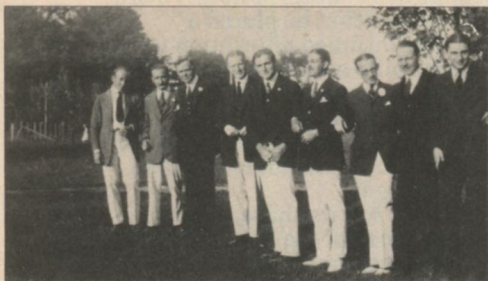


The Five Styles of Men's Fashion ²

THE IVY LEAGUE

by John Sedgwick



Of boxers, buttons, and blue blazers

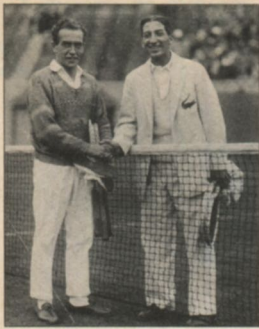
Let's get right to the bottom of it and start with the boxer shorts, that barrel of cotton, cut as long as Bermudas and as crinkly as crinoline. Ivy Leaguers may have other garments hidden away under their wide-wale corduroys, but boxers are the true underpinnings of the Ivy League style, the top drawers. At the prep temple, the Andover Shop in Harvard Square, owner Charlie Davidson stocks no other kind—no Jockeys, and certainly none of the snug, Italian-stallion variety. "All the rest are tacky," he sniffs. "They're like bikinis. They're effeminate."

Given its pugilistic associations, the boxer is certainly manly, but that alone doesn't make it the correct foundation for the Ivy League style. The boxer has the right stuff: a rough, starchy cotton that calls up the hallowed oxford cloth, the very warp and woof of the style, found in all of its button-down shirts and even in some of its pressed trousers. The boxer palette of colors—mainly white and muted pastels—are merely understated versions of the cheery primaries of the outer garments. Then there's the inimitable boxer styling: the way it just hangs there practically down to your knees. But, most of all, there's the whole spirit of the thing, the utter simplicity of it, the way it says "underwear" without any adjectives. Boxers present . . . the box itself.

Although the Ivy League is the height of sophistication in other ways, when it comes to dress, it is hard to get more fundamental. We're talking basics here: the blue blazer with gold buttons; the tweed jacket with leather buttons; the gray flannel pants; the khakis; the oxford-cloth shirts; the turtlenecks; the wool sweaters; the Weejuns.

While some of these items could be turned into fashion numbers with a little work, that would ruin everything, for fashion has no place in the Ivy League wardrobe. These clothes were chosen for their immutability. Continents may slide about, empires fall, but all correct jackets, regardless of material, will always have three buttons, lapels that are neither narrow nor wide, flaps on the pockets, a single center vent, and no tapering darts. And the proper oxford-cloth shirt will be cut "full," with a collar measuring three inches from the neck to the point. "Every now and then the shirt might change





OVERLEAF: (Top) A distinguished, Gatsby-era group assembled for the 1921 wedding of Ernest Hemingway, seen in the middle. (Bottom) A youthful Tony Perkins sports the classic blue button-down shirt and requisite navy tie. THIS PAGE: (From top) 1. In 1926, René Lacoste wears the original version of the alligator crest. 2. Bold madras plaid, a staple of collegiate Ivy League wardrobes of the Sixties. 3. F. Scott Fitzgerald epitomized and chronicled the existence of the Ivy League man. 4. John F. Kennedy and Jackie stroll the beach in well-worn khaki walking shorts and white cotton shirts. 5. The Roaring Twenties, and students greet each other warmly in their ubiquitous fur stadium coats.

just a tad," admits the Andover Shop's Ivy-Leaguer-in-residence Davidson, "but we call our manufacturer right up and say, 'Hey, stop that!' They always change it right back."

In buying the Ivy League style, one does not buy an individual designer, for there are no individual designers. But one may buy a store—Brooks Brothers, J. Press, and the Andover Shop place their labels on the inside jacket pocket where Giorgio Armani's and Calvin Klein's normally would be. No, the Ivy Leaguer is really buying an ethic, one founded on the Yankee principles of practicality, comfort, and tradition. In wearing these clothes, he is joining a select order of men. Compared with the Ivy League style, other clothes are costumes designed to express the wearer's personality. In the Ivy League, personality is much solidier stuff; it's called character—nothing that could be rendered in any fabric. So the Ivy Leaguer dresses merely to cover himself. Consequently, the style is anything but revealing: no pleats or tucks to fit any individual contours. And the clothes are treated with the opposite of respect. Harvard's renowned classics professor John Finley once got so caught up in a lecture that he placed a lighted pipe in his jacket pocket. He continued his oration until students grew alarmed at the smoke billowing up around him and yelled out. Finally, Finley glanced down. "Good God!" he cried, "I'm on fire!" As Harvardians recount the story, however, the point is not that a Harris Tweed coat pocket is the wrong place to store a pipe, but that Finley should have made sure the flame was out before pocketing it.

While the Ivy League style probably has its share of natty dressers, some even approaching the snap of the British Royal Navy, which inspired it in the first place, the mode tends toward the casual. Other groups might gain comfort in social settings by dressing up; the Ivy Leaguer, already so sure of his place, gains comfort by dressing down, often to the point of scandal. If the situation calls for black tie, the Ivy Leaguer comes in a suit; if it calls for a suit, he wears a jacket; if it's jacket-and-tie, he skips the tie; and so on down to the uniquely Ivy habit of wearing shoes without socks.

But if the Ivy Leaguer downplays certain formal items, he plays up certain informal ones to take their place. Sportswear—the polo shirt, tennis shorts, boating shoes—is worn everywhere. There may be a kind of playfulness in the way the Ivy Leaguer occasionally loops a tie about his Lacoste shirt for formal occasions, and an arrogance in the thought that social conventions don't apply to him, but I detect some wistfulness, too, a wish that he could return to the freedom of his prep school playing field. There is a similar I-wish-I-weren't-here quality in the Ivy League graduates turned bankers and businessmen, whose neckties are invariably bestrewn with ducks, crossed tennis rackets, or polo ponies.

If you compliment an Ivy Leaguer on his tie or jacket, he might well say, "Oh, this old thing?" But the joke is that he would mean that sincerely. These *are* old things. These clothes might have adorned his grandfather. They look that old, anyway, or they should. My father wore his navy-blue Groton School blazer for fifty years. When one sleeve gave out after it had been rubbed so often over the prickly golden threads of the school crest, he had the sleeves patched with leather, and he went on wearing the coat more proudly than ever. This stuff is meant to last. It is a fashion that is antifashion, asserting itself to be above the fray, above the petty concerns of the present moment. The Ivy Leaguer sees himself as occupying a more perfect world beyond style, beyond outward show. But the pity is, in the minds of others, nothing types the Ivy Leaguer quite so quickly as his chosen garb—the peerless blue blazer, gray flannels, and tasseled loafers.

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