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Chic, colorful and cool

Men's fashion revives classic style

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Outfitted by Cravats' Custom Shirts & Clothiers, Kyle Battie lounges at the Sarasota Coffee & Tea Company in a pink checked French-cuffed shirt, pinstriped vest and slacks.

The difference between being fashionable and being a slave to fashion is having style.

To be stylish is to accent your image by applying trendy pieces to an existing wardrobe. Finding a style can be difficult.

Men are starting to do what is second nature to women: mix and match clothing to create a look that suits their needs and reflects their personality, said Joe Marconi of Nello's in Sarasota.

"You can get inspired by past fashion history and reinvent it for today," Marconi said.

Elements of fashion from the 1950s and '60s -- slim-fitting pants paired with blazers of various fabrics -- are among this season's trends in men's fashion. The menswear color palette will show pastels in shirts and a mixture of fabrics and patterns in pants.

Men can expect to see a lot of layering this fall through spring. Jeans may be worn with a fitted blazer over a long-sleeved shirt, with a bold colored T-shirt underneath. Or, for a simpler look, a colorful checked shirt is paired with a solid colored tie and worn with slacks.

The look takes a bit of planning but has more depth and will be eye-catching. Even a French-cuff dress shirt worn with a pair of textured pants or jeans can dress up an outfit.

"You're creating a different look that's not plain, but still makes a statement," Marconi said.

As the holiday season begins and the party invitations roll in, it's the perfect time to try something new, sprucing up a bland look with a few wardrobe additions.

Button-down, polo and linen shirts in pinks, purples and yellows add versatility to this season's wardrobes.

If pastels and saturated reds, purples and oranges are too bold, tone the look down with neutrals, said Michelle Sterling, a fashion consultant for Global Image Group in New York City.

"Color is a good way of expressing yourself," she said. "Neutrals are any color that's dull in hue; it's not necessarily black, white or gray or khaki."

Build a wardrobe around basic pieces by using formal details to dress up a casual outfit. This is not to be confused with the business casual trend of the past, said Hank Battie of Cravats' Custom Shirts & Clothiers in Sarasota.

"Casual is for the weekend," Battie said. "Dress is about a look and feel. If you wake up in a funk, I say dress your way out of it."

The trend of a more formal look in menswear is a result of business casual getting too casual during the dot-com era. Men are moving away from the lazy, baggy jeans and loose T-shirts and opting for a more tailored look, said Thomas Maus Jr. of Maus & Hoffman in Sarasota.

"The plain front pants goes with the trim look," he said.

For someone who's ready to experiment with a few new looks, but has limited resources, Battie suggests the following: three pairs of pants in gray, camel and taupe; a blazer, which allows more flexibility than a suit; and shirts in a variety of colors (other than just white and blue).

"Men have been trained and conditioned to have a narrow view on fashion," Battie said. "But you can refresh your look with different shirts and ties and build a wardrobe around basics."

The collar width on shirts also adds interest. Rather than wearing only narrow point or traditional spread collars, which are popular in the business world, opt for a shirt with a fashion or British spread collar, which is a bit wider at the neck and creates a different look with or without a tie.

Men can also get some pointers from actor Jude Law's character in the film "Alfie," a remake of the '60s classic whose main character takes pride in his appearance at all times. It doesn't matter whether Alfie is people watching at a café or hanging with his friends at a nightclub, he always looks put together.

In the opening scene, Alfie thumbs through his closet for the perfect match to his pinstripe blazer. In the end he chooses a pale pink over a white shirt because it makes the pinstripes pop.

"A lot of men don't have confidence about fashion," said Charles Shyer, the director of "Alfie," referring to men who never divert from the chino slacks, blue blazer and loafers.

"What you have to do is mix it up ... a vintage thing with a designer (piece) and create your own style," Shyer said in a phone interview. "It's a bit corny, but it's a no-brainer."

Another look making a comeback is the guayabera shirt, also called the Caribbean wedding shirt. It was one of the featured looks on NBC's "Today Show" Destination Wedding series this fall.

"I would not have considered showing this five years ago," Marconi said. "It was an older-man look, and suddenly the young guys are wanting to wear the shirts."

The guayabera shirt is made in linen and light cotton blends with four pockets on the front with buttons and pleating detail. It's an alternative to the typical evening attire for a man who wants to be a bit more casual, ... ut looking sloppy.

"Regardless of evolving trends, the key to dressing well is knowing what colors and cuts of fabric look best on you," Sterling said.

"People without a sense of personal style can get sucked into the current trends," she said. "They need to really understand who they are as a person, and it (style) has to do with their lifestyle, goals and preferences."