



**October 2008**

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## Outside counsel

Mark Twain opined that clothes make the man because “naked people have little or no influence on society.” He might have added that the poorly dressed don’t hold much clout either. Still, based on a few mornings and afternoons spent hanging out near Burrard and Georgia – from which we offer these candid, nay horrifying, photos – it would appear that British Columbians haven’t got the message. Caught between the tech sector’s lamentable sartorial contribution (a combination of pleated khakis, polo shirt and performance fleece known as the “Vancouver Special”) and misguided attempts to introduce yoga pants as a business-casual alternative, B.C.’s business wardrobes have traditionally been dismal – and are only getting worse. For the inaugural BCBusiness style issue, we convened a panel of experts at the Vancouver Club – culled from the worlds of media, law, executive recruitment and beyond – to discuss the most egregious fashion transgressions. And fear not: we offer some prescriptions for a more stylish future too.

– *Steven Schelling*



### **1. If the shoe fits (or doesn't)**

Being the first thing people notice, shoes, not surprisingly, were the first problem area pinpointed

by our panel. “Nothing ruins a good suit like a bad pair of shoes,” says Fred Lee, echoing the unanimous sentiment. “Doc Martens are not meant to be worn with a suit.” Pairing the right shoe to the right outfit is only half the problem, however. Maintenance is also key. “Badly scuffed shoes,” quips Amy Gill, “are like having bad tires on a car.”



## 2. It's raining hems

A good tailor is your strongest ally when it comes to making the right first impression. “Men on the West Coast tend to hem their pants up too high, as if they’re expecting an imminent flood,” says Fred Lee. “You need a good break in your pants.” But this piece of advice is not uniquely for men. Good tailoring can transform even the most banal off-the-rack item into a bespoke treasure. “Because whatever it is, it has to fit properly,” says Linda Brown.



## 3. Pleats...no!

“Pleated pants are not flattering on anybody,” says Mihaela Ciocan. “Period.” Unfortunately, in the millisecond it took for our panellists to agree with her assessment, several pair of pleated Dockers were purchased by clueless men across North America. The idea that pleats offer a roomier, more comfortable fit is as laughable as the pants are tragic. A well-tailored, flat-front trouser will prove just as comfortable, with the added benefit of a leaner, more toned appearance.

The Panel: Our five experts on the style (and substance) of dressing for success



**Fred Lee** is “Man About Town” for CBC Radio One’s the Early Edition and writes the “City Life” column for the National Post and “Urban Landscape” for the Vancouver Courier



**Mihaela Ciocan** is founder and principal consultant at ImagePro Image Consulting and VP of Communications for the Association of Image Consultants International Toronto/Canada Chapter



**Amy Gill** is a consultant for executive search firm Ray & Berndtson. She specializes in the recruitment of board directors and C-level executives



**Philip Ireland** is general manager and chief operational administrator for the Vancouver Club



**Linda Brown** is a partner of the law firm McCarthy Tétrault LLP, practising business law. She recently co-chaired the recruiting committee for the firm’s Vancouver office



#### 4. Is that a gun you have?

Our rugged and sometimes remote geography aside, the Wild West has been tame for more than a century. In spite of access to mod cons – or perhaps because of it – some urban cowboys still clip their iPhones, BlackBerries and assorted tech gadgets to their belts with what Philip Ireland refers to distastefully as “the holster.” Not only does it ruin the line of any well-tailored suit, it harkens to over a decade ago when cellphones were kept on display as status symbols. “You need to be current,” warns Mihaela Ciocan. “If your clothing isn’t current, people may think that your ideas aren’t current either.”



### **5. Colour me bad**

A little colour goes a long way. Men can add interest to the boring blue business suit with their choice of tie; the pocket square has also made a welcome comeback. Women should look to purses, shoes and jewellery to add a jolt. “We all love colour,” says Amy Gill, “but when women wear full-on pantsuits in solid, bright colours . . . it just looks wrong. Hillary Clinton is officially on notice.”



### **6. Down and dirty**

When it comes to dressing for the workplace, men benefit from the traditional expectation of the suit and tie. Women, on the other hand, suffer from an embarrassment of choice – some too casual and others too revealing. “The gradation between appropriate and inappropriate has more shades of grey for women,” says Linda Brown. The simple rule for what’s inappropriate according to Mihaela Ciocan? “If you have any doubt at all, go change!”

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