

FOR THE BOYS

'No tie black tie'

There comes a point at every black tie event, however smart, when the ties come off. "Men are getting used to wearing suits without ties," says tailor Emma Willis. "For the past few years people in the arts and media have been interested in something different - it's partly down to English eccentricity."

The lounge suit minus the tie is widely accepted in offices and on TV screens, but the look has now penetrated evening wear, with a growing number of fans including the designer Tom Ford (below).

Emma Willis is currently making a black shirt shot with burgundy for the comedian Stephen Merchant.

"If you want to go tie-less," says Willis, "you need to make sure that you get the details right, that the fabric is good quality and the collar is neat and stays under your jacket."

Simon Maloney, head of buying and production at Thomas Pink, prefers to go without a bow tie. "It's a much sexier look," he says. "It's quite rakish, and it challenges the penguin suit look." Thomas Pink have duly produced a dress shirt with an embroidered front or "bib", where the detailed decoration compensates for the absence of a tie.

Maloney believes the trend for no tie black tie is a natural progression from the cravat (think Jude Law) or straight tie (think George Clooney). "If you don't want to lose the bow tie you can leave it undone, which looks very natural," he says.

Tailor Oliver J Benjamin agrees: "It's essential to be groomed in keeping with the etiquette of formal black tie, but as the evening draws to a close, a slightly dishevelled look can be appealing," he says. "The best way to achieve this is to wear your self-tie bow tie loose around your neck with your top button undone and the shirt stand pulled up."

Duchamp, known for its coloured shirts, has found that its jacquard prints have become popular with men looking to dispense with a bow tie. "Black and white shirts are still key but maybe with a jacquard pattern or a pleat," says chief executive Marc Psoralls. "Dark navy can also be used if you go for a dark navy tux, like the Duke of Windsor used to."

Even in the hallowed workshops of Savile Row, there is a growing acceptance that the bow tie is no longer essential. Mark Henderson, chief executive of Gieves & Hawkes, says, "We've done without it this year. The dinner jacket is an abbreviation of the 19th century tailcoat, after all. This is just the latest development."

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Simon Brooke

