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Cool check tailoring fit for the office



David Hayes NOVEMBER 1 2013



Eddie Redmayne

When British actor Eddie Redmayne stepped up to collect his gong at this year's GQ Men of the Year Awards he wasn't wearing the traditional tuxedo and bow tie sported by most of his fellow attendees – including Justin Timberlake, Dan Stevens, Michael Douglas and Tom Ford – but a spiffy blue and grey check single-breasted Gucci suit with a neat shadow-check knotted tie.

Checks on the [red carpet](#)? Whatever next? Yes, the stuff of flannel shirts and country tweeds has been given a smart urban makeover this autumn with designers from Gucci to Tommy Hilfiger, Hardy Amies, Tom Ford, E Tautz and Valentino all embracing sharp check tailoring.

“I am a check-o-holic,” admits Tom Kalenderian, manager of menswear at Barneys New York. “I’ve been addicted to the richness of these wonderful patterns and cloths for years. Houndstooth, Prince of Wales or District Checks – these patterns appear across many collections this season, from major brands such as Prada [jackets from £1,310, trousers from £405] to small emerging designers such as Brooklyn Tailors [jackets from £435, trousers from £177]. We’ve also had an increase in the number of check suits from collections such as Ralph Lauren, Richard James, John Varvatos, Canali and Brioni.”

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“We’ve bought heavily into checks this season,” says Lisa Crockard, men’s formalwear buyer at Selfridges of London. “The windowpane check has proved popular for autumn so far across lots of our brands – Paul Smith has some great options [jackets from £560] and Tiger of Sweden has an especially chic grey charcoal version at a good price [£689].”

Checks may be cool, but are they something that most men should happily embrace – even in the City? That, of course, depends on the type of check.

“The scale, finish and colour of a check govern whether it works for town or city,” says E Tautz designer Patrick Grant. “Flatter finishes, subtler colours on bases of grey and navy, and smaller scales of check are all good for the city. The same rules govern checks as stripes; never have the same scale check on your suit, shirt tie or hanky.”

E Tautz has a particularly on-trend bold black and tan check suit for £950. Grant has also launched an affordable capsule collection for Debenhams, the British department store, called Hammond & Co, which features a natty Prince of Wales check suit (£199) as a key look. “In any stylish man’s wardrobe there will always be a few timeless checks,” he says.

“The Prince of Wales check is one of the most iconic menswear patterns around,” agrees Jason Basmajian, creative director at Gieves & Hawkes. “It always looks elegant while being quintessentially English. The pattern looks fresh again reinterpreted into slimmer-cut three-piece suits in a classic black and white – which reads as grey from a distance – or reworked in new colours such as tobacco, cream and pale blue [from £995]. We get an enormous demand from bespoke clients for these types of fabrics because they are a little bit different but still have a timeless quality.”

However, not everyone is a fan. “My first work suit was Prince of Wales check and double-breasted,” says 49-year-old London-based accountant Michael Walker. “Checks still remind me of the era of brick-sized mobile phones and yuppies – and it’s not something that I am keen to revisit.”

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Jonathan Lucas, a 34-year-old trader, has a different objection: “A check jacket would be great for the weekend, but checks feel too ‘hunting, shooting, fishing set’ for the office.”

But others beg to differ. “I have a very fine check suit from Zegna that I’ve started to wear again,” says City analyst Simon Clarke, 42. “It looks smart and fresh with a plain shirt and tie.”

The message seems to be: choose a subtle check in a dark shade and it can really work in the office.

“A check suit looks contemporary and modern and yet is easy to wear,” says Jeremy Langmead, editor-in-chief at online retailer Mr Porter. Not convinced? “Look at old film stills from the 1940s and 1950s, or at members of the Rat Pack, and see just how stylish check tailoring can be.

“But I absolutely think that you dress this look down, particularly if you work in the City. Clashing checks makes me think of clowns in the circus.”

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