

GET SMART

Smart Casual is a notch above Business Casual: an uncontrived, pulled-together look for a day in the office or night on the town.

A sales executive friend of mine confessed that he hasn't worn a suit in years because he conducts most of his business over the phone or email. We can lament or rejoice over technology's impact. But from a fashion perspective, an unintended casualty of its rapid rise is the demise of office attire. Clearly, many men have traded in suits and ties for the somewhat-too-casual, downgraded and downright sloppy look of jeans and T-shirts or khakis and polos.

What's next, Snuggies? Well, not quite. When confident self-styled men play it smart by dressing for work in Smart Casual, it pays off in spades.

So, exactly what is the Smart Casual aesthetic? It's looking neat, relaxed and pulled together without necessarily "matching." It's about investing in versatile sportswear pieces made from quality fabrics, and learning how to pair them. Actually, when you buy the right items in the right neutral shades, there's not much to learn: you can create multiple looks by effortlessly layering shirts, sweaters, vests and outerwear with wool trousers, five-pocket pants or clean denim. Adding the right accessories (handsome cashmere scarf, patterned pocket square, distinctive watch, cool eyewear, burnished leather belt) will take it up a notch without looking contrived.

Italians believe in *la bella figura*: putting careful thought into the image you present to the world, through one's clothing, one's attitude, one's ability to make the ordinary extraordinary. With so many great options for Smart Casual this fall, attaining the extraordinary is easier than you think. — BY HANS GSCHLIESSER

SMART TIPS FOR SMART GUYS

SUIT CASE: Invest in suit separates and wear them in different ways. Pair that classic suit jacket with khakis or jeans; slim suit trousers work with a knit cardigan or vest. Then, when you want to get down to brass tacks, show them you mean business and wear the pieces together as a suit. (Advice: dry-clean both the jacket and pant at the same time, even if one doesn't need it, so they age in unison.)

TIE GAME: Try a not-so-shiny knit, wool/silk or cashmere tie to make a casual-but-still "I mean business" impression. Pair a tie with a sport shirt rather than a dress shirt: a slightly lower knot is perfectly appropriate here and not stuffy.

NEUTRAL TERRITORY: Fall's neutral colors include gray, brown, black, navy and shades of olive and burgundy; stick to the neutrals in key pieces and add contrast with accessories. This way your tops (woven or knit) will always work with your bottoms. Winning combinations: navy and gray, navy and tan, or brown and gray.

SOLE MAN: Get off on the right foot wearing this season's updated cool sneakers, casual leathers and soft suedes.

PATTERN RECOGNITION: Yes solids are simpler to match, but sometimes it pays to stand out. (Advice: Consider a new soft plaid sport coat, it plays well with dark-wash jeans.)

