
ALL TIED UP IN DES MOINES

BY DOUG HEROLD

So you've tossed caution into the Salvation Army bin and decided to replace your neckwear wardrobe with nothing but bow ties this year.

Well, hold onto your collar. Before you tie what could be an albatross around your neck, there are some things you should consider.

Depending on your looks, your status and your personality, a bow tie will either accentuate your assets or plunge you chin deep into clothing controversy.

The good news is that by donning this abridged version of the straight necktie, you will aspire to an elite clique in Des Moines, a group of movers and shakers who, consciously or otherwise, appear to have adopted the item as a symbol of membership. Among this loose fraternity of instantly-recognizable names are such figures as Des Moines magnate John Ruan, recently-appointed Bankers Trust President John Chrystal, Levine Co. Inc. President Arnold Levine, Equitable's Luther Hill and a smattering of top-level executives at the Des Moines Register and Tribune Company.

The bad news - and there's plenty of it- is attested to by wearers, retailers and fashion experts alike. First of all, the bow tie is not "in." Local clothing shop managers say the items never sell like hot cakes, nor even lukewarm cakes, and haven't since the early 1970s when men attempting a Soupy Sales image bought wide and garish butterfly varieties. Experts in business dress will tell you a bow tie is the worst possible accessory to wear in a commercial setting. And a few will tell you the bow tie inflicts numerous less-than-appealing connotations on its wearer — everything from excessive will to irresponsibility to felonious intent.

So, a good guideline to follow if you plan to switch to bow ties is to be serious about it, and be ready to wear its pitfalls as well as sport its advantages. For details, read on.

TIES THAT BIND US

In the mid-1600s, a Croatian regiment returned to Paris after defeating Turkish troops and were met with what today would be a ticker-tape parade. The soldiers, harried in getting to the boulevard, tied their scarves sloppily, inadvertently igniting a new phenomenon in neckwear among the admiring French. Years later, as Revolution brewed in the mud-caked alleys of the city, the aristocracy took to wearing snow-white neck clothes. "The people" responded by wearing black neck clothes - ties to bind them in protest.

Since then, the tie has evolved into mandatory business plumage, weathering along the way scores of transformations. A high stiff collar and tie were sported in the 1800s. This century has been marked by oscillating popularity between wide and narrow, loud and understated species.

Meanwhile, the bow tie, emanating from the same ancestor as its more common cousin, has remained a fringe item, a device of separation rather than regimentation.

"The apparel," wrote Shakespeare in Hamlet, "oft proclaims the man. If this is true of the bow tie, the item could well be taken as a sign of independence, a rejection of popular influences.

Although the movies "Chariots of Fire" and "Brideshead Revisited" have sparked somewhat of a revival of bow ties, this subcategory of neckwear never claims more than 5 percent of the total market, according to Gerald Andersen, executive director of the Neckwear Association of America. Retail sales of bow ties are a far-from-whopping \$30 million a year industry — dominated by uniform bow ties made for waiters and waitresses. The small core of die-hard elective bow tie wearers is a group that resists trends, Andersen said.

"Steady bow tie wearers are professional types with a strong sense of individuality because they obviously don't follow fashion," he said.

Chuck Edwards, an advertising executive at Des Moines Register and owner of a half dozen bow ties, says "You have to have a lot of confidence to wear bow ties because they're so ugly. Not everyone has that courage."

Craig Millhollin, owner of Badower's at 2817 Ingersoll, says he only stocks five or six dozen bow ties because they comprise "such a small percentage of all ties sold." The reason?

"Bow tie wearers are generally strong-willed individuals. They don't cater to what other people think is in style."

And they certainly don't cater to the warnings of fashion consultants.

Susan Bixter, author of "The Professional Image", endorses the bow tie with a heavy qualification: "Because they can so easily make a wearer look comical, they are not good choices during working hours."

Comical? Literally. The most immediate example that comes to mind is Dagwood Bumstead, who rarely loosens his bow-tied collar — even to chase Daisy around the neighborhood. Real-life comic Don Knotts, Orville T. Redenbacher of pop-corn fame and network television's wild-haired critic Gene Shalit employ the bow tie to effect a nerdish image. And there are those who achieve the Poindexter-look with a bow tie without realizing it. Does one need to explain the image of that "popular recording star in Great Britain" Slim Whitman?

If the bow tie can be comical, it can also be criminal, in the estimation of vehement bow tie critic John Molloy, author of "Dress for Success."

"You will not be thought of as responsible if you wear one," he writes. "Most people will not trust you with anything important. It is a death-knell for anyone selling his services as a consultant or law-yer. The number of people who will trust you at all, for anything, will be cut in half.

"In general, people believe that a man in a bow tie will steal. It creates the impression of being unpredictable, thus some experienced trial lawyers who believe they have a good case will try to keep a man wearing a bow tie off the jury."

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But perhaps that is too harsh. After all, some of Des Moines' most notable professionals have reached that status while wearing bow ties.

For instance, Des Moines lawyer Dwight James of James & Galligan has been wearing bow ties for 15 years or more. He maintains, innocently, "I like bow ties. They're neat, easy to tie, distinctive and different ... I'm wearing a paisley one today."

Jones has 50 to 60 bow ties, including ones that are polka dotted, striped and "just plain."

Michael Gartner, president of the Des Moines Register and Tribune Co., says local mega-businessman John Ruan has worn a bow tie most of his life. Ruan himself chose not to comment on his apparel. Said a worker in his office: "I doubt he'll ever talk about it because it was such an issue in the past."

An issue over his bow tie? Indeed.

Gartner himself started wearing bow ties about eight years ago, after the birth of his second child. "I began wearing them when I started changing diapers. I don't think I need to explain the reason why." (Gartner, by the way, says he doesn't know the etymology of the term bow tie and has never thought about it. But he has at least once dealt with "cravat" in his "Words Words Words" column.)

Sitting in a different office at the Register, Edwards says he likes the "clean, simple look" of a bow tie.

Besides, he jokes, "I'd get fired by Michael Gartner if I didn't wear one."

Although Edwards, Gartner and Register publisher Gary Gerlach all sport bow ties, there is no office policy concerning them, Edwards claims.

"There is no corporate edict about wearing bow ties," he says. "But it is strongly recommended."

Edwards prefers the narrow, straight bow tie over the butterfly type -- a preference in keeping with current fashion as described by Andersen.

For the past two years — as with their straight counterparts — bow ties have tended toward the conservative, Andersen says. A classic, or "British-country" look prevails, featuring narrow ends and soft patterns in the tie-yourself variety. The largest call for these is from a core of older men who were hooked by bow ties in the 1930s when Humphrey Bogart took one to the big screen. But younger men and women, particularly in urban areas, also have been buying bow ties, Andersen says.

Dan O'Brien, manager of Kucharos at 400 Merle Hay Mall, agrees, saying a revival of bow ties in Texas has rubbed off on the Des Moines area. The look to the south is marked by bow ties with pointed ends, he claims, which can add life to an old sport coat or even be worn with a sweater. These bow ties will get a wearer into "the most exclusive clubs down there."

Kucharos orders most of its bow ties from the Rainbow Co., a small apparel concern in Dallas. A matching bow tie/cummerbund set successfully marketed by the company in Texas does not have much drawing power in Des Moines though, O'Brien said.

Other retailers in the area say bow ties in general don't attract customers. Todd Parker of Johnson Clothing Co., Valley West Mall, says "there's never a run on them." The manager of K-G Men's Store at SouthRidge Mall says the "very few" fancy bow ties they carry "are the slowest item in the shop." And Bond's of Beavertdale owner Jerry Watts, who has been at the 2716 Beaver Ave. site for 37 years, says there was a slight demand for bow ties six months ago, but it came nowhere near the extent of the trend 30 years ago.

Still, one can purchase about every known variety of the bow tie in the Des Moines area - tie-ons, clip-ons, clasp-ons, loop-overs and bandit bows; silks, silk and synthetic combinations, and "pure" synthetics; patterns, solids, stripes and foulards. Generally they sell for \$13.50 to \$25, although the silk specimens run a little more expensive.

What's it all add up to? Basically, the bow tie, suffering as it does from both kudos and hard knocks, remains a viable, albeit unusual, alternative for the man choked by the culture-wide prevalence of regular neckwear.

There. You may now let go of your collar and proceed.

BY DONALD WERBOLD
So you've heeded caution into the Salvation Army bin and decided to replace your neckwear wardrobe with nothing but bow ties this year. Well, hold onto your collar. Before you tie what could be an abhorrent around your neck, there are some things you should consider.

Depending on your looks, your status and your personality, a bow tie will either accentuate your assets or plunge you into deep into clothing controversy.

The good news is that by donning this abridged version of the straight necktie, you will aspire to an elite clique in Des Moines, a group of movers and shakers who, consciously or otherwise, appear to have adopted the item as a symbol of membership. Among this loose fraternity of instantly-recognizable names are such figures as Des Moines magnate John Ruan, recently-appointed Bankers Trust president John Christal, Levine Co. Inc. president Arnold Levine, Equitable's Luther Hill and a smattering of top-level executives at the Des Moines Register and Tribune Company.

The bad news — and there's plenty of it — is attributed to by wearers, retailers and fashion experts alike: First of all, the bow tie is not "in." Local clothing shop managers say the items never sell like hot cakes, not even hawkswarm cakes, and haven't since the early 1970s when men attempting a Soups Sales Image brought walk-and-kick-butcher varieties. Experts in business dress will tell you a bow tie is the worst possible accessory to wear in the commercial setting. And a few will tell you the bow tie infers a certain lack of appealing connotations on its wearer — everything from excessive will to irrepressibility to dishonest intent.

So a good guideline to follow if you plan to venture into bow ties is to be serious about it, and be ready to wear its pitfalls as well as sport its advantages. For details, read on.

TIES THAT BIND US

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Craig Millhollin, owner of Bowdoin's at 2847 Ingersoll, says he only stocks four or six dozen bow ties because they comprise "such a small percentage of all ties sold." The reason? "Bow tie wearers are generally strong-willed individuals. They don't cater to what other people think it is in style."

And they certainly don't cater to the warnings of fashion consultants. Susan Baxter, author of "The Professional Image," endorses the bow tie with a heavy qualification: "Because they can so easily make a wearer look comical, they are not good choices during working hours."

Comical? Literally. The most immediate example that comes to mind is a hapless Humstead, who rarely loses his bow-tied collar — even to phase Daisy around the neighborhood. Real life, come Don Knotts, Orville T. Roderbacher of popcorn fame and network television's wild-haired critic Gene Shalit employ the bow tie to effect a nerdyish image. And there are those who achieve the Bowdoin look with a bow tie without realizing it. Does one need to explain the image of that popular recording star the Great Lakes' Slim Whitman?

If the bow tie can be comical, it can also be criminal, in the estimation of whom? Not the critic John Holby, author of "Ties for Success." "You will not be thought of as responsible if you wear one," he writes. "Most people will not trust you with anything important. It is a death-knell for anyone selling his services as a consultant or lawyer. The number of people who will trust you is all for anything will be cut in half." He agrees — "people believe that a man in a bow tie will steal. It creates the impression of being unpredictable, that some experienced trial lawyers who believe they have a good case will try to lose a man wearing a bow tie off the job."

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Ruan has 50 to 60 bow ties, including ones that are polka dotted, striped and "dot plain."

Michael Gardner, president of the Des Moines Register and Tribune Co., says local news correspondent John Ruan has worn a bow tie most of his life. Ruan has sold those out to comment on his apparel. Still a worker in his office, "I doubt hell ever get tired of wearing my bow tie. I don't know how long I'll wear it."

An ever-over-the-hill 60' indeed, Gardner himself started wearing bow ties about eight years ago, after the birth of his second child. "I began wearing them when I started changing diapers. I don't have a need to explain the decision."

Gardner, by the way, says he doesn't mind the dynamics of the bow tie and has never thought about it. But he has at least one deal with "cravat" in his "Barks Words World" column.

"I'm in a different office at the Register. I'm recording for the "Urban Sample Look" of a bow tie. Besides, he jokes, "I've been by Michael Gardner of my own wear."

Although Edwards, Gardner and Register publisher Gary Gerken all sport bow ties, there is no office policy concerning them, Edwards claims.

"There is no corporate edict, although strongly recommended," says Edwards. Edwards prefers the narrow, straight bow tie over the butterfly type — a preference in keeping with current fashion as decreed by Anderson.

For the past two years — as with their straight counterpart — bow ties have trended toward the conservative. Anderson says, "A classic, or 'British-country' look, pink, featuring narrow web and

soft patterns in the ties — most" variety of older men who were hooked by bow ties in the 1950s when Humphrey Bogart said sport coat or even be worn with a sweater. These bow ties will get a warmer into "the most exclusive club down here."

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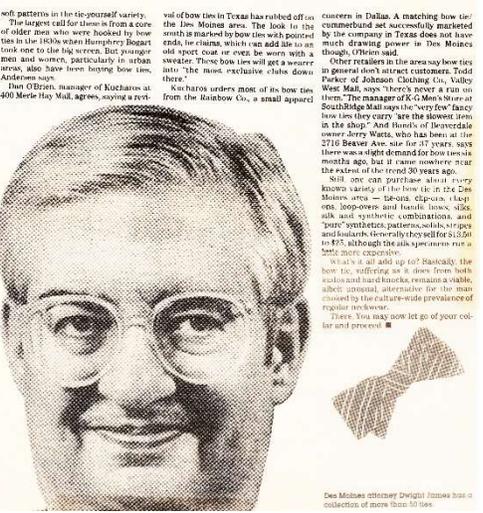
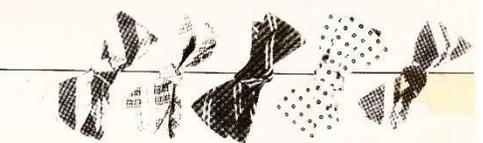
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