

[STYLE]



Tie right

3 routes around buyer's remorse

By Wendy Donahue
Tribune staff reporter

Fingering the \$15 tie and the \$150 tie in a lineup might have been easier a few years ago.

"Traditionally, the hand of the tie, if it was sumptuous and silky as opposed to rough and shallow, would indicate quality," said Alan Flusser, a New York menswear designer and author of "Dressing the Man: Mastering the Art of Permanent Fashion" and other sartorial tomes.

"Normally, the more handmade, the more expensive—normally, you wouldn't use an inexpensive fabric in a tie that has a lot of handwork."

Colors might be rich, but not gaudy. Not only would the tie be silk, but so would the inner tip, in the same or complementary silk, rather than acetate.

Today, however, the traditional indicators of quality aren't always so cut-and-tied.

"You can make a very expensive tie in Italy," Flusser said. "And you can make a very expensive-looking tie where the silk is printed in China."

Dictates on hue, pattern and width have flown out the window.

"Almost anything goes," said Stephen Watson, fashion editor at Men's Vogue.

Adding murkiness is the popularity of printed neckties. The pattern is stamped on top, rather than being woven from colored threads on the loom, which contributes a luster and texture that has always made woven ties look more expensive and often more elegant.

But printed ties can be just as expensive. The silk-screening process allows more color, which lends itself to whimsical motifs, like Hermes' hippos (\$145). Some men depend on them for levity in their day. (They don't always make Flusser smile.)

While the texture of woven ties can reduce knot

slippage, printed ties boast a less sensitive surface.

"Woven ties are nice, but they snag. If your thumb is dry when you're tying your tie, it's gone," said Patrick Palella, CEO of Quantitative Growth Analytics in Chicago, who wears both wovens and prints. "Prints also will tie a finer knot [the dominant look now], because you're not fighting the texture."

So with so much freedom of choice, how's a self-respecting tie-wearer to avoid buyer's remorse?

■ Besides visual appeal, Flusser suggests relying on your sense of touch.

■ Knot the tie in the store—he suggests a four-in-hand knot as a default, with a proper dimple forming below its midpoint—to see if it pulls up smartly into your collar. Observe how the tie emerges from the task. (Does it regain its composure when you suspend it in front of you?)

■ Look at the label to see if it's one you associate with quality.

"Are these definitive guarantees? No," Flusser said. "But it's the best you can do."



Lee Allison "Wall Street" tie, \$90, leallison.com.

Allison's wonderland

Patrick Palella knows all of his Lee Allison ties by whimsical name. "I walk in [to the closet] in the morning and I've got 'Google' and 'Big Ass Plaid' and 'Regimental Stripe'—picking one out is the best part of the day."

In addition to his wovens, Chicago-based Allison just launched a printed tie collection (\$90 each), in time for his 10th anniversary. A frog stalks a fly on "Pad Tie." On "Wall Street," a bear and a bull exchange torments (which Allison knows well as a former investment banker).

The mischievous tagline printed inside all of his ties, "Remove Before Sex," has given Allison second thoughts. So he expressed them, deep in the tail, simply as: "Or Knot."



Vineyard Vines crab print silk tie, \$65, vineyardvines.com.

The Two-Buck Chucking of ties

Inspired by "Two-Buck Chuck" Charles Shaw wine at Trader Joe's, two Naperville attorneys, Gina and Greg Sugar, started The Tie Bar online a year ago.

Each of their ties is 100 percent silk, handmade—and just \$15 each.

"If Two-Buck Chuck was able to convince wine connoisseurs you don't have to spend \$50 on a bottle of wine, you can do the same thing for ties," Greg Sugar said. "We found a great manufacturer who manufactures for other major designers in the U.S., though we're not allowed to say which ones."

The manufacturer in Shenzhou, China, which calls itself "Necktie City," uses Italian looming machines, "which is why many of the ties made in China—despite the negative connotation—are so well made," he said.

Available in extra long, the ties also are coated for stain-resistance. "We were debating whether to advertise that part—it's too practical, too Dockers," Gina joked.

"But," Greg said, "we're going for the practical type of person in every way."

On the power of a tie

"There should be nothing casual about Friday—it's 20 percent of your workweek. If you come to work in a polo shirt and khakis and the president of a bank you've been courting shows up and he's wearing a Lee Allison tie, you start that discussion by apologizing [for your appearance]. Why leave it to chance? Whenever I take over a company and people say, 'We're not wearing a jacket and tie,' I say, 'Yes, you are.'"

—Patrick Palella

Tribune photos by Alex Garcia



Stripe silk woven tie, \$15, thetiebar.com.

QURIOUS CONSUMER

Tim Rock models his Band of Outsiders tie (\$120) from Guise, 2217 N. Halsted St., 773-929-6101, with his Band of Outsiders shirt, Yves Saint Laurent vest and Paper Denim & Cloth jeans.

Tribune photos by Alex Garcia



SIZE MATTERS

Wide world of ties just got skinnier

Chicago actor Tim Rock, 24, doesn't wear suits often.

But ties? All the time.

"There's something sort of modern and also throwback about them," he said.

Superslim is the style for him and other fashion-forward types these days.

J. Crew has gone boarding-school skinny with its Cambridge ties— $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches versus its typical $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches, inspired by resurgent fashion fondness for the movie "Dead Poets Society," said Todd Snyder, vice president of men's design. (Sold individually for \$39.50, they also form J. Crew's new Tie of the Month Club, launched for the holidays—12 ties, with free shipping, for \$475. Call 866-739-5944 or go to jcrew.com.)

Snyder and others have gone so far as to resurrect the knit version.

"Our editor in chief has made it his signature," said Stephen Watson, fashion editor at Men's Vogue. "He wears very slim double-breasted suits with this knit tie—it almost goes back to Gianni Agnelli, the chairman of Fiat in the '50s and '60s, who sort of popularized the narrow tie."

Words to the standard tie wearer: Even that width has narrowed subtly, said Stan Gellers, senior editor for menswear weekly DNR, thanks in part to a similar slimming of suits.

"Now $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches is the standard," Gellers said. "Not too long ago it was 4 inches."

For every action there's an opposite reaction: Chicago designer Kent Nielsen makes a statement with wide-load ties— $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

Men's Vogue approves of that too.



Fusiliers
Regimental
tie, \$135, at
KentNielsen.com.

Fit tip

"The width of a necktie should have some relationship to the width of the jacket's lapel. And the width of the lapel relates to the shoulder of the jacket, which relates to the shoulders. If a big guy wears a narrow tie, he'd look pretty dumb, even if that's the fashion."

—Menswear god Alan Flusser, who adds that a tie shouldn't fall below the waistband of your trouser:

"We've found a very wide tie looks very rich," Watson said.

But don't equate narrow with unkempt.

"There was a time when I wore ties with T-shirts," Rock admitted. "But once Avril Lavigne was doing that, I knew it was over."

—Wendy Donahue