

Black Tie 101

The Classic Tuxedo: What to Wear and Why it Works



In 30 minutes, you'll learn

- Why 75% of women think a man looks better in a tuxedo (and why they are right).
- What tuxedos will still be in style 30 years from now.
- Why the shirt collar is one most important parts of a tuxedo.
- Why Dr. Martin Luther King showed cuff when he gave his “I Have a Dream” speech.
- Why you *already* know how to tie a bow tie (and should wear one).
- Why a cummerbund makes you look stronger.
- Why real men in tuxedos sometimes wear shoes with bows on them.
- Why, even on a budget, you can dress better than most men at the Oscars.
- Why Sean Combs, Steven Colbert, Jay Z, Tom Ford, John Hamm, Brad Pitt, and Hugh Jackman all wear the same type of tuxedo that Clark Gable wore 80 years ago

Why Men Wear Tuxedos

- 75% of Women Think a Man Looks Better in a Tuxedo. Why?
- Because, it has been said, a proper tuxedo “makes a man look more like a man.”
- A classic tuxedo makes a man look bigger and taller, with a larger chest and wider shoulders, along with longer arms and legs. It also draws attention to his face.
- Classic Black Tie uses about a dozen “tricks of the eye” to get this result.
- The same tricks work today. Use them and you’ll look great, even on a budget.



The Basis of “Formal”

1 = A Special Occasion.

- The more dress differs from business dress, the more important the occasion.
- With Classic Black Tie, *everything* is different.

2 = Looking Backwards.

- Formal looks backwards.
- Classic Black Tie goes back 80 years, while Classic White Tie goes back 150.

3 = Men Look More Like Men & Women More Like Women.

- If only for social play or fun.



The Colors — Black and White

- Because the color for clothes typically is taken from the world around us.
- Thus, Black and White after dark, just like Gray and Blue suits in the city during the day, or pastel colors in the summer.
- Also some role for shine or sparkle, given the lower lighting and indoor setting.
- As the two most opposite colors, Black (e.g., no color) and White (e.g., every color) also provide emphasis and high contrast.

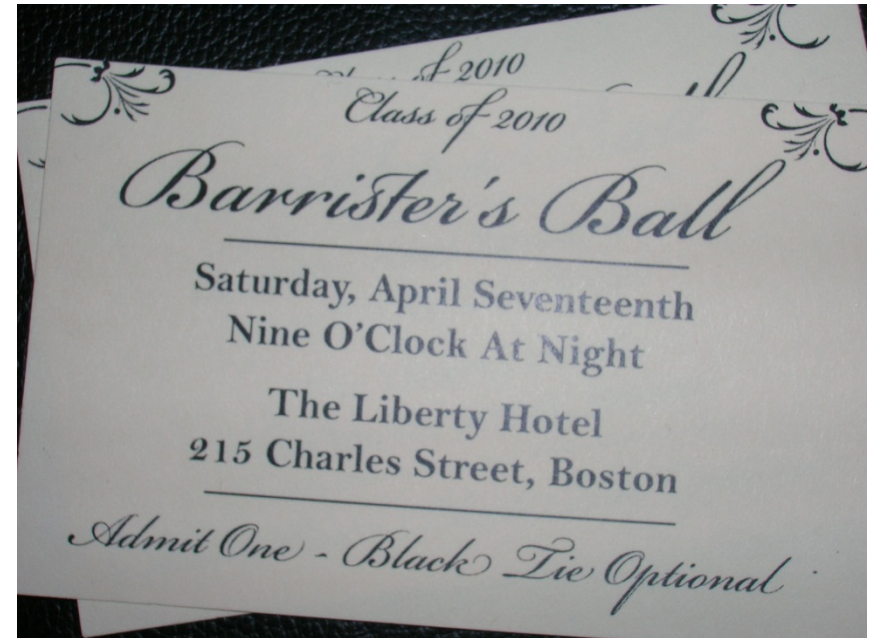


The Terms

What “Black Tie” Means

- In decades past, Evening “Formal” meant White Tie and Evening “Semi-Formal” meant Tuxedo.
- But now, with changing standards about what “formal” means, it’s easier just to say “Black Tie.”
- **Black Tie** = Tuxedo Required.
- **Black Tie Preferred** = Host Prefers Tuxedo, but Dark Solid Suit Acceptable.
- **Black Tie Optional** = Either Tuxedo or Dark Solid Suit.
- White Tie = Tails. The most formal civilian dress. Now rarely used.

An Invitation



Harvard Law School Barrister's Ball (Black Tie Optional)

The Key to Understanding Classic Black Tie

Why is This



Like This?



Both Use Sartorial Tricks of the Eye

With Classic Heels You See

- Longer legs.
- Shorter, smaller feet.
- Added height.
- Etc.

With Classic Black Tie You See

- Wider shoulders.
- Bigger, wider chest.
- Narrower waist.
- Emphasis on the face.
- Etc.

Why Classic Black Tie Works

- For the last 200 years, men's fashion has emphasized the following:
 - Broad shoulders
 - Broad, high chest
 - Long legs
 - Long arms
 - Narrow feet
- Classic Black Tie emphasizes these features *more* than a suit. In turn, a suit does it more than casual clothes.
- Thus, a man “looks more like a man” in Classic Black Tie.
- Classic Black Tie is men's answer to the stiletto heel.



The Seven Principles of Classic Black Tie

- **The Coat.** Peak lapel, one-button coat. Shawl lapel is another option.
- **The Shirt.** High, powerful collar. Showing cuff.
- **The Tie.** Self-tied black bow tie.
- **The Waist Covering.** Formal vest or cummerbund.
- **The Pants.** Pants on the natural waist & braces.
- **The Shoes.** Black patent oxfords (or pumps) or highly-shined cap-toe oxfords.
- **The Extras.** Pocket square, boutonniere, studs, color, etc.



Classic Black Tie – The Jackets – Two Options

“Only shawl or peaked lapels are used for dinner clothes.”

-- Alan Flusser, *Style and the Man* 98 (2010).

- Thus two options – Peak or Shawl Lapels.
- The Peak Lapel is the more formal of the two, but either is acceptable.
- Peak Lapels are *rarely* seen on business suits, while Shawl Lapels (e.g., like a robe), are *never* seen on business suits.
- Thus, together, these two options stress the “special” nature of formal, since both differ from the notched lapels used for regular business suits.



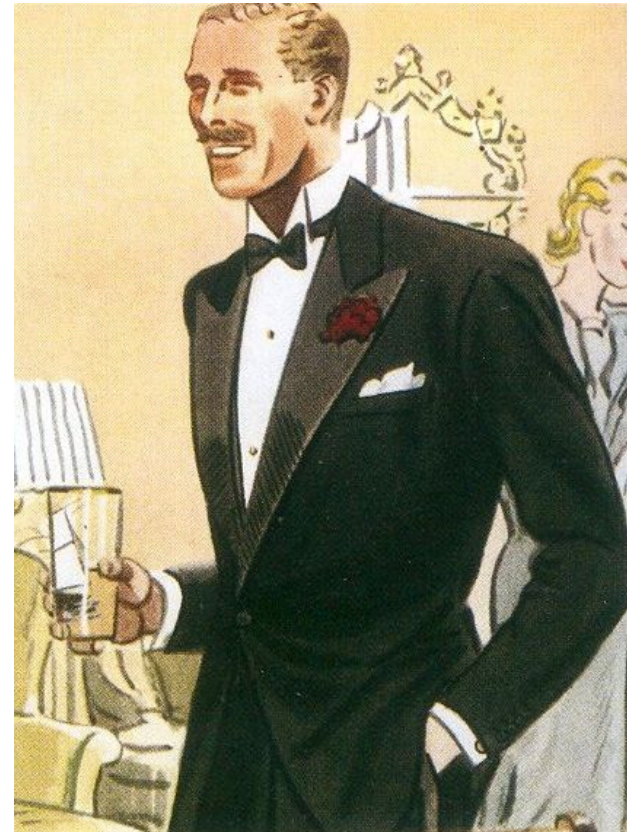
Peak Lapels

The Coat – The Origins of Peak Lapels

White Tie & Tails



Becomes Peak Lapel Tuxedo





The Coat – The Origins of Shawl Lapels – Jacket # 2

Smoking Jacket

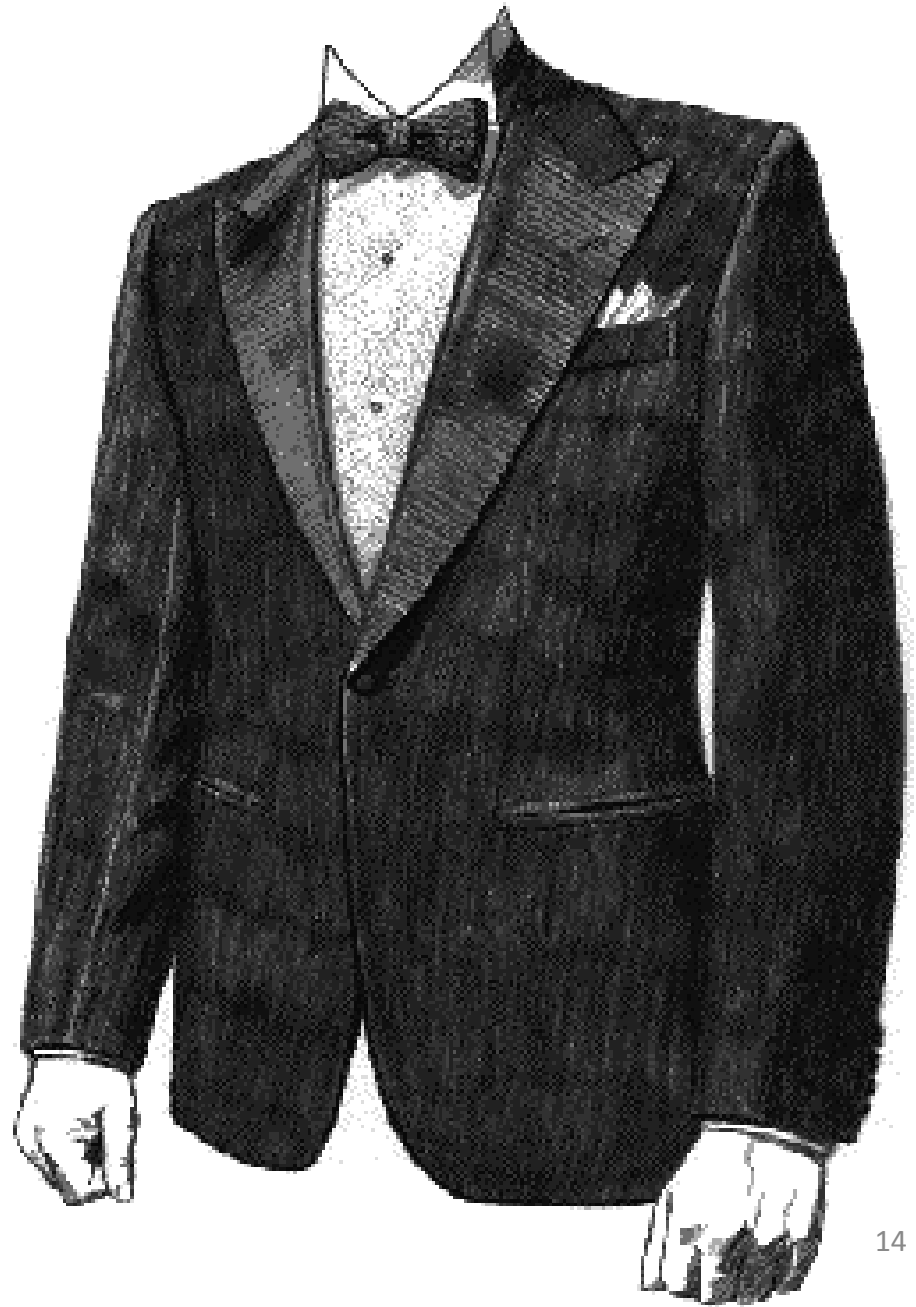


Becomes Shawl Lapel Tuxedo



The Classic Black Tie — The Peak Lapel Jacket

- Wide, Peak Lapels
- Faced Lapels (Grosgrain or Satin)
- Lower Button Stance
- One-Button Closure
- No Pocket Flaps
- No Vents or Minimal Side Vents
- High Contrast of Black and White



The Key Feature of Classic Black Tie

-- The "V" Chest

Faced Peak Lapels & High Contrast -- Wide Chest & Narrow Waist

- The upsweep of the Peak Lapels make shoulders look broader and waist narrower. Thus, a more powerful and youthful appearance.
- The "V" of the Peak Lapels is then emphasized *even more* by using contrasting facing on lapels.
- "V" is further emphasized by the high contrast of the white shirt against black jacket.

Strong Collar & Bow Tie -- Emphasis on the Face

- The resulting "cone" of the White shirt -- with Bow Tie atop -- "holds" the face and draws the eye upward.
- The High Collar brings the shirt closer to the face.
- The Studs trace the route.





Facings on Lapels

Grosgrain Silk (“Grow-grain”)



Satin





Grosgrain Silk Lapels (Oxford Tuxedo)

Classic Peak Lapels – The “V” at Work



Note how the contrasting facing on the lapels accentuates the upward sweep of the lapels. The same “V” narrows the waist.

Classic Black Tie – The Strong Collar

- As a formal shirt, Classic Black Tie demands a powerful collar.
- The formality of a Collar is judged by two things:
 - Height of the collar.
 - Spread of the collar.
- The higher and wider the collar, the more formal (and powerful) the shirt.
- Thus, Collars on high quality tuxedo shirts have both.
- Also, the higher the collar, the more emphasis on the face (because less neck showing).



Marcella shirt from Harvie & Hudson

Classic Black Tie – The Strong Collar

- For many, the best first choice of tuxedo shirt is a strong spread-collar shirt.
- **A Hierarchy of Collars**
 - Classic wing collar (separate)
 - ✓ **High & Wide-Spread Collar with stays**
 - Regular Spread collar with stays
 - Point collar (e.g., downward pointing) with stays
 - Button-down collar
 - Polo shirt (soft collar)
 - T-shirt (no collar)
- Good tuxedo shirts have higher collars than regular business shirts.





Classic Black Tie – The Strong Collar – Explained

- Note the height of the collar (and thus the small amount of neck exposed).
- As a result, the eye is more easily drawn up from the shirt to the face.
- In addition, the Black Bow Tie underscores and holds the face while drawing the eye upward as well.
- Thus the esthetics of Classic Black Tie made a good thing even better.
- This is one reason all men (even already handsome men) look better in Classic Black Tie.



Examples of Strong Collars

“Ocean’s Thirteen”



Brad Pitt



With less neck showing, these high collars “frame” the face. The eye goes directly up from shirt to face.

Classic Black Tie Shirt – the Fabric



✓ The Marcella Shirt

- Made with pique (“pea-kay”), fabric with a small, honeycomb pattern.
- “Marcella” is another word for pique.
- Pattern on collar, cuffs, and front of shirt (e.g., parts that show with jacket on).
- Provides surface interest.
- Rest of shirt has smooth fabric, typically broadcloth, a smooth dress fabric used on dress shirts.
- Fabric first used with Classic White Tie vests and bow ties.
- Marcella Shirts first used in London in the 1930s.
- Different from business shirt.



The Classic Black Tie Shirt – the Fabric

The Pleated Shirt

- A second option.
- Folded Pleats on front bib.
- Many different sized pleats available, but bigger pleats tend to look better on bigger men.
- First used by the Duke of Windsor in the 1920s as alternative to Classic Wing Collar Shirt.
- Less formal than Marcella Shirt, but still correct.
- Different from business shirt.



Wing Collars – Classic & Otherwise

The Classic Wing Collar

- High, firm, wide & highly-starched.
- The most formal collar.
- Used for Classic White Tie.
- Note the high sides and the front “V” under the chin.
- Frames the face better than any other collar.
- Widely used for Black Tie in 1920s through 1940s.
- Still proper for Black Tie today, but hard to find.



Wing Collars – Classic & Otherwise

The Classic Wing Collar – Why It's Detached

- Stiffer and different fabric than shirt.
- Detachable from shirt to allow separate laundering.
- Attached to shirt and closed with collar studs (shown).
- Available in different heights and styles.
- Still used for work by some British Lawyers today.



Otherwise -- The Problem with Modern “Wing” Collars

- A low (and thus weak) collar.
- Attached to the shirt.
- Also, soft and limp construction.
- Doesn't frame the face well.
- Also, often (improperly) paired with pleated front.
- Often used by rental companies for three business reasons:
 - Low collar guaranteed to “fit” neck (and chin) of any size.
 - Need only stock one type of tuxedo shirt.
 - Cheap to make.

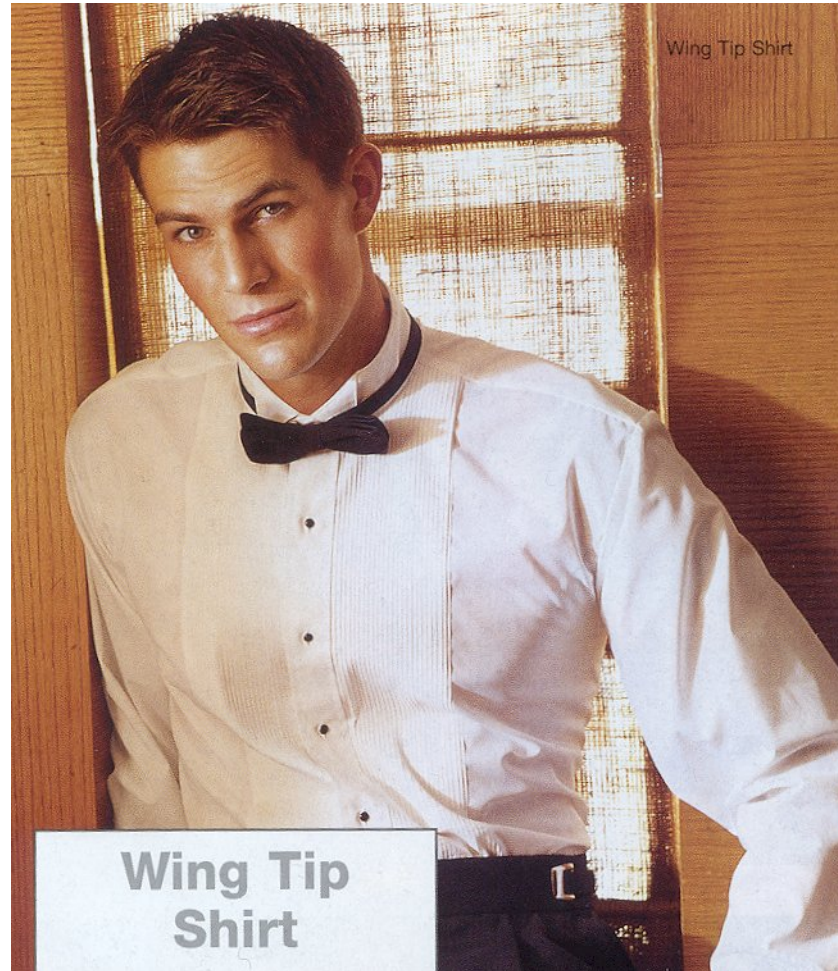


The Weak “Modern” Wing Collar

- ✓ Note how much neck is showing.
- ✓ Low sides, low (and narrow) front.
- ✓ In terms of formality, the modern wing collar thus is closer to a T-shirt, below even a regular business shirt.

- **A Hierarchy of Collars**

- Classic wing collar (separate)
- High & Wide collar with stays [**Classic Black Tie is Here or Above**]
- Regular Spread collar with stays
- Point collar with stays
- Button-down collar
- Polo shirt (soft collar)
- ✓ **Modern wing collar**
- T-shirt (no collar)



Examples of Weak Collars

Low Collar = Less Formal



Low Collar = Less Formal



Note the amount of neck exposed. Particularly weak when (as here) paired with a long neck.

The Classic Shirt -- Showing Cuff

- The cuff of the shirt should extend beyond the sleeve of the jacket.
- **Why?**
 - Adds dimension & depth to the silhouette.
 - Makes the arms look longer.
 - Wears on the shirt, not the suit.
 - Like many constants of classic men's dress, thus combines both **esthetics** and **practicality**.
- **How much?**
 - In business dress, typically $\frac{1}{2}$ inch. This matches the $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of shirt typically showing above the collar.
 - For black tie, cuffs can be longer. Here, it matches the $\frac{3}{4}$ inch (or more) of shirt showing with the stronger collar.



Saville Row Tailors -- Anderson & Sheppard

Showing Cuff – Business Wear

JFK



RFK



Showing Cuff – Business Wear

MLK – “I Have a Dream”
Speech --1963



Showing Cuff – Business Wear



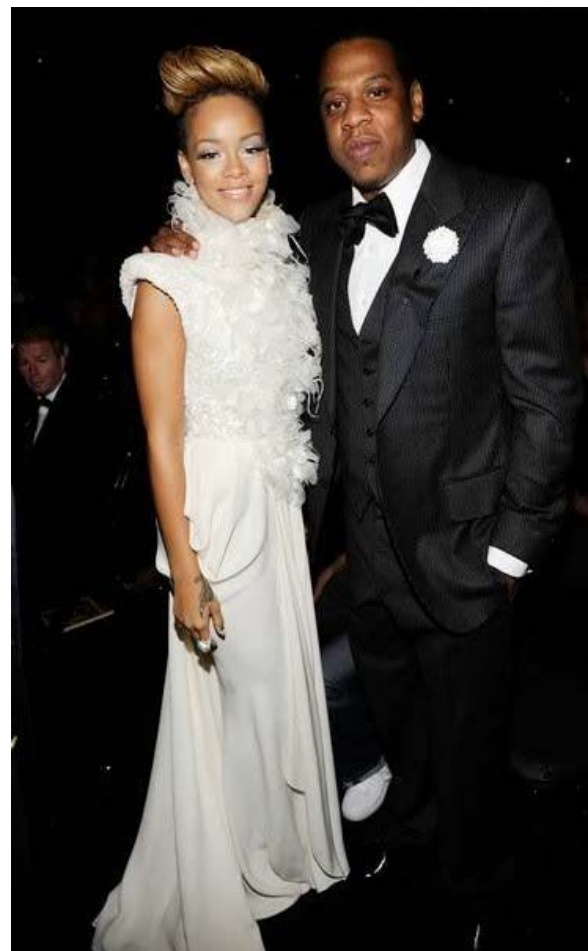
- **MLK – “I Have a Dream” Speech –1963**
- **Second View**

Showing Cuff -- Tuxedos

Sean Combs



Jay Z



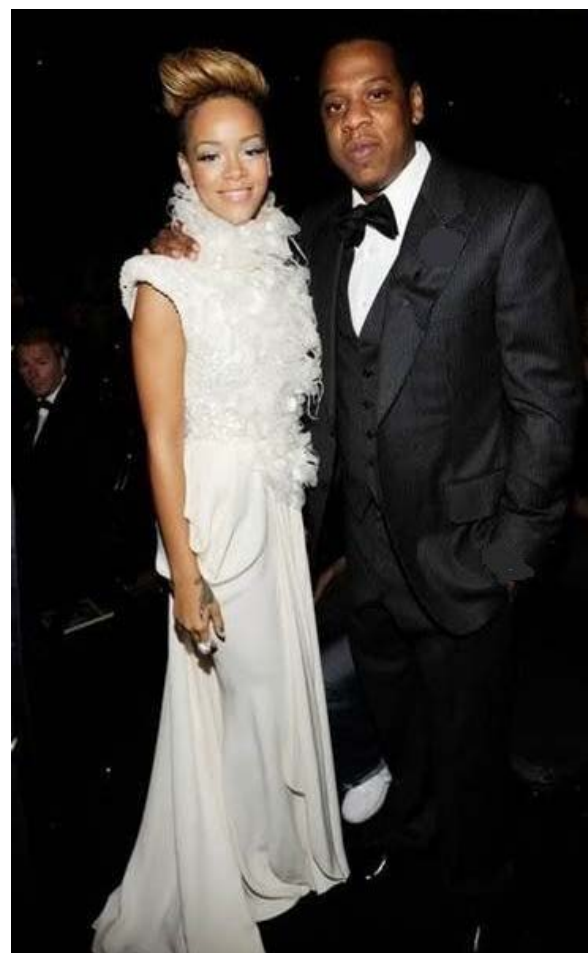


Now, If They Hadn't -- To Compare

Sean Combs



Jay Z



Classic Black Tie -- The Rest of the Shirt

-- The Bib Front

- **Thicker Fabric on Bib, Cuffs, & Collar.**
 - Parts of shirt exposed when jacket is worn.
 - Thus stiffer (and more formal).
 - Creates deeper white on front for higher contrast (and no see-through).
- **Thinner Fabric on Back and Sides.**
 - Cooler, since many venues for formal events are warm.
 - Also better for dancing.
- **No Pocket**
 - More formal.
 - Use pockets inside jacket instead.



Bib Front Shirt

Classic Black Tie -- The Rest of the Shirt

-- The Cuffs

- French Cuffs (e.g., Double Cuffs).
- Use with Double-Sided Cufflinks.
- Long Enough to Show Proper Amount of Cuff.



French Cuffs

Tuxedo Shirts -- Special Features

Removable Buttons

- A feature on high-quality tuxedo shirts.
- Buttons sewn on cotton tape, thus allowing swapping out of buttons for studs.
- Or keep buttons in for less formal look.
- High quality buttons are often thick Mother of Pearl (and will feel cool if touched to the face).



Button Ribbon

Tuxedo Shirts -- Special Features -- Black Tie Engineering

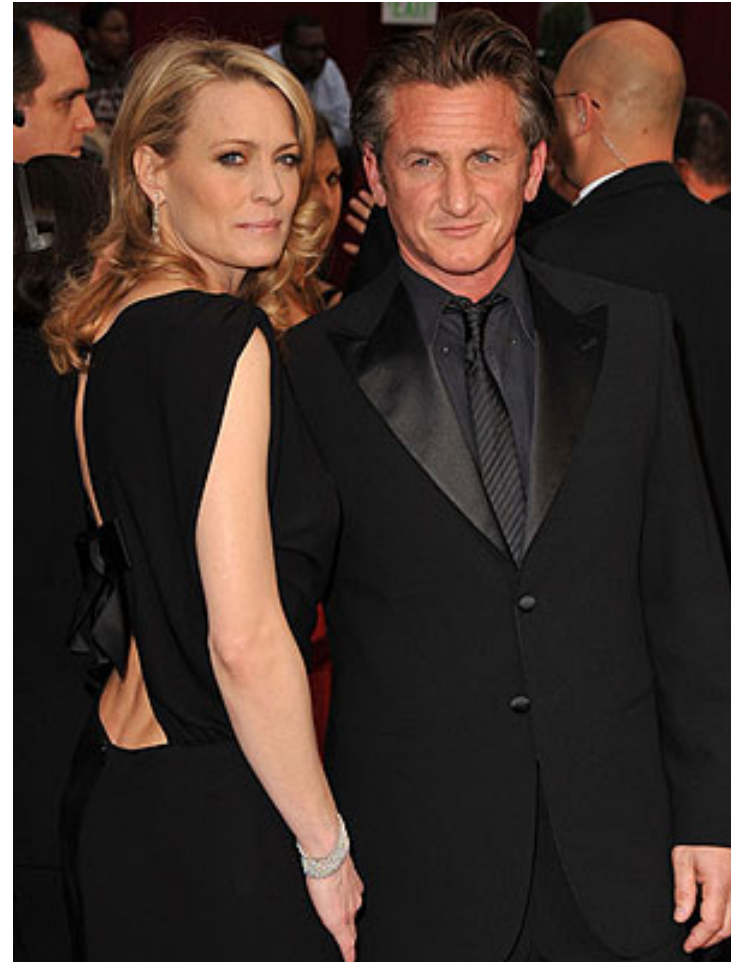
Shirt Tab



- A feature on top-end tuxedo shirts.
- Keeps shirt front smooth and tucked.
- Particularly helpful because of the long (and often open) shirt front showing.
- Shirt Tab attaches to button on inside of pants.
- Can be added by tailor.

Why Black Shirts Don't Work

- The classic “V” of the chest is removed.
- It removes emphasis on the face.
- Removes the high contrast of Classic Black Tie.
- The same shirt removes the benefit of the White Cuff.
- Here, no dimension to the chest, arms, or waist.
- With no White showing, it's just face and hands swaddled in Black.



More Goth than Good

The Tie of Black Tie

- **Color.** Black. Of course. It's why formal is called "Black Tie."
- **Esthetics.**
 - Underscores and draws the Eye up to the Face (vs. Long Tie).
 - Maintains "V" of the chest.
 - When worn, should be slightly narrower than face, but slightly wider than outside of eyes.
- **Type.** Self-Tie (Adjustable).
- **Fabric.** Matches Facing of Jacket (e.g., Grosgrain or Satin).



Three Self-Tie Bow Ties at 2009 Emmys

Why the Black Bow Tie is Formal

White Cravats & Riding Coats

Evening and Court Wear 1803–1815



Become White Tie & Tails



Bow Ties & Formality

Then White Tie Becomes



Black Tie



Thus, the bow tie (and strong collar) for formal wear go back over 200 years.



The Mystery of the Bow Tie

- All of you *already* know how to tie a bow tie.
- But 98% of you don't *know* you already know how to do it.
- How can this be?



Tying the Bow Tie

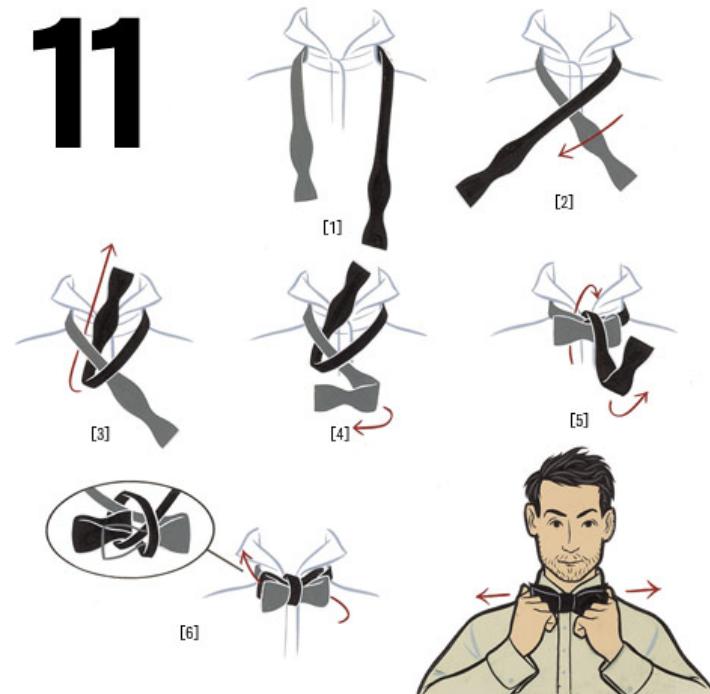
It's the Same Knot

Your Shoes



The Bow Tie

11



Tying the Bow Tie



- Get a bow tie. Most are adjustable and can be changed for different neck sizes.
- Forget the fancy instructions. Just pretend you're tying your shoes. The only difference: start with one side slightly longer than the other.
- Sit down on the edge of a chair. Practice tying the bow tie around your leg, just above your knee.
- Just like your shoes, each side has a loop and a single. To adjust the sides, pull the loops. To untie, pull the singles.
- Now just do the same thing under your neck.
- [YouTube Video.](#)

The Classic Bow Tie -- After the Party

Jon Hamm



Tom Ford



Features on Quality Self-Tie Bow Ties – Firm & Secure Adjustments

- Easy to change settings.
- Hook fits into marked settings (e.g., mini-button holes) on inside of tie.
- Hooks (or similar feature) also keep tie from loosening or moving during the evening.
- Often not found on rental ties.
- Working parts won't show under turn-down collar (but would on wing collar).
- On some quality bow ties, buttons are used instead of hooks.



A Self-Tie Grosgrain Bow Tie (Drakes of London)

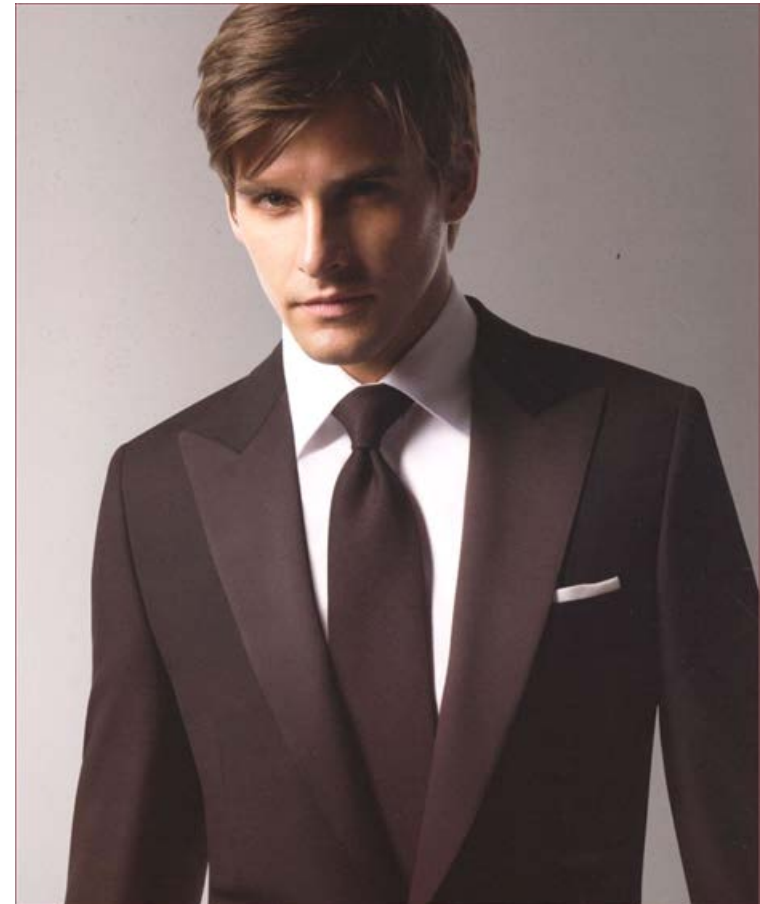
Problems -- The Pre-Tied Bow Tie

- Too “perfect” a bow.
- Rarely pass for the real thing.
- Rentals use them because they’re cheap.
- Often loosen during the evening because adjuster can’t be fixed in one position (unlike a good self-tie bow).
- Note the free-moving adjuster on the right side of this bow tie.



The Tie – Problems – Long Ties

- When paired with a Peak Lapel Tuxedo, a long tie forms **a long, downward arrow.**
- The contrasting **facing** on Tuxedo lapels **accentuates** the downward arrow.
- Points away from the face and down towards the waist.
- Divides up the “V” of the Chest.
- Less Powerful.
- Less Formal.



The Tie – Compare – Why Long Ties *Do* Work for Suits

- A long tie *does* work with a regular business suit, but for different reasons.
- A regular business suit does not have faced (and thus shiny) lapels.
- Together, this removes (or dampens) the “V” of Classic Black Tie and the risk of a long downward arrow.
- With the strong “V” gone, a long tie *can* draw attention to the face by matching or complimenting colors of the eyes, skin, or other facial features.
- The same holds true for colored or patterned (e.g., striped) shirts, or patterns in the fabric (e.g., pinstripes).
- But it doesn’t work for Classic Black Tie.



Sean Combs

Waist Coverings – Cummerbund (or Formal Vest)

- Extends the line of the leg.
- Makes the chest look bigger and higher.
- Together, this gives the hint of a “barrel” chest (e.g., a strong chest sitting above flat abs and waist).
- Fabric of cummerbund should match lapels (e.g., grosgrain or satin).
- No cummerbund or vest needed with double-breasted jacket (since jacket always is buttoned and covers waist with no gaps).
- Single-breasted jackets can be worn open or closed.



Brad Pitt with Cummerbund

Waist Coverings – Cummerbund

Why it Makes You Look Stronger -- Another Example

- Note how the cummerbund extends the line of the leg and builds his chest.



Waist Coverings – The Cummerbund

- Originally from India, where the idea was picked up by British officers (who then brought it back to London). Still used by Indian Army [today](#).
- Originally, cummerbund was single cloth wrapped several times around the waist -- thus the use of folds.
- Folds point up.
- Cooler than formal vest, thus first used during summer.
- Now used throughout the year.
- Less formal than vest.
- Often paired with Shawl Lapel Tuxedo.



Waist Coverings – Cummerbund

- When jacket is closed, cummerbund should show several inches above the button.
- Illustrates, too, how waist covering extends line of the legs and raises the chest
- Shown with Cream (Not White) Summer Shawl Lapel.



Fun Features on Quality Cummerbunds

Hidden Pocket

- Sometimes called an “opera pocket.”
- For tickets, money, key, or surprises.
- From a time when formal pants didn’t have pockets.
- Men, at times, would also use folds of cummerbunds to hold theatre tickets.



Cummerbund with Opera Pocket

Fun Features on Quality Cummerbunds

Trouser Tab

- On inside of cummerbund.
- Buttons onto waist of pants or slips over “extender” (e.g., elongated closure) on front of waistband.
- Keeps cummerbund in place.
- Can be added by tailor.

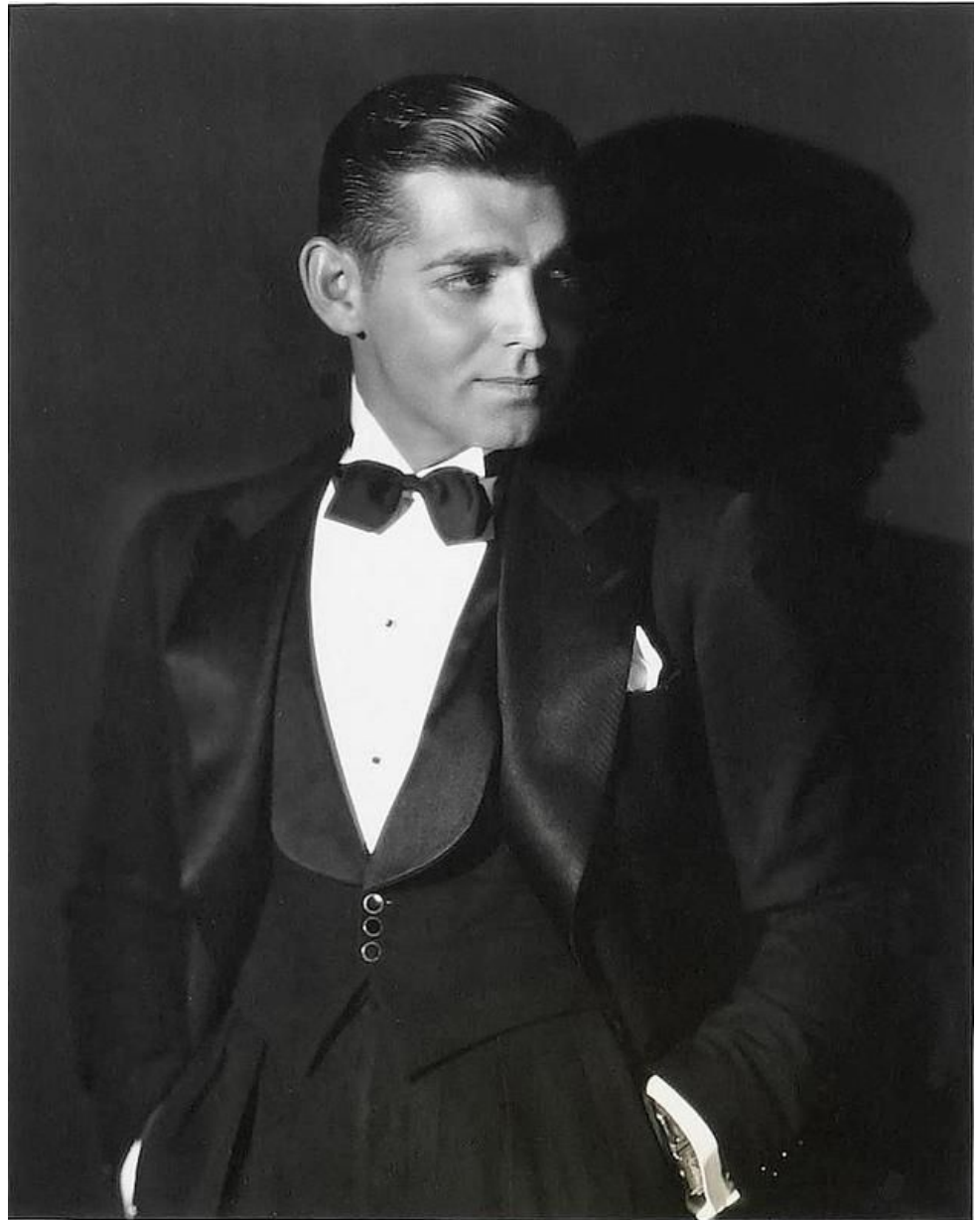
- Also found on quality formal vests.



Trouser Tab on Inside of Cummerbund

Waist Covering – The Low-Cut Formal Vest

- Low cut, with three buttons.
- Mimics the low-cut vest used for Classic White Tie.
- Keeps deep “V” of the chest and emphasis on face.
- Either Full Vest or Half Vest (no back). Half Vest designed to be cooler.
- Vest has Lapels. Same facing as lapels or body of Tuxedo.
- Wearing pants on natural waist prevents gap between Vest and Pants.
- Often paired with Peak Lapels.



Formal Vests -- Examples

Formal V-Shaped Vest



Formal U-Shaped Vest



Classic Black Tie Vests Mimic the Low-Cut Vest used with Classic White Tie. Note Both Vests have Lapels.

Example of a Half Vest

- Open in back.
- First used by the Duke of Windsor in the 1930s.
- Cooler than a Full Vest (in summer or if dancing).
- Open Back not seen, since Jacket is not removed.



Formal Half-Vest

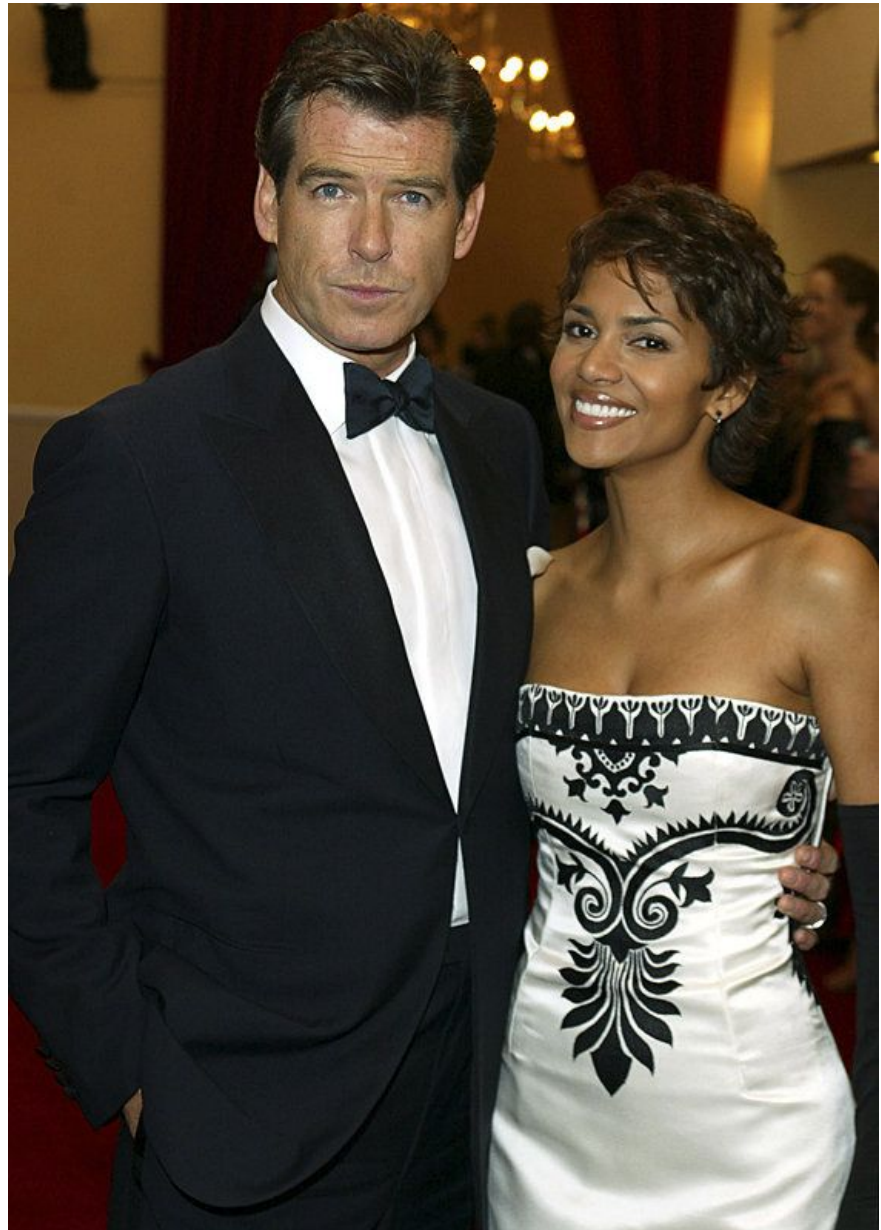
Problems -- Open Jacket & No Waist Covering

- Draws the eye down, away from the face (even these faces).
- Draws attention to the stomach.
- Turns the “V” of the jacket into a “Box,” making the waist wider.
- Shortens the line of the legs.
- Loses the high chest and makes you look older (as in too old) and heavier.



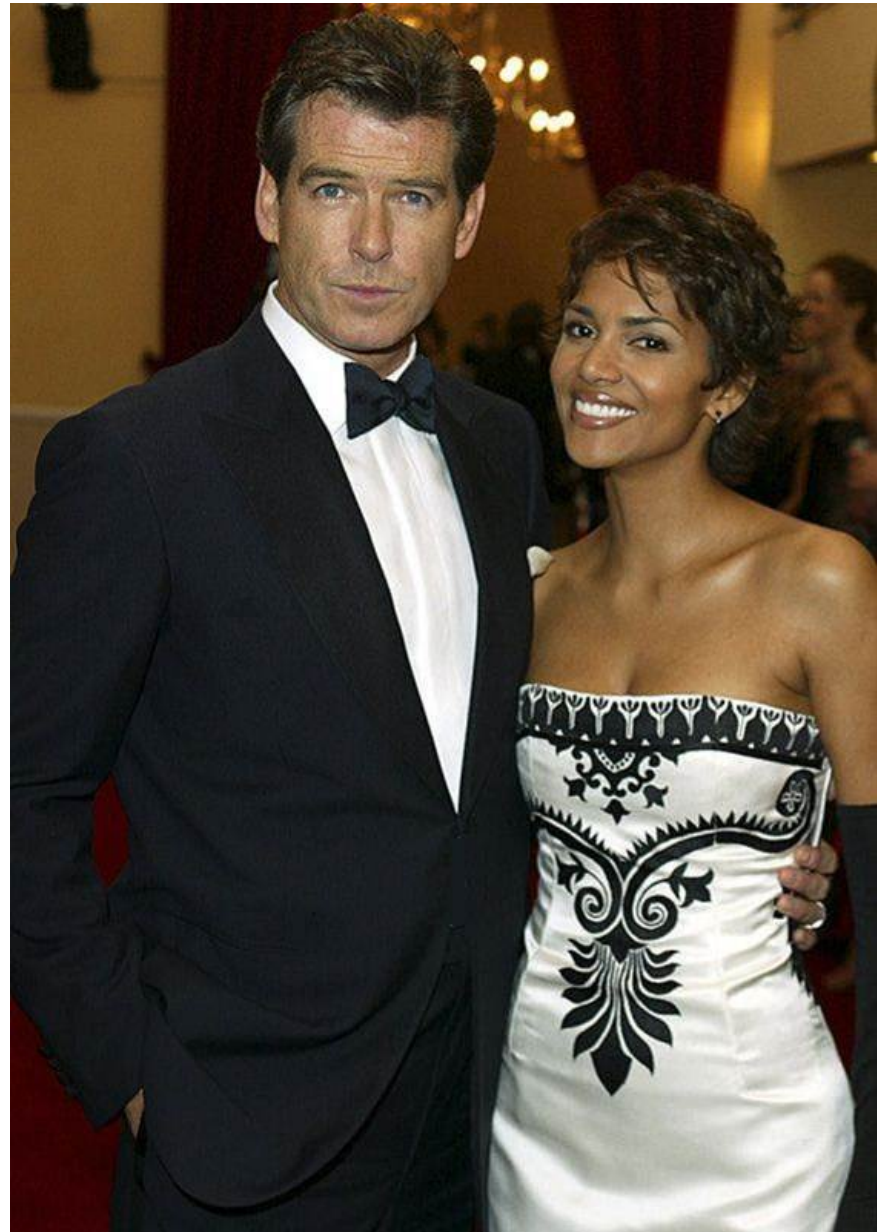
Problems – Closed Jacket & No Waist Covering – Gap

- Draws eye downward & distracts.
- Gap almost certain if no Waist Covering used.
- Even worse if pants not worn on natural waist.
- High contrast of White and Black draws even more attention.
- Shortens line of legs.
- Drops line of chest.



**Problems – Closed Jacket
and No Waist Covering –
Gap -- Corrected**

- Cover the gap and the eyes go upward to the faces.





Problems – Business Vest Rather Than Formal Vest

- Here, dramatically weakens the powerful “V” of Classic Black Tie.
- Removes the “Cone” of the Shirt.
- Lessens high contrast of Black and White.
- Together, dampens rather than enhances any “V” of the Lapels.
- Less formal, since it mimics the high vest used with Business Wear.
- Emphasizes the Torso rather than the Chest.
- Often used in rentals.



Classic Black Tie – The Pants

- Worn on the natural waist.
- Braces (suspenders) attached to pants with buttons. No clips.
- No belt loops on pants, since braces are used. Gives a cleaner look.
- May also have a watch pocket.
- Pleats are traditional. They also extend the line of the leg.
- Vertical pockets (more formal).
- With side stripe. Also extends line of leg.
- No cuffs.



Oxford Tuxedo Pants

Pants -- On the Natural Waist

Classic White Tie



Classic Marine



Pants -- On the Natural Waist

Extends the line of legs, narrows the waist, raises and emphasizes the chest.
In both cases.



Classic Black Tie Pants – Braces -- Why They Work

**Braces (Suspenders) are
Traditional for Classic Black Tie.**

Esthetics:

- Keeps crease straight, thus extends line of the leg.
- Front braces are directly over pleats, thus, keeping crease tight.
- Help pants drape better.
- Pants always in place. Line remains consistent.

Comfort:

- With braces, pants hang from the shoulders vs. being strapped to the waist as with a belt.
- With braces, waist on pants can be about 1 inch looser. Thus, with braces pants are more comfortable, too.
- No need to adjust pants.



Black Moiré Evening Braces (by Albert Thurston)

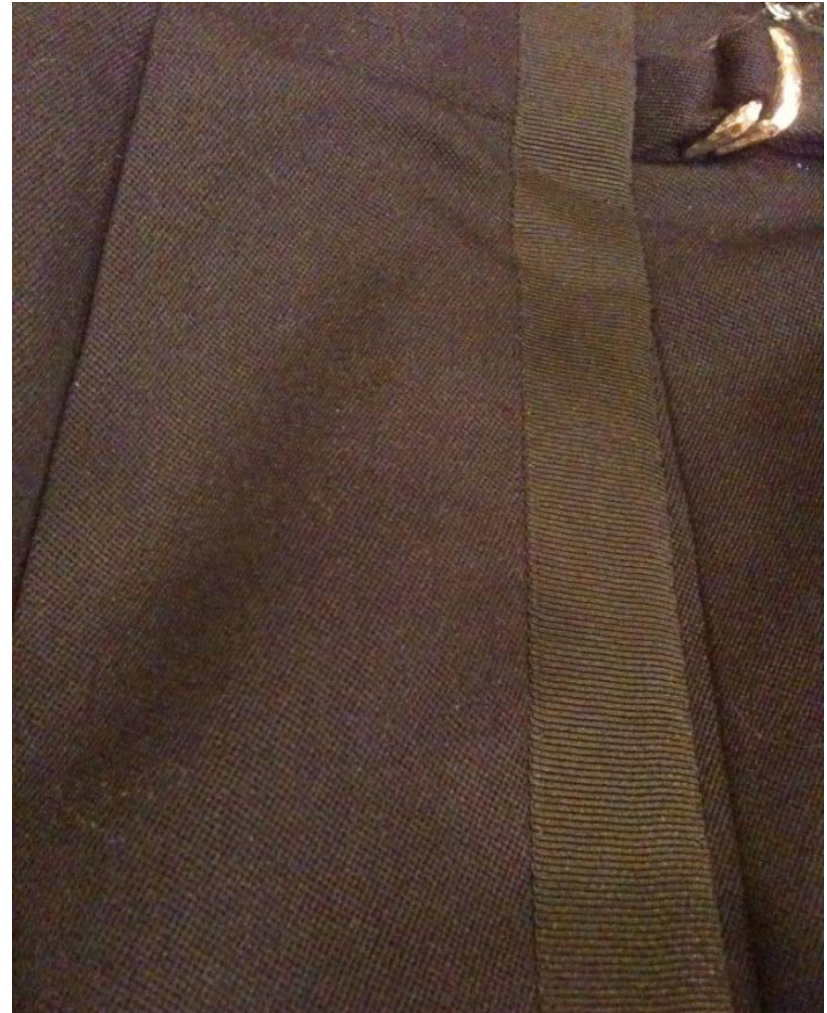
The Pants – Braces & Pleats Working Together

- Together, extend line of the legs.
- Front braces are directly over pleats, thus, keeping crease extended and sharp.
- Braces help pants drape better over the legs.
- When paired with proper break on pants (as here), both together give maximum extension of legs.
- Heavier fabric tends to drape better (because of the weight).
- Does for men's legs what heels do for women (but also why women rarely use pleats).



Classic Black Tie Pants – The Side Stripe

- Classic feature of Tuxedo Pants.
- Covers the full outside seam of the Pants.
- In grosgrain or satin to match lapels on jacket.
- Emphasizes vertical line of the legs and draws the eye upwards.
- Distinguishes Tuxedo pants from business suit (and thus more formal).



Grosgrain Side Stripe on Barathea Tuxedo Pants (Oxford)

Classic Black Tie Pants – The Side Stripe – Military Origin

- Side Stripe on Tuxedo Pants Derived from Military Dress.
- Each branch of Military has its own Formal Dress (called Mess Dress).
- This example is from the Marine Evening Dress, what would be worn for White Tie.
- Note the covered waists, the high (and thus strong) collars, and the slight break on the pants.
- Note, too, how the white gloves (and braid) work much like showing cuff, plus the hats also make the men look taller.



The Classic Black Tie — The Bottom

- Moderate Break.
- No Cuffs. This extends the line of the leg.
- Covers the back of the shoe (but stops before the heel). This also extends the line of the leg.
- Note, too, the side stripe and slimmer formal shoes following the line of the foot.



Dress trousers should definitely break at the instep, and pumps or oxfords may be worn with either tailcoat or dinner coat. The dinner jacket trouser should carry a single braid at the side, and the tailcoat trouser two narrow medium braids set close together.



Pants – The Bottom – Problems

Too Much Break

- Dramatically shortens the line of the leg.
- Makes a man look smaller.
- Draws the eye down, away from the face.
- Frequently seen today.
- What some people call “puddle pants.”



Classic Black Tie Pants -- Special Features

✓ Higher Back for Braces

- A feature on high-quality tuxedo pants.
- Pants are cut higher in back to accommodate braces.
- With higher back, braces less likely to slip on shoulders.
- High back also avoids gap with back of vest.
- More comfortable when sitting.
- “Fish-Mouth” split on back (shown) also makes pants (and braces) more comfortable.
- Similar features found on other high-quality pants designed for braces.



Classic Black Tie -- Shoes

Patent Oxfords



Brooks Brothers Patent Oxfords

- Formal shoes conform more closely to the shape of the foot and make the foot look narrower.
- Simple, with no pattern on shoe. The less decoration, the more formal the shoe.
- In evening setting, patent leather also helps reflect light.
- Patent leather not used for regular business shoes, thus, more of a “special” occasion.

Classic Black Tie -- Shoes

Compare – Business Shoes

- The cap-toe oxfords on the right are the most formal business shoe.
- Regular leather.
- Minimal decoration (e.g., cap-toe). Most business shoes have more decoration on front, sides, or top of shoe.
- When highly shined, business cap-toe oxfords may work as less formal option for those who don't yet own patent leather shoes.

Calf Leather Cap-Toe Oxfords



Allen Edmonds Cap-Toe Oxfords

Shoes –Why Real Men Wear Bows

Men's Formal Pumps



The Oldest Part of Classic Black Tie

Court Shoes



Based on Court Shoes from 200 Years Ago

Shoes – Why Real Men Wear Bows

JFK with Opera Jumps

- JFK, as President, wore opera pumps.
- Short vamp (e.g., front top) of opera pump makes foot look smaller.
- Bow on front also makes the foot look smaller (like cross-piece on penny loafers).
- Opera pumps (like any light shoe) are good for dancing. Some have light padding inside to cushion the feet.
- Still standard footwear for Classic White Tie.



JFK in Peak Lapel Tuxedo and Pinched-Bow Opera Pumps

Shoes – Problems – Casual Shoes

- Formal is based more on shape than anything else.
- This is a Blucher shoe (e.g., open lacing) rather than an Oxford shoe (e.g., closed lacing).
- Also big, wide, and thick.
- Even patent leather can't make these shoes formal.
- Avoid square-toed shoes as well, since they make the foot look bigger.



Patent Leather Doc Martens

Accessories – Formal Socks

➤ Fabric

- Black silk (traditional) or thin wool that has smooth surface (such as lisle).
- Silk dates back to days of breaches and court shoes.
- The thinner the fabric, the more formal the sock. Thus, formal socks are even thinner than those for business.
- Smooth texture compliments similar surface on lapels as well as patent leather on shoes.

➤ Length

- Over-the-calf length.
- More formal and avoids exposing skin.

➤ Patterns

- Often has patterns (called “clocks”) or other design. Extends line of side-stripe on pants.
- Plain (e.g., no pattern) used as well.



Patent Opera Pumps with Petersham Bows

Accessories – The Pocket Square

Esthetics

- Pocket square makes the chest look bigger.
- Adds dimension to the silhouette.

Features

- White.
- Hand-Rolled Edges. This gives the pocket square body and helps it stand in the pocket.
- Linen (more traditional) or Silk.
- Typically, about 1 ½ inch shows above pocket. More draws too much attention.

Hand-Rolled Pocket Square



Silk Pocket Square

Accessories – Cufflinks & Studs



Marcella Shirt

- **Features**

- Double-Sided Cuff Links. Both sides of cuff will show.
- Solid Black (e.g., Onyx) or Black/Gold or Black/Silver.
- Studs for Shirt (and Possibly Vest).
- Many Styles and Options.

- **Esthetics**

- “Dot” of Black Cufflinks Against White Cuff Also Make Arms Look Longer.
- Studs on Shirt Draw Eyes Up to Face.
- Step Above Normal Business Wear (e.g., Buttons).
- Adds a Bit of Sparkle in Evening Light.

Accessories – Boutonnière (Flower)

Typical Choices:

- Carnation (since stays fresh long after cutting)
- Gardenia (shown)
- Artificial Flowers (often made of silk) are another option
- Just flower, not “greens”

Colors

- White
- Red

Esthetics

- Extends eye outward, making chest appear bigger
- May be used with or without Pocket Square



Tom Ford

Accessories – Boutonnière Loop



Underside of Lapel, showing Buttonhole and Boutonnière Loop

- High-end tuxedos (and suits) have a working buttonhole in the left lapel.
- Lapel buttonhole originally used to close collar on coat. Now a (vestigial) feature used for pins or flowers.
- Often slightly longer than regular buttonhole.
- On good tuxedos, underside of collar has thread loop for securing stem after flower pushed through buttonhole.
- Also prevents pinning (and possibly damaging) the more delicate facing on tuxedo lapels.
- Can be added by a [tailor](#).

Accessories – Use of Color

- At times, Color can be added to the basic Black and White.
- Experts recommend *one* item only.
- Also recommend item be surrounded by enough Black.
- Thus, best choices for color are:
 - **Pocket Square**
 - **Boutonnière**
 - **Cummerbund or Vest**
 - (but *Not* Bow Tie since it sits on White)
- Strong colors are best (e.g., Deep Red, Purple, Bottle Green, Burgundy).
- Or combinations of Black and White.



Red Boutonniere (Left) & Red Pocket Square (Right)

Summer Options

Cream Shawl Lapel

- Cream color works better than white (because cream looks better with summer tans).
- Often shawl lapels are used because summer is less formal.
- Lapels may not be faced (less formal).
- But either peak or shawl lapels are fine.
- Worn during summer months or when in tropics (why Bogart wore one in *Casablanca*).
- Pleated shirt (less formal) and cummerbund (less formal and cooler) used more in summer.
- Pants and other options remain the same.



Summer Cream Dinner Jacket with Shawl Lapels
Also Pleated Shirt, Cummerbund, Pocket Square, Boutonniere, & Opera Pumps

Review -- The Seven Principles of Classic Black Tie

- **The Coat.** Peak lapel, one-button coat. Shawl lapel is another option.
- **The Shirt.** High, powerful collar. Showing cuff.
- **The Tie.** Self-tied black bow tie.
- **The Waist Covering.** Formal vest or cummerbund.
- **The Pants.** Pants on the natural waist & braces.
- **The Shoes.** Black patent oxfords (or pumps) or highly-shined cap-toe oxfords.
- **The Extras.** Pocket square, boutonniere, studs, color, etc.



Review – Why Classic Black Tie Works

- ✓ **Broad Shoulders & High Chest**
 - Peak Lapels
 - Grosgrain or Satin Facing on Lapels
 - Pocket Square
 - Waist Covering
- ✓ **Emphasis on the Face.**
 - Strong collar
 - Black Bow Tie
 - White “V” of the chest
 - Studs on front
- ✓ **Narrow Waist**
 - Pants on the natural waist
 - Peak Lapels
 - One-Button jacket
- ✓ **Long Arms**
 - Showing Cuff
 - Black cufflinks on French Cuffs
- ✓ **Long Legs**
 - Waist Covering
 - Pants on the natural waist
 - Pleats, helped by Braces
 - Side Stripe on pants
 - No cuffs on pants & slight break
- ✓ **Small, Narrow Feet**
 - Oxford shoes or Opera Pumps





Why Use Classic Black Tie?

- You'll always look good.
- Your tuxedo won't go out of style (ever).
- Even people who claim little interest in fashion will be affected by it.
- You'll feel (and be perceived as) more confident.
- Which means you'll always have fun.





First Tuxedos – What To Think About



First Tuxedos – First Principles

✓ First Things First.

- Dressing well isn't about money, it's about information.
- It doesn't cost *anything* to know what you should wear and how it should fit.
- Start with Classic Black Tie.
- You'll use what you learn for decades.
- Pick a future event (e.g., wedding, Barrister's Ball, social event), and use it as a goal.
- Make a list of what you want.



First Tuxedos – Rent vs. Buy

Rent

- Lets you learn and experiment.
- Lower initial cost (if resources limited).
- If time is short, may be only option.
- Small investment of time.
- Options, though, may be limited.
- Harder to find peak or shawl lapels and other features of Classic Black tie.

Buy

- Lower long-term cost. How many rentals equal a purchase?
- Better fit.
- Gets you what you want.
- Once you own a tuxedo, you'll find new ways to use it.
- If you buy Classic Black Tie, the style won't change.
- Higher quality.

First Tuxedos – A Game Plan

- **First Options**

- ✓ Peak (or Shawl) Lapel, One-Button Tuxedo. No vents or minimal side vents. Tuck in pocket flaps, if any.
- ✓ Shirt with strong turn-down collar (Marcella or Pleats). In a pinch, just use a nice spread collar dress business shirt with french cuffs.
- ✓ Show cuff.
- ✓ Pants on the natural waist, with braces.
- ✓ Formal vest, if possible. But cummerbund usually easier to find.
- ✓ Pocket Square. Cheap and easy to do. Even cotton will do.
- ✓ Well-polished black dress shoes. Regular black dress socks.



First Tuxedos – A Game Plan

- **Later Upgrades**
 - Read a little, watch a little, and then work on upgrades or fun options.
 - ✓ Stud Sets. Your son can use them later. Also an easy way to change your look.
 - ✓ Formal Shoes (and Socks).
 - ✓ Formal Vest, if not already.
 - ✓ Pocket Squares in other colors or patterns.
 - ✓ Other Shirts. If you have Marcella, get Pleated. Or upgrade quality. Or get Classic Wing Collar shirt.
 - ✓ Summer Cream Dinner Jacket. You already have the pants and everything else to go with it.

Resources

Best Website on Classic Black Tie

[The Black Tie
Guide](#)



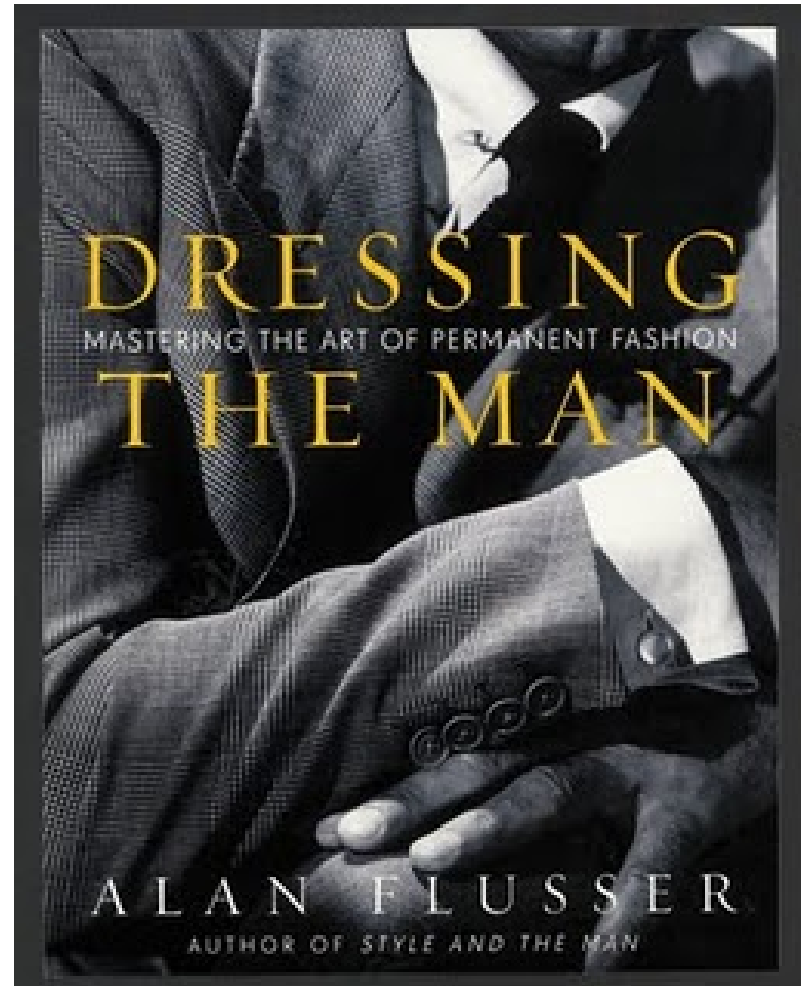
- Everything you need to know about Classic Black Tie in one place.
- Covers other forms of formal dress as well.
- Good for both beginners and experts.
- Clear, thorough, and correct.

Resources

Best General Book on Classic Men's Dress

Alan Flusser, [*Dressing the Man: Mastering the Art of Permanent Fashion*](#) (2003).

- Covers Classic Men's Business Dress.
- Includes Suits, Shirts, Ties, Shoes, Jackets, and Use of Color.
- Much History as well as Practical Advise.
- Wonderful Pictures.
- Includes Chapter on Formal Wear.
- Alan Flusser has several other excellent books on classic men's dress as well.





Now You Know

BlackTie






Jack Vettriano, The Singing Butler

A Miscellany of Classic Black Tie

It Hasn't Changed in 80 Years



A Miscellany of Classic Black Tie

- It hasn't changed in 80 years.
- It still works today.
- It works for everyone.

What Do these People Have in Common?

- Humphrey Bogart
- Cary Grant
- Duke of Windsor
- Louis Armstrong
- Jackie Robinson
- Marlon Brando
- James Dean
- Don Draper
- Gordon Parks
- Prince Charles
- Sidney Poitier
- Tim Gunn
- Brad Pitt
- Hugh Jackman
- Stephen Colbert
- Daniel Craig
- Sean Combs
- Kanye West
- Tom Ford
- Jay Z

What Do these People Have in Common?

Classic Black Tie

Clark Gable

- Peak Lapels (Satin)
- Strong collar
- Formal vest
- Hand-tied bow
- Cuff
- Pocket square
- Studs (on shirt and vest)



Humphrey Bogart

- The Cream Double-Breasted Shawl from *Casablanca*. He made it classic.
- Strong Collar, Cuff, Self-Tie Bow Tie, & Pocket Square.



Cary Grant

- Peak lapels
- Strong collar
- Hand-tied bow tie
- Cuff
- Pocket square
- Studs



Duke of Windsor

- Shawl Lapels
- Strong Collar
- Cuff
- Self-Tie Bow Tie
- Pocket Square
- Boutonnière (carnation)



Jackie Robinson, Roy Wilkins, & Duke Ellington

- 1950s Black Tie (e.g., narrower lapels and ties)
- Three shawl tuxedos & pocket squares
- Note cummerbund showing above button on Roy Wilkins.



Louis Armstrong



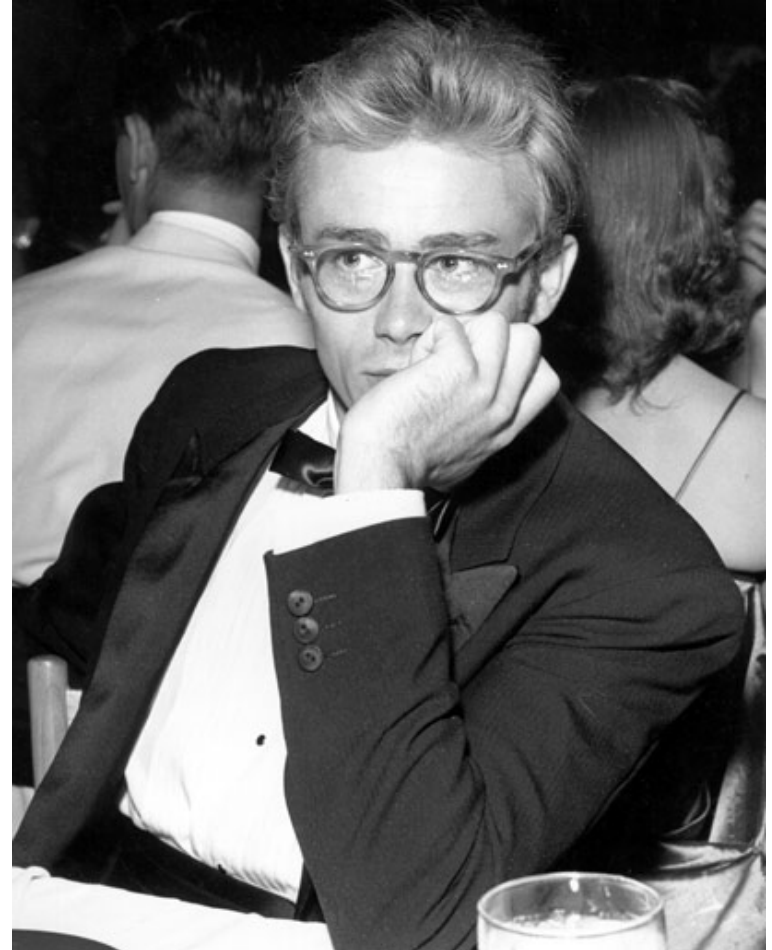
- Shawl lapel
- Pleated shirt
- Cuff
- Self-tie bow tie

Marlon Brando



Even Rebels Have to Dress Up. Shawl Lapels (& Marilyn Monroe), Strong Collar, Self-Tie Bow Tie, & Pocket Square

Indiana-Born James Dean



Another Rebel Dressed Up. Peak Lapels (Satin), Pleated Shirt, Cuff, Cummerbund, & Studs.

Don Draper

- Shawl Lapels
 - Strong Collar
 - Cuff
 - Self-Tie Bow Tie
 - Studs
 - Pocket Square
-
- Note the narrower ties and lapels (common for the period).



Jon Hamm in "Mad Men"

Don Draper, Again

- Cream Self-Faced Shawl Dinner Jacket (for Summer)
- Strong Collar
- Pleated Shirt
- Hand-Tied Bow Tie
- Studs



Jon Hamm in "Mad Men"

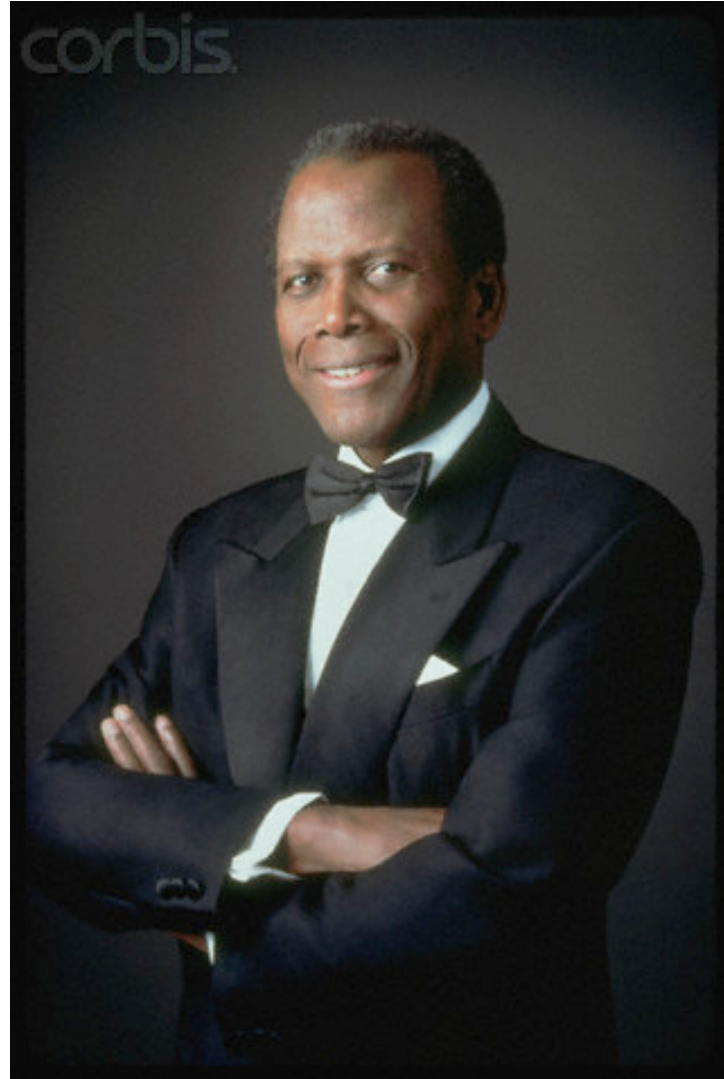
JFK

- One-Button Peak Lapel
- Classic “V”
- Cuff
- Hand-Tied Bow Tie
- Pocket Square
- Slight Break on Pants
- Opera Pumps



Sidney Poitier

- Peak Lapels
- Strong Collar
- Cuff
- Pocket Square

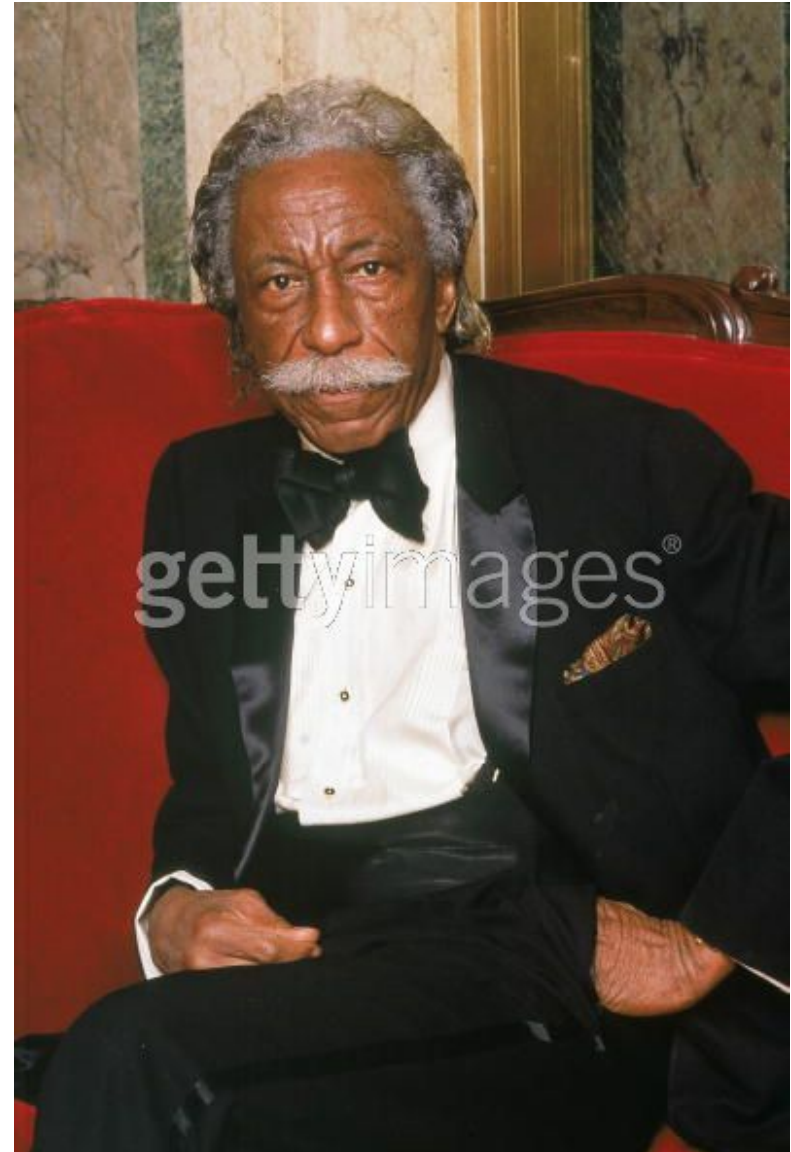


Gordon Parks

- Peak Lapels (Satin)
- Strong Collar
- Cuff
- Self-Tie Bow Tie
- Waist Covering (Cummerbund)
- Studs

- Also note patterned pocket square that picks up colors of his face.

- Note braces peaking out at top of waist covering and side stripe on pants.



Tim Gunn



Shawl Lapels, Strong Collar, Cuff, Slight Break, & Studs -- Simple & Classic

Brad Pitt

- Peak Lapels
- Strong Collar
- Cuff
- Self-Tie Bow Tie
- U-Shaped Formal Vest
- Slight Break on Pants
- Narrow, Formal Shoes

- And Angelina Jolie



Brad Pitt, Again

- Shawl Lapels
- High Collar
- Cuff
- Self-Tie Bow Tie
- Waist Covering (Cummerbund)
- Pocket Square
- Studs
- Slight break on pants



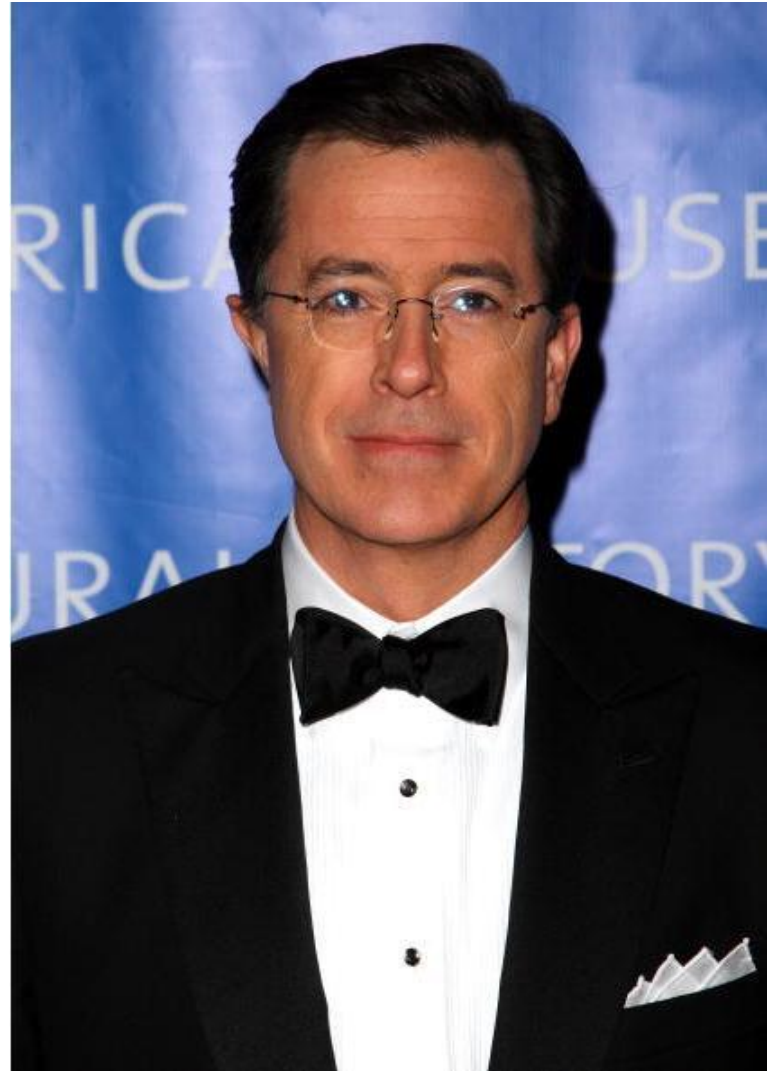
Brad Pitt, And Again

- Peak Lapels (Grosgrain)
- Strong Collar
- Self-Tie Bow Tie
- Formal Grosgrain Vest
- Pocket Square
- Studs



Stephen Colbert

- Peak lapels, strong collar, pleated shirt, hand-tied bow, studs, & pocket square.
- Dressed here (and on his show) by Brooks Brothers.



A New York Party

- Peak & Shawl Lapels
- Cuff
- Hand-Tied Bow Ties
- Waist Coverings.
- Studs



From "New York Social Diary" website

Wynton Marsalis

- Peak Lapels
- Strong Collar
- Cuff
- Hand-Tie Bow Tie
- Pocket Square

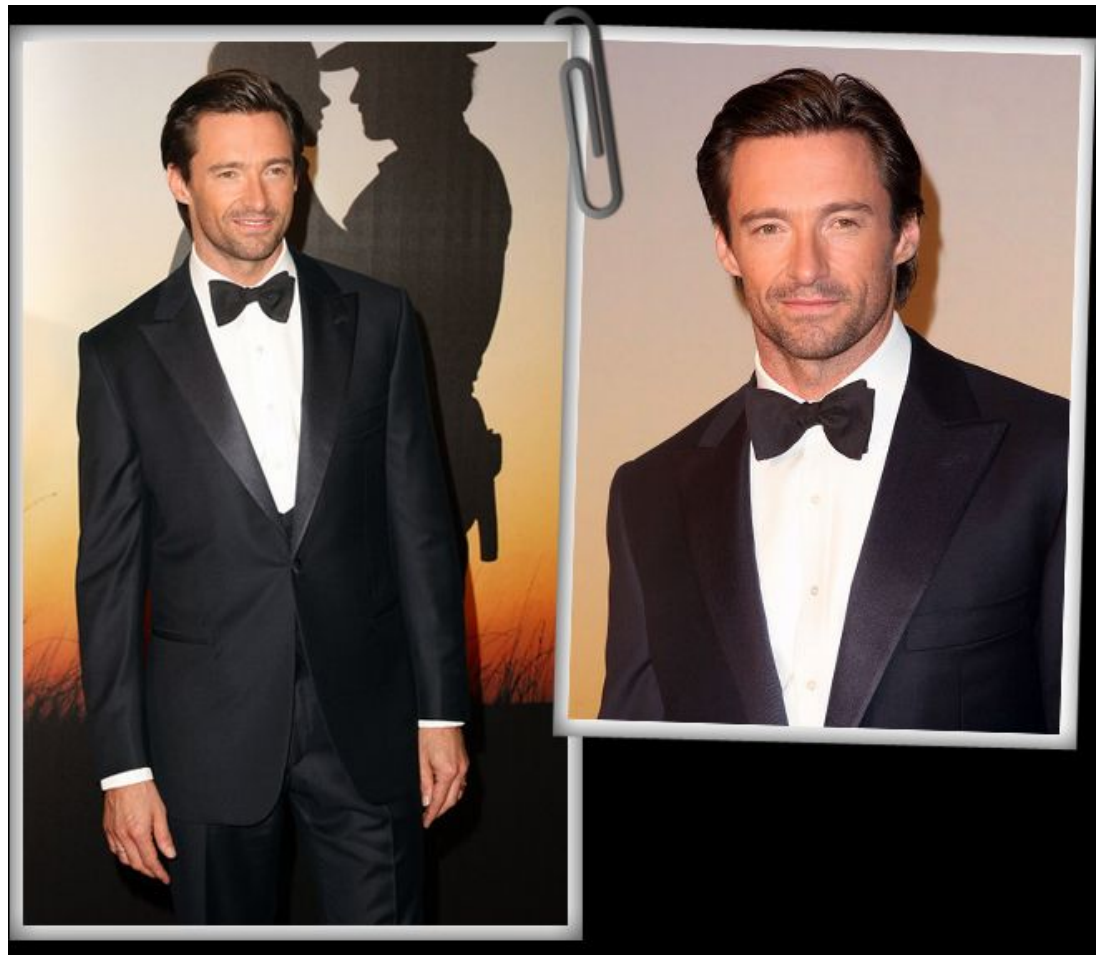
- Another Classic “V”



Photo: © Arnold Newman / Liaison Agency

Hugh Jackman

- Peak Lapels
- Strong Collar
- Formal Vest
- Showing Cuff
- The Classic “V”
- Here, Classic Black Tie makes a Good Thing even Better.



Hugh Jackman, Again

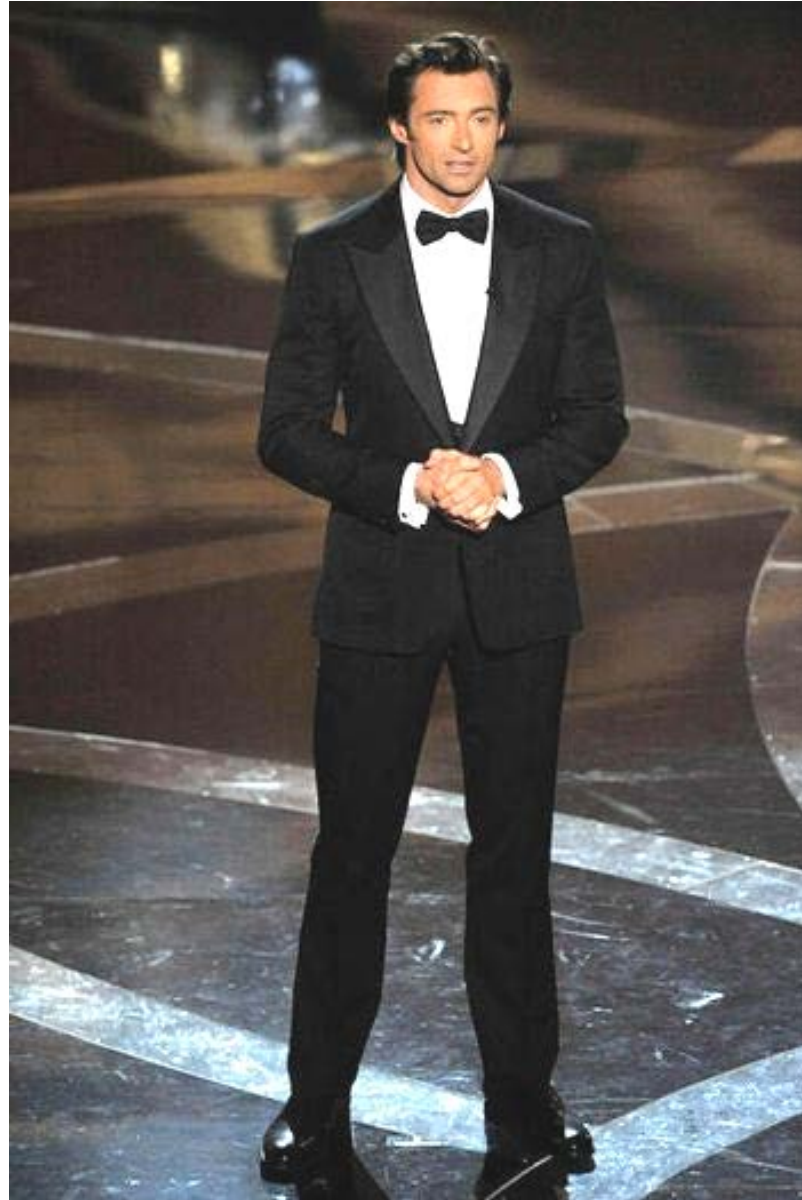
Peak Lapels, Strong Collar, Self-Tie Bow Tie.

Another View of the Classic “V.”



Hugh Jackman, And Again

- Note the “V” of the chest and how cuffs add dimension to the silhouette.
- An existing long and lean line and strong chest (as here) is accentuated even more in Classic Black Tie.



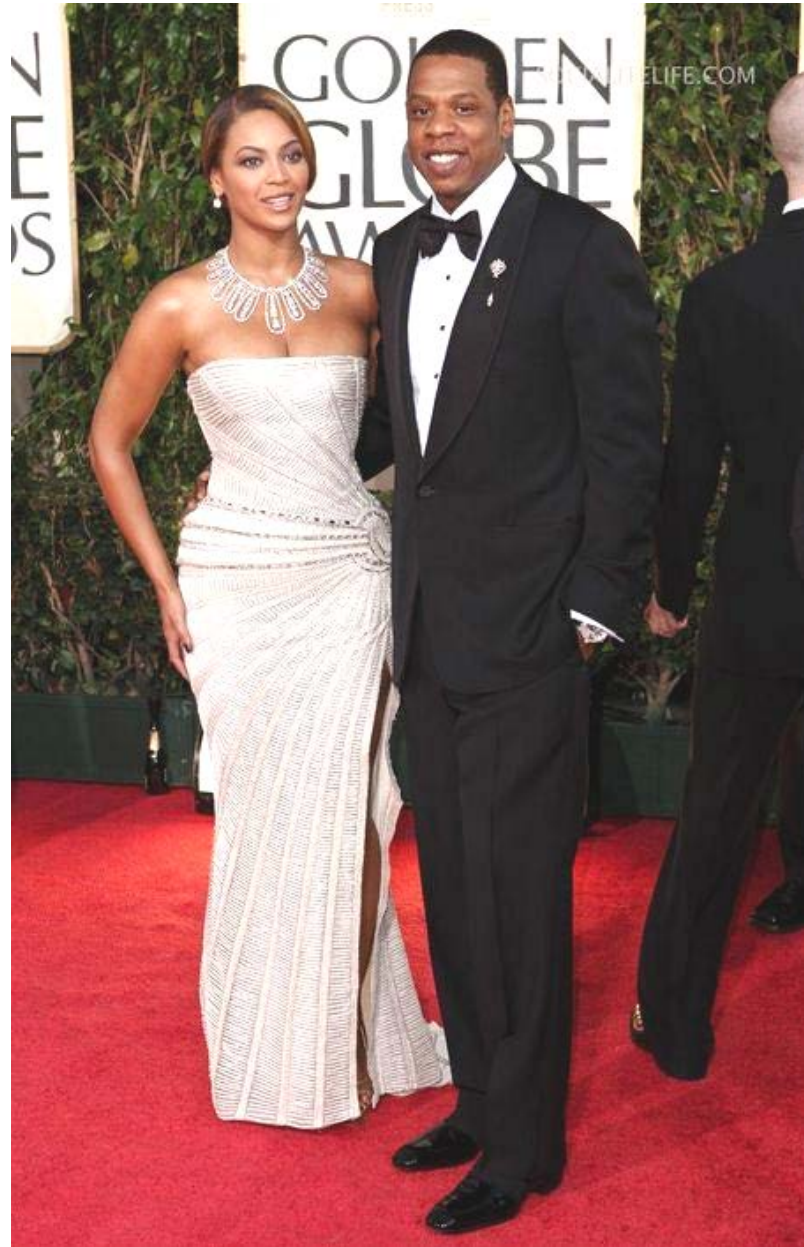
Daniel Craig



- Shawl Lapel, Strong Collar, Pleated Shirt & Pocket Square.
- What James Bond would wear.

Jay Z

- Shawl Lapels
- Strong Collar
- Self-Tie Bow
- Cuff
- Studs
- Silver Pin as Boutonnière
- Pants on the Natural Waist
- Slight Break on Pants
- Narrow, Formal Shoes



With Beyoncé Knowles

Jay Z, Again



With Beyoncé Knowles

- Shawl Lapels
 - High Collar
 - Cuff
 - Self-Tie Bow Tie
 - Pocket Square
 - Studs
 - Narrow Formal Shoes
-
- Note side stripe on pants.

Jay Z, Again



- Strong Peak Lapels
- Strong Collar
- Self-Tie Bow
- Studs
- Pin as Boutonnière

Jay Z, And Again



- Velvet Smoking Jacket with “Frog Closure” (e.g., an elaborately-folded cord) rather than buttons.
- A traditional smoking jacket, going back 150 years.
- Strong Collar + Studs.
- Accented with Gold Pin as Boutonnière.

Tom Ford



The Modern Standard. Always in Classic Black Tie. Always.

Tom Ford, Again

- Shawl Lapels
- Strong Collar
- Cuff
- Self-Tie Bow Tie
- Boutonnière
- Pocket Square

- Classic “V”

- Broad shoulders and narrow waist in action.

- Note the narrow sleeves on the jacket (similar to Classic White Tie).



Tom Ford, And Again

- Shawl Lapels
- Strong Collar
- Self-Tie Bow Tie
- Boutonnière (Gardenia)
- Studs
- Pocket Square

- Larger Bow Ties
sometimes needed (as
here) to balance out
larger collar.



Tom Ford, And Again

- Double-Breasted Peak Lapels (Satin)
- Strong Collar
- Cuff
- Self-Tie Bow Tie
- Pocket Square
- Studs



The British Royal Family



Double-Breasted Peak Lapels, Strong Collars, Cuff, & Pocket Squares Abound

Sean Combs

- Peak Lapels
- Strong Collar
- Cuff
- Self-Tie Bow Tie
- U-Shaped Formal Vest
- Studs
- Pocket Square (black silk)
- Classic “V”



Sean Combs, Again

- Summer Peak Lapel
- Strong Collar
- Self-Tie Bow Tie
- Studs
- Pocket Square (black silk)



Sean Combs, And Again

- Shawl Lapel
- Strong Collar
- Self-Tie Bow Tie (satin)
- Studs
- Pocket Square (silk)



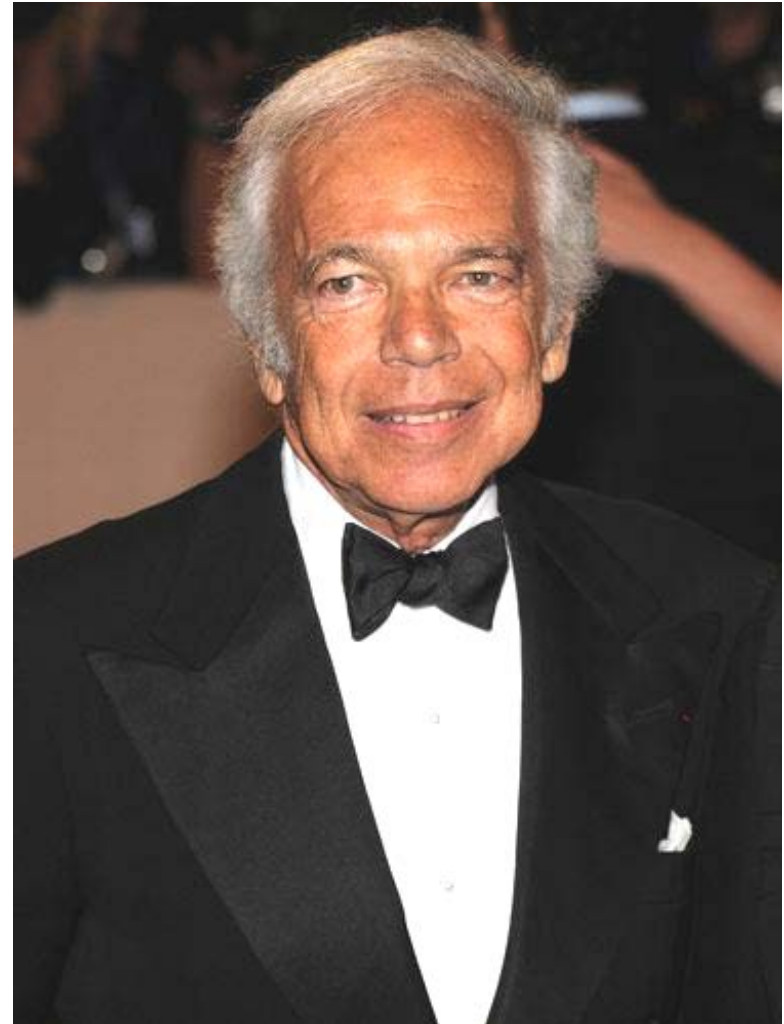
Black Tie Dinner



Front: Itzhak Perlman, Elie Wiesel & Oprah Winfrey.
Back: Barbara Walters.

Ralph Lauren

- Strong and Wide Peak Lapels
 - Strong Collar
 - Self-Tie Bow Tie
 - Pocket Square (silk)
-
- What Designers Wear Themselves



Valentino

- Peak Lapels
- Strong Collar (Classic Wing)
- Self-Tie Bow Tie
- Studs
- Pocket Square (silk)
- What Designers Wear Themselves



Kanye West

- Shawl Lapel
- Strong Collar
- Cuff
- Self-Tie Bow Tie
- Cummerbund
- Pocket Square (silk)



Kanye West, Again



- Shawl Lapel
- Strong Collar
- Cuff
- Self-Tie Bow Tie
- Pocket Square (silk)

Scenes from a New York Party



Peak Lapels, Strong Collars, Hand-Tied Bow Ties, Studs, & Pocket Squares. The Classic “V” at Work.

Brad Pitt

5 Different Looks – All Classic Black Tie

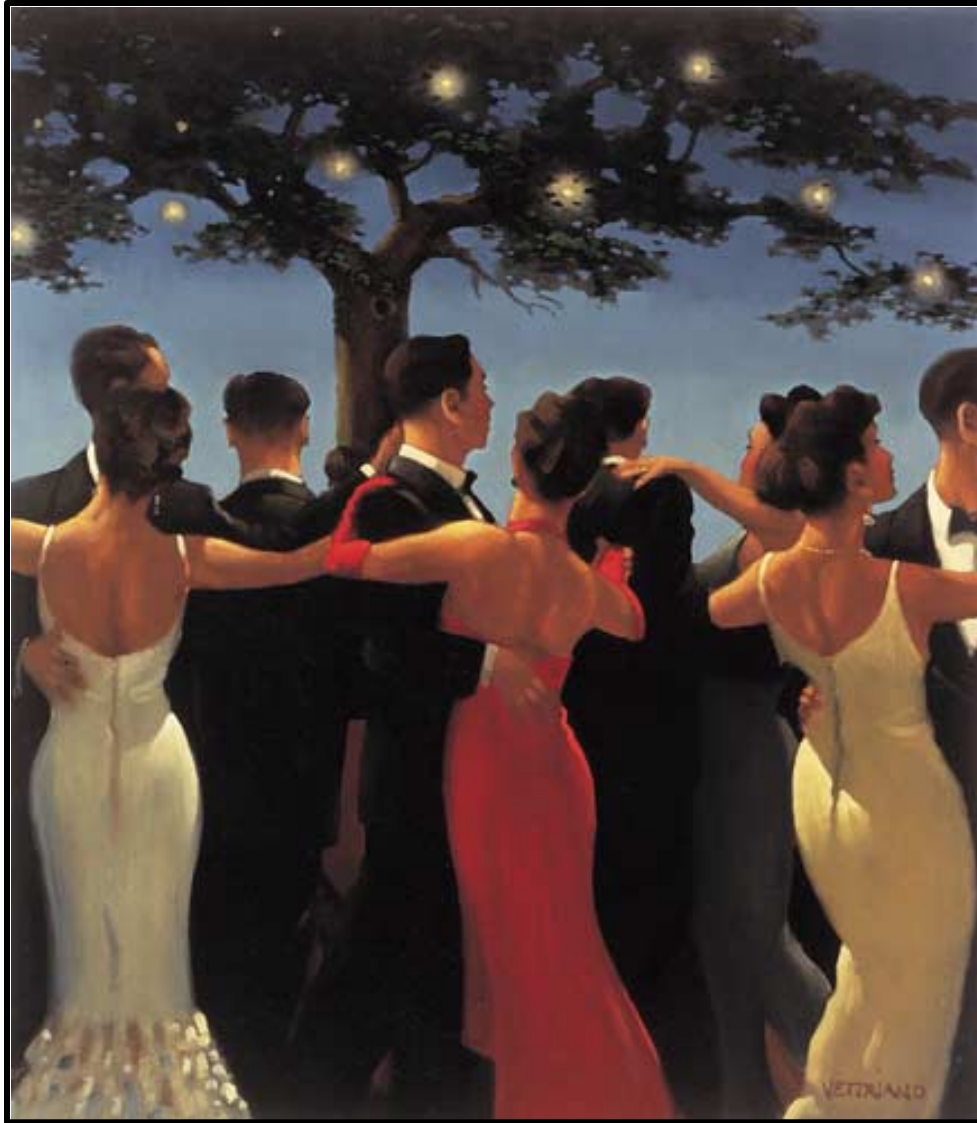


Left to Right: Shawl Lapels with Cummerbund; Single-Button Peak; Double-Breasted Peak; Cream Summer Shawl; Peak Lapel with Formal Vest.



- 3 Peak Lapels, 2 Shawls
- Strong collars, cuff, & bow ties

December 2010 Issue

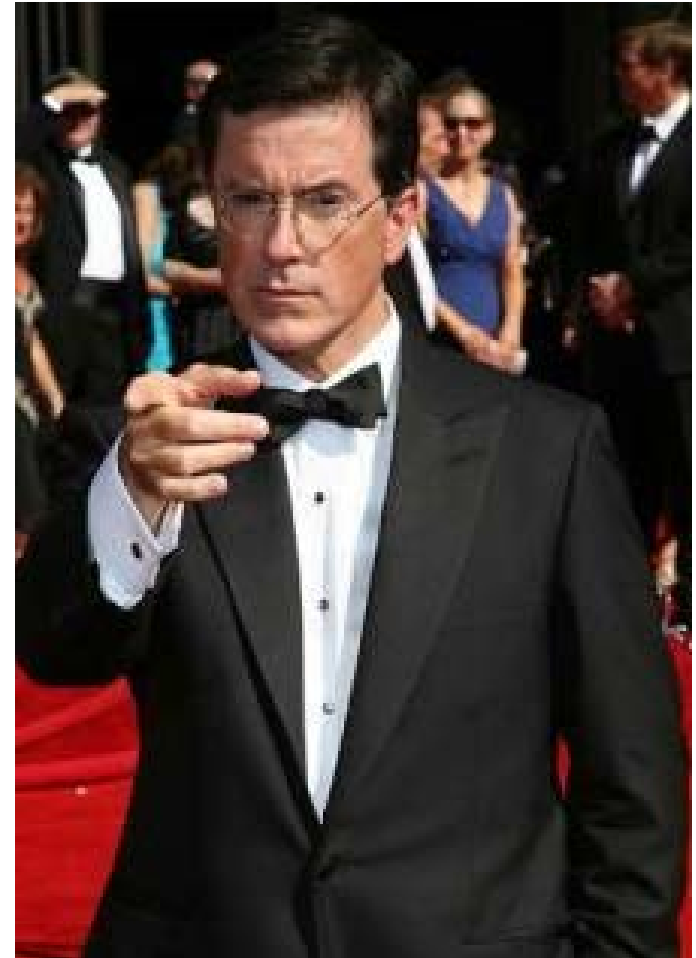


Jack Vettriano, The Waltzers.



Appendix

Why Notch Lapels and
Black Suits Don't Work
for
Classic Black Tie



Why Don't Notch Lapels Work for Classic Black Tie?



Two Good Reasons

- ✓ **A notch-lapel tuxedo is not as flattering.**
 - A notch lapel, the standard lapel with business dress, points to the side not up, almost like two turn signals (<:>).
 - Once emphasized in satin or grosgrain, the notch lapels draw the eye out, not up.
 - Once covered, the notch lapels thus make a man look wider, thicker, and older than the self-faced notch lapels on a business suit.

- ✓ **It weakens the special nature of formal.**
 - If a tuxedo is meant to emphasize the special nature of formal, notch lapels do not help.
 - As a staple of business wear, notch lapels lower the formality of a tuxedo.

What Experts Say About Notch Lapels

- “A dinner jacket with notch lapels is a sartorial oxymoron.”
-- Alan Flusser, *Style and the Man* 98 (2010).
- “Notched lapels on a dinner jacket eviscerate its formal character.”
-- Nicholas Antongiavanni, *The Suit: A Machiavellian Approach to Men's Style* 172 (2006).



Other “Suit” Features



- While notch lapels are the most prominent example of “tuxedo as suit,” adding other features associated with business suits reduces the power of the tuxedo, too.
- The impact is cumulative. Any of these features reduce formality, because they’re common on business suits:
 - ✓ Long tie.
 - ✓ Multiple front buttons.
 - ✓ High, six-button vest.
 - ✓ Flap pockets.
 - ✓ Single, back vent.
- Combined with notch lapels, it’s a far less powerful look. It may make a nice suit, but it’s a suit without the power of the tuxedo. The very tricks of the eye men want are gone.

If Men Look Better in Classic Black Tie, Then Why Don't Many Rentals Offer it?

It's Just Good Business



- **Notch-Lapel Jacket -- Cost.** Notch lapels (and other suits features) are easier and cheaper to make. If the maker can use the same features and patterns as business suits, it saves money.
- **Notch-Lapel Jacket -- Durability.** As a practical matter, too, notch lapels tend to hold up better under the heavy wear of rental (and casual care of customers).
- **Low Wing Collars.** One style that “fits” every neck and chin. Also cheaper.
- **Pre-Tied Bow Ties.** No explanation or training needed and no calls for help later. A guaranteed quick transaction.
- **One Style.** Stocking only one style of tuxedo, shirt, and tie cuts down on inventory.
- **Larger Sizing.** Basic business also dictates larger than normal sizing in sleeves, sides, and pants (e.g., greatest number of “fits” for a given tuxedo).
- **Customer Satisfaction.** Rental customers often are inexperienced, and rely on advice from the store. Customers have fun at the event (and why not -- it’s often a wedding or prom) and are happy.

Why, Too, Is it Hard to Find an Entry-Level Tuxedo with Peak Lapels?

Again, It's Just Good Business



- **Cost.** For similar reasons, buying an entry-level tuxedo in Classic Black Tie is harder, too. Using the same patterns as business suits is cheaper. In a tight market, every dollar matters.
- **Levels.** Because of the importance of costs, don't be surprised if the lower-end offerings of even conservative stores (such as Brooks Brothers or Ralph Lauren) may have notch lapels. In contrast, the higher-end offerings will likely be either shawl or peak lapels.
- **Custom.** Since rentals are often the first experience most men have with tuxedos, rental features – such a notch lapels – become the norm.
- **Knowledge.**
 - As a practical matter, not one man in a hundred who wears a tuxedo with notch lapels has *decided* to favor notch over shawl or peak lapels.
 - In contrast, at least 50% of men who wear peak or shawl *did* choose it on purpose. And most who didn't had an experienced tailor or salesperson pick it for them
- **But They Do Exist.** Classic Black Tie items are available, even at lower price points, but may require extra work to find. Don't expect every store or company to carry them. In the end, though, extra effort pays big dividends.

The End



Max Beckmann, Self-Portrait in Tuxedo (1927)