

# ELEMENTS OF Style

ILLUSTRATION BY D. HORII



## THE E-MALE

A GENTLEMAN'S GUIDE TO ELECTRONIC FLIRTING BY JOHN SEDGWICK

■ Giving good phone is easy. You get on the horn and you talk like the person is right there and you've had a few drinks and the dog is snoozing at your feet. That's good phone. It's a wire going from your heart to hers. It's everything you can't say in person but wish you could.

But good romantic E-mail? No such animal—at least not in the telephone sense of the midnight heart-to-heart. (I'm not talking about business E-mails, which ought to be grammatical and reflective of an expensive education. Nor am I talking about guys' writing to each other, which ought to be ribald and witty, as if they were having beers together.) We're talking guy to girl and vice versa. If everybody relied on E-mail to convey his deepest feelings, this would be a land of broken hearts from Maine to California. E-mail is too fleeting, too provisional, too postmodern, to catch the profound, semipermanent truths that come from the depths of your soul. Those require flowers. The mistake

people make—and I mean smart people, people who should know better—is thinking E-mail is writing. Are they kidding? It's more like humming. All tune, no lyrics.

E-mails aren't letters. Only a dork starts an E-mail with "Dear ———." E-mails aren't even postcards; they're snatches of conversation. That's why they start with "Hi," as if you're bumping into someone on the street. That's the good part, and that's the bad part. E-mail can only go so far. If it's a street conversation, it's one with buses rushing by and other people around who might be listening. (You never know when your charming E-mail is going to be forwarded around the globe with some comment like "Guess what Creepola just sent me.")

And, like an outdoor conversation, it's hurried, on-the-run, both for sender and recipient. Keep it short and simple, because people, being rushed, read E-mails with half a brain, and they miss a lot. The one thing you said *not* to repeat to anyone *ever* is the one thing they thought was OK to spread around. Whoops.

But that doesn't mean your E-mail can't have personality. E-mails to women can, and should, be flirty—so long as you don't get carried away. I invariably read E-mails that start "Hi, handsome" with great attention. I like the no-caps look, too, especially from women, since it suggests a whispery kind of intimacy.

But, hey, easy on the caps, which can seem screechy. And no cutesy-wutesy emoticons—like those inane sideways smiley faces—thank you very much. To me, they're like someone zinging you with a rude remark, only to cap it off with a singsong "Just joking!" Hint: If you're joking, the words should be funny. Keep it conversational, with all the written equivalents of *er* and *um* thrown in, the dot-dot-dots, typos (not too many), slashes between words, like "kiss/screw," to convey the tentative, I-don't-know-but-hey quality of real talk. Otherwise, E-mail can seem like a mutual download between two computers. And sign off with something breezy. I find "love" a little heavy, although I appreciate the thought. I like "See ya" better, since it follows the street metaphor. I close mine, "J," like a peck on the cheek.

Don't worry about E-mail silence. There's a nice bing-bing-bing quality to rapid-fire E-mail chats, but everyone needs a break eventually. A nonresponse doesn't mean your E-mail mate slammed down the receiver. It just means she's gotta go. See ya. ■



PHOTOGRAPH BY JONATHAN KANTOR

### TSUNAMI GEAR

#### OP CORDUROY SHORTS ARE A SURFER'S CLASSIC, DUDE

"We're all seasick," a retired surfer friend once told me. No matter where they live or what they do, most men spend their entire lives longing to connect with their inner beach bum. Sounds like as good an explanation as any for the enduring success of Ocean Pacific's decidedly unstylish, après-surf corduroy shorts. They're too short, too bright and tighter than Peter O'Toole on his birthday—and they've been that way since the first pair was sold back in the early '70s, when everybody was too stoned to give a damn about good taste. ■ That was 11 million pairs ago and counting. ■ So what's the appeal? "To be honest, I didn't know they were cool right now," says Op's design director, Nat Norfleet. "I'm as shocked as you that these things are still going strong." ■ Op founder Jim Jenks created the shorts to give wet, tired surfers something warm and comfortable to slip into. Then the rest of us found out about them. ■ By the early '80s, the company was shipping 1 million pairs a year, and—from Laguna Beach to Long Island—cord shorts were as popular as Huey Lewis & the News. These days Op is selling slightly less than half that amount annually, but considering that it spends next to nothing to promote the line, the company is ecstatic so many men still find it hip to be square. ■ The shorts come in nine colors: black, khaki, navy, turquoise, yellow, orange, red and two shades of sand. ■ My inner beach bum prefers red. How about yours?—DAN DUNN

STYLIST: VICKY MCGARRY