befuddled by the contrasting opinions on bag vs. briefcase vs. other items of carrying, I have another fashion question. I'll soon be required to appear in court on a semi-regular basis, which means the one charcoal-gray suit that I bought for the purposes of law school functions and interviews is no longer going to cut it. But beyond that I don't honestly know what kinds of suits men wear these days. How many suits should I have in the rotation, and of what variety? If it matters I'm in Texas, where summers can be hard on suit wearers. Wildly differing opinions welcome. Thanks everyone.

In my experience, it is not about the suit, but the shirt and tie. If you keep your suits basic in color (grey, blue, black) and in style (classic, not trendy -- the guy at the store will know), you can get away with 4-5 suits. Just keep a large variety of ties and add different shirt colors. The same black suit will look different with a white shirt versus a blue shirt or even a bold color (green, purple, salmon).

As to the climate, a good wool blend suit will work. Again, the guy at the store will know.

In Illinois, we have Men's Warehouse, which have knowledgeable staff, good selection, reasonable prices and will tailor the suit for a small cost and will press it FOREVER and retailer it at no cost.

Rhonda L. Rosenthal, Illinois

Basic classics are always a charcoal-gray, dark solid navy blue, and one more with a subtle pattern, like a mid-gray with faint pinstripes (please don't get an actual black suit). If Texas weather is anything like Charleston, I'd suggest making one of those either linen or only partially lined (I have a great gray Brooks Bros. suit that is almost completely unlined and I won't break a sweat when I wear it in the 5,000% humidity here in the summer.

If you want to push it some more, and possibly inspire an image of dandyism, grab a seersucker. You might feel ridiculous in it at first, but you have no idea how comfortable it is until you've tried it. You don't have to be outrageous and look like Tom Wolfe (any relation?), but it might be a good

buy.

T. Ryan Phillips, South Carolina

I think this one is totally up to the individual. I go solids--navy, grey or black--two buttons, off the rack. Juries don't want to see a 3k suit. The only place I splurge a little is on ties. A relative brought me some knock off Hermes ties from a china trip and it was downhill from there.

Jake C. Eisenstein, Colorado

Now that you are in with a law firm, you should probably follow the lead of others in your office. Once again, 'clocking' your local courthouse will give you an idea of the range of options and help you decide which look you prefer for yourself. Beyond that, it depends a lot on your practice area and whether you tend to do bench trials or jury trials. My personal philosophy is to dress in the manner that gives me the maximum amount of comfort and self-confidence; but some judges frown on cowboy boots and jeans. Second best choice is to 'blend in' so that no one notices how you are dressed because it doesn't stand out one way or the other. For criminal jury trials, I would dress down just a bit; juries tend to relate well to browns and greens that are muted. For bench trials, always dress according to the preferences of that judge.

D.A. "Duke" Drouillard, Nebraska

SLOWLY increase your wardrobe. A good trick is to wear all white shirts until you can add some in so that your shirts can't be predicted. (It must be Tuesday because he's wearing cornflower blue...).

Try the deal from Paul Frederick if you are a standard size, four decent white shirts for less than \$90 for a first time customer.

<http://www.paulfredrick.com>

Keep your wardrobe simple and classic until you build it up. Try starting with two suits of identical color and same color shirts. Then expand from there getting as creative as you want.

I worked in jobs where wearing a shirt that wasn't white caused a

stir. Now I'm back to that simple wardrobe, when I must dress up, it's in a nice, dark gray suit with a white shirt and a good tie.

By the by, the shoes are the most important aspect of your suit. You will communicate more about your practice by what shoes you wear than what car you drive. But then, no matter your dress, the substance of your arguments shall carry the most weight.

Regards,

Roger Traversa, Pennsylvania

Be sure to get wool, unless you want the Matlock seersucker look. Wool breathes and is easy to wear in the summer. I have 5 so that a weeklong trial is covered. Blue, brown (sort of mauve I think my wife calls it), grey, black, green (no not like a leprechaun). I believe that the Italian suits are better made than American suits. They hold up through dry cleaning for years. I am still wearing a suit that I bought in 1995. Yes, I had to let the pants out a little (only 1/2 inch), I got taller. No, I am lying, I got rounder.

Robert W. "Robby" Hughes, Jr., Georgia

I've got 5 suits: black three piece, pinstripe navy three piece, light-ish charcoal three button, a navy three button with light brown square patterns, and a navy two button. I'm also looking into having my tailor buddy make a couple of khaki fabric suits (lighter tan and brown colors).

However, I have roughly a jillion shirts and ties. I've had a few instances where I've had to wear the same suit two days in a row (the rest were at the dry cleaners). By pairing a different shirt and tie with the same suit, it really does make it look like a completely different outfit. Now, that usually only works with the "usual" colors--navy, black, and grey. I think that if you have a few suits in your rotation and a decent amount of shirts/ties, you'll be OK.

I'm also a fan of the three piece for a few reasons. 1) I've got a big neck and even the extra long ties come up short on me. Having the vest allows me to hide the length of some ties. 2) It's basically 2 suits in one. Take the vest out and you've got a different suit.

Arizona doesn't have the humidity that TX does, but we do have 120+ degree summers. I don't care what the humidity is, I'm still sweating my butt off

walking around downtown Phoenix in a suit. I do favor the light weight fabrics, although I've noticed they tend to wrinkle easily (at least the couple that I have). I rarely wear the black suit unless it's an in office meeting with a client, or if it's a short walk to the courthouse.

I'm excited about the khaki suits. I figure if that fabric is comfortable enough to wear on an African safari, it should do well in the Arizona heat.

Disclaimer: My fiancé calls me a suit and tie whore. So the amount of suits/shirts/ties I have may be different than other people. Of course, I can no longer fit into them all, but I'm working on that.

Sincerely,

Kristian K. Lindo, Arizona

Your next suite needs to be a Navy blue solid. Most versatile suit period. Fine with brown or black shoes, white, blue, pink, or patterned shirts. Grab a solid knit tie and pair with a white shirt and you've always got a classic professional look available that you don't have to think about in the morning. A light or medium gray with subtle white strips or subtle blue plaiding would be nice too. A beige/khaki or brown suit may be appropriate as well based on your location.

As for the heat, get a summer "light" wool fabric and you should be fine. Also, although I'm quite a traditionalist when it comes to suit fashion, I highly recommend getting a 2 vent suit - 2 vents on the side in the back. Although some in Texas may associate it with Europeans, it is practical and doesn't disrupt the form of the suit like a single vent does with half the venting.

Appearance ranking: #1 No vents, #2 Double Vents, distant #3 Single Vent
Summer breathability ranking: #1 Double Vents, #2 Single Vent, #3 No vents

Score: Double vents 5 pts, No vents 4 pts, Single vent 3 pts

Trends you shouldn't follow: flat front pants, skinny ties, peaked lapels

Trends you should follow: get your suit tailored...sites like Indochina make this an affordable option for even low budgets. The suit will look better and last longer than most anything else for equal money. Also, keep a navy blazer in your office.

P.S. I'm from Alabama and I've seen my share of "suckers" wearing seersucker. It's meant for preppy boys dressed by their mother, that weird uncle, and a foppish day of fun at the Kentucky Derby, not for a professional trying to be taken seriously. Especially not a young attorney.

Jeff Parker, District of Columbia

I second the idea of shirts and ties. I usually wear only white or a blue or blue patterned shirt. I do like nice ties and the ties will change the look of the suit completely. I really like Robert Talbott ties.

Robert W. "Robby" Hughes, Jr.

Land's Ends shirts are the most comfortable I have worn. You can have them custom made with whatever kind of cuffs, collars, pockets you want. They are under \$50 each and last for years.

Robert W. "Robby" Hughes, Jr.

If you don't have (or want to use) a good available laundry, then the best shirts by far are the 100% cotton non-iron ones available from Brooks Brothers or, better yet, Charles Tyrwhitt (ctshirts.com) The latter is having a sale right now for \$50/shirt if you buy four of them. Extremely well made, very good looking... it's a good bet.

Erik Hammarlund, Massachusetts

Ah, thank you for mentioning vests!

3 piece suits had gone out of style for a very long time, but they've come back. Hugely important to me, though for a bit of a different reason.

Handed down from generation to generation, I have an 18th century gold pocket watch, that isn't just ornamental, it still keeps perfect time. I don't always want to wear it when I have on a suit, but when I do, stringing it across the front of a vest is mandatory. Poseurs who attach such a watch to a belt loop are godless heathens!

James S. Tyre, California

I've seen the Matlock suit upclose (not too close it was in a glass

case) in the Andy Griffith Museum up in Mount Airy, NC. Its definitely not seersucker. Its really a fine brownish speckle. Apparently, shortly after the show started they quit making the fabric. So they went out and bought all they could find. IIRC the cost of one of those suits is like \$2000.

John Davidson, Pennsylvania

Good advice all around on suits. one thing to add, find a good, quality dry cleaner. The cleaners that do dress shirts for half of the average price in your area is using the cheapest solvents and soaps. It'll ruin your clothes in no time. And don't use the "green" cleaners without checking them out intensely. Most "green" cleaners use air-pressure to blow the dirt off of your clothes. That doesn't clean the oils off the collars and cuffs (not to mention underarm areas). Your nice, new white shirts will have yellow stains on them within a dozen cleanings.

The high-end hydrocarbon soaps that the good, quality cleaners use is 100% bio=degradable. It is green as well; they just don't advertise it as much. While those cleaners will cost you more, your clothes will last much longer and look much better. Finally, don't be afraid to take an item back in and speak with the manager/owner. If the press was not up to snuff or you're missing a button, a good cleaner won't hesitate to take it back and fix for free... no questions asked. They want your repeat business and will want you to be happy with their service.

John G. O'Byrne, Missouri

Thanks everyone for the advice on suits. It is most appreciated!

Someone on this list recommended a JCP shirt (Executive mumbo jumbo style); I could not be happier with the price and durability. Here's the kicker, the neck button has an expansion/contraction slide!

Outstanding.

Under \$50/per

Michael J. Sweeney, Connecticut
