

## A Reality Check For Men's Fashion

*How stores will translate latest runway looks for the regular guy*

By Ray A. Smith

**W**ILL REGULAR GUYS wear drawstring tuxedo pants? How about ruffled sport coats? Roomy trousers with superwide legs?

The trends in men's clothing that emerged from this past week's New York fashion shows often appeared extreme on the runways. Elie Tahari, for example, showed a tuxedo shirt with faded khakis. Duckie Brown featured a fitted sport coat and baggy, full-length drawstring trousers. "We wanted the pants to feel almost like pajamas, that comfortable," says Steven Cox, co-designer of Duckie Brown. A deliberately ruffled cotton sport coat was shown with tailored linen pinstriped slacks at the John Varvatos show.

While some of the more outlandish looks clearly won't cut it with many men, chances are most of the styles will appear in one form or another at retailers in the spring. In an effort to reach a wider audience, stores will be toning down, adapting and otherwise translating the season's looks into what they think will sell. Often that means displaying the items differently than they appear on the runway or refashioning them in tamer versions. Macy's, for example, will stock up on roomier pants, but they won't be nearly as baggy as the ones the designers showed, says Jerry Balest, vice president of men's fashion for Macy's merchandising group.

Here are four key trends from this past week's runways and how they will be translated for regular guys.

### THE FADED, RUMPLED LOOK

The crisp, no-iron dress shirts populating most men's closets may be outdated by spring. Designers showed a plethora of crumpled, frayed and washed-out shirts, jackets and pants this past week. Elie Tahari, for example, presented a sport coat, jeans and a polo shirt that were garment dyed to give the clothing an uneven worn look. Phillip Lim showed a leather riding jacket washed to look faded and lived-in.

Several retailers say they would buy the looks and incorporate them into their own private labels, but most would tread



**REALITY CHECK: Look for short drawstrings and nothing excessively baggy.**



**REALITY CHECK: Only one ruffled or faded item per outfit.**

carefully. Macy's, for example, will use the washed-out effect in its Club Room brand, a traditional casual label, as well as its American Rag brand aimed at young adults. Even so, the looks in Club Room will be tamer than those on the runway. "It's tempered, not overly aged," Mr. Balest explains of the Club Room interpretation. "There's no rolled edges, or nicking in collars, it's not ripped and repaired. It's still finished."

Likewise, Nordstrom may go with subtle interpretations of the ruffled trend, says Gregg Andrews, a fashion director at Nordstrom. But the J.C. Penney chain will take a pass on extreme wrinkling entirely, says Lana Cain, general merchandise manager of men's and children's at J.C. Penney.

To make the ruffled look more palatable, stylists advise limiting it to one item. "Don't wear more than two grungy items at a time," says Samantha von Sperling, a stylist in New York.

### BAGGY PANTS

After squeezing into flat-front, low-rise pants for the past few years, men might be relieved at the roominess of the new baggy pants shown on runways for spring -- even those with drawstrings or elastic waistbands. But pairing them with fitted, tailored sport coats, the way designers did on the runways, may not be for everyone.

Nordstrom, for example, plans to

show some drawstring pants with dressier shirts, but "every mannequin won't be wearing a drawstring pant and tailored sport coat," Mr. Andrews says. The retailer might feature its drawstring pants with fitted shirts or finer knit pullovers. Macy's, too, will feature baggy pants, but not as wide as those seen on the runways, Mr. Balest says.

Drew Sisselman, a wardrobe consultant in Atlanta, recommends pairing these pants with a sporty jacket that's unstructured, such as those with little or no lining or shoulder padding, and not investing in anything too billowy. "Most people, when they see a long drawstring, think sweatpants," Mr. Sisselman says. "You don't want that."

### NEUTRAL COLOR

Men will be bombarded by gray, beige, khaki, olive and army green when they go to stores in the spring. Most guys find neutrals easy to understand because they go with almost everything and don't attract attention. But men can get into trouble if they follow runway looks strictly and dress head-to-toe in the same neutral color.

Nordstrom will train its sales assistants to show men how to "team" neutral colors with other colors or with different shades of the same color. For example, "gray looks great when teamed with other shades of gray," Nordstrom's Mr. Andrews says. In addition, he says, the

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**REALITY CHECK: Neutrals are back - but don't wear them head-to-toe.**

**REALITY CHECK: Mixing casual with formal pieces in the same outfit can work, but it's risky.**

retailer is moving colors like khaki and olive into more tailored clothing but showing men how to wear it with casual knit and polo shirts on weekends. "Those colors tend to give tailored clothing a more casual attitude," he ex-

plains.

Still, "you don't want to be too matchy, matchy," warns stylist Ms. von Sperling. "Head-to-toe beige cotton is not so interesting." She suggests wearing different textures of the same color, for ex-

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*Left:* Baggy drawstring pants from Duckie Brown  
*Right:* Rumpled or faded look from John Varvatos

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*Left:* Neutral colors from John Bartlett  
*Right:* Mixing formal and informal from Donna Karan

ample a khaki cotton or linen shirt with a khaki-colored wool pant.

### FORMAL/INFORMAL MIX

Moving one step further past the trend of sport coats mixed with nice jeans, the industry is now pushing men to combine other formal and informal elements. On the runways, the trend was extreme: Donna Karan showed men in hoodies with sport coats. Dressy, tailored shorts were ubiquitous, shown with sport coats, dress shirts and ties.

The mix-and-match trend is a potential minefield for most men, retailers admit, and they'll be careful how it's displayed. For example, Macy's will offer linen short-sleeve shirts with a tuxedo pleat in the front. "It's us taking the tuxedo shirt and translating it to a more casual attitude," Mr. Balest says. Tuxedo shirts and pants worn out of context -- with jeans, casual shirts or sneakers -- have been big on the runways. But it's hard to pull off for nonmodels.

J.C. Penney is weighing in on the trend, mixing sport coats and jeans as well as pinstriped suit jackets with V-neck shirts, says Ms. Cain. Penney's also likes the idea of a fitted jacket layered with a wind-resistant jacket and hoodie over jeans.

Stylists warn that men shouldn't wear formal and informal pieces that contrast or fight each other. The hoodie with a suit or sport coat, for example, could work if it is made of a fine material like cashmere or if the suit or sport coat is of a dressier type. "Then it has a smart look to it," says Anna Soo Wildermuth, a stylist in Elmhurst, Ill. "Especially if it's a neutral color, one that doesn't stand out."