

Brief history of wedding attire

Throughout the annals of man it has been customary for grooms to don their most splendid raiment for their wedding ceremonies, according to the American Formalwear Association.

Of course, the higher the rank and the greater the wealth of the groom, the more splendid was his garb.

However, even the lowliest wore their "best" for their nuptials and, if possible, made sure that their wedding garments differed in some degree from their everyday clothes.

In biblical times, grooms of the elite wore exquisite robes made of fine linens and lawns shot through with threads of silver and gold and bordered with intricate embroidery.

The color story

As there were no "formal colors" in those days, those robes could range anywhere from pure white to jewel-like hues of brilliant red, blue, yel-

low and green.

The only colors eschewed were purple, which was reserved for wear by royalty, and black which then was only worn for mourning.

The use of brilliantly colored formalwear declined during the early Greek and Roman eras.

Both in Athens and in Rome the elect wore pure white, sometimes bordered in friezes of gold and silver to differentiate them from the slaves and craftsmen.

As the Roman Empire came to dominate the then-known world, its mode of dress set the standard for all of what we now know as Europe with the exception of Scandinavia.

The next important change in wedding attire occurred after the fall of the Roman Empire and during the medieval period when the chivalric orders, the kingdoms and the duchies held sway over all of Europe.

At that time, the royalty, the

knights and the nobles wore splendid wedding attire of fine silks and velvets.

Those exquisite fabrics, many of which were either embroidered or quilted, were often worn in conjunction with dress armor which was either intricately chased or studded with coats of arms.

The elite didn't wear trousers, but rather long hose of colored fine cotton.

Renaissance regalia

It was during the Renaissance, particularly in the Latin countries, that grooms decked themselves in great splendor. Silks, brocades and velvets in virtually every color of the rainbow were worn.

The dress swords worn with those outfits were actually works of art, examples of which can be seen in modern museums.

In the late 18th century, Beau Brummel, a young officer in the British 10th Hussars and a close friend of the

Prince of Wales who later became George IV, was known at Court as a perfectionist in manners and dress, and he became the style-setter for the English.

His dress influence eventually affected all of Europe, and to some degree its effect is reflected in modern menswear, particularly in formalwear.

Up to the time of Beau Brummel, the custom of wearing gaily colored formalwear was firmly established.

It probably reached its peak at the French court where satins, velvets and brocades were embellished with lace, expensively buckled shoes and the powdered wigs which then marked the attire of the gentry.

However, Brummel revolutionized formalwear when he appeared at court dressed in stark black, relieved only by white shirt and white bow tie.

His only ornamentation was jeweled shirt studs, cuff links and rings. His tailcoat was essentially the same as those worn today except that it was

of silk.

The tail-less evening jacket cut along the lines of the modern business suit was introduced by Griswold Lorillard at Tuxedo Park, N. Y., in 1886.

Thus was born the "Tuxedo." For some time the tuxedo was thought of as a novelty not to be worn at affairs where ladies were present.

To this day, the French refer to the tux or dinner jacket as "Le Smoking." Of course, the dinner jacket (tux) is now considered to be eminently correct for wear at events which ladies attend.

In the strictest interpretation of the rules of dress, the tuxedo is considered to be "semi-formal" — "formal" indicating that white tie and tails are required for evening wear.

For daytime formal weddings, the "cutaway coat" and gray striped trousers are correct.

The "stroller" (a dark gray coat cut like a business suit) worn with gray striped trou-

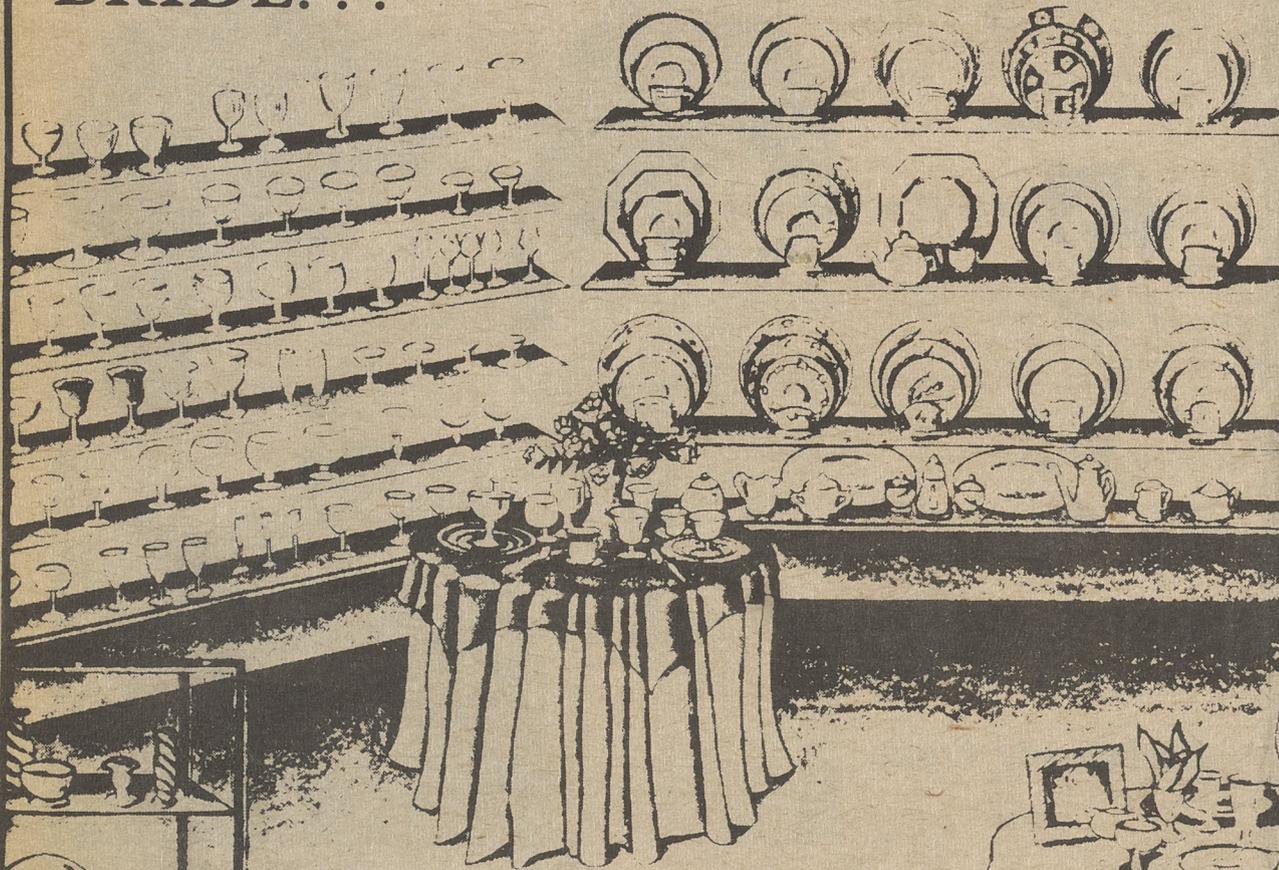
sers is accepted for daytime semi-formal weddings.

In Mexico, some grooms wear white intricately embroidered and pleated "wedding shirts" in lieu of a jacket, topping off white pants.

A similar style of wedding dress is used in the Philippines, too. In parts of Europe such as Scotland, Bavaria, Hungary, Poland and the cantons of Switzerland, it is not uncommon for both brides and grooms to wear their traditional native costumes for wedding ceremonies.

At home in the United States, the groom has the option of going contemporary and wearing colors other than black or gray — some prefer a choice of many pastel shades in both tuxedos and tailcoats — or abiding by the traditional conservative outfits that have come down through the years from the style of Beau Brummel.

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