

Dress to Impress

By Rick Moorman

As many businessmen are used to taking off the jacket of their suit during meetings, it is time to give some attention to the shirt.

The best shirts are always made of pure cotton. It looks good and the fabric breathes, but it gets creased easily. Nowadays there are plenty of brands that offer the so-called easy care or crease-resistant shirts, but they often have a finish that undermines the typical characteristics of cotton.

The easy care shirts are, however, a good alternative against the disadvantage of easy crumpling. The most classical design is white. White is the symbol of authority, honesty and expertise. That is why presidents, top managers, pilots and officers still wear white shirts. The purity of that symbolism fades with pastel colours like blue and pink, or with thin stripes. The whiter, the more traditional. The more colourful, the more fashionable.

A perfectly fitting collar leaves space for two fingers from your neck without having respiratory problems. A too tight collar means discomfort, a lack of expertise, or gained weight. A too wide collar makes you look like a turtle.

The height of the collar depends on the length of your neck. Most brands have varied collar sizes. In the end, the collar decides which tie knot is appropriate. The classical standard collar is most business-like and usual and can be worn with most tie knot varieties. With a standard collar the spreading of the tips is average, with a cut away collar the tips are cut tightly, which leaves more space. A large knot, like the Windsor knot, is best for such a collar. The button-down collar, recognisable by the small buttons that hold down the collar tips, is considered rather sportive in Europe.

Besides these collar variables, there is also the tab collar, where the collar tips are secured by press-studs behind the tie. A regular tie knot would be appropriate.

On a normal business shirt a breast pocket is standard, but real gentlemen wear a shirt without a pocket and with double cuffs, which is more exclusive and stylish.

The chosen cuff-link says a lot about the bearer and is one of the few jewels a man can wear. For the perfect sleeve length, the cuff should rest on the ball of the thumb. The cuff should stick out of the jacket sleeve by 1 cm.

A final remark about the fit of the shirt: the shirt should follow the contours of your body without being too wide and certainly not too tight, especially around the chest and the stomach. The seam should be on the edge of the shoulder and certainly not halfway the upper arm.

Does your shirt meet with these requirements and have you used the proper tie knot, then you can hang your jacket on a chair during the next meeting. If you're having doubts, just keep your jacket on.

Rick Moorman has stores in Holland and Belgium. He gives advice and readings on clothing in the business world.