

The Men's Collared Shirt

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If one garment had to best represent the image of a man, it would be the shirt; more specifically, the collared shirt. In its lowly beginnings, the shirt was considered an undergarment (Flusser, 2002). These underclothes initially served to keep sweat away from the outer garments while protecting the body from the coarse outerwear materials. Most underclothing was made of linen, and was therefore referred to as "linens." However, over time, these "linens" would metamorphose into the collared shirt that we know today. The collared shirt is the culmination of many fashions being improved on.

The two men's shirts I will compare are King Louis XIV's ruffled shirt and UNTUCKit's white modern oxford. Though they are extremely different, both are versions of the collared shirt. By comparing the two, we can see how men's collared shirts have transformed in appearance and function. The difference in materials, production, and availability are also noteworthy aspects. We will start with the ruffled chemise, and end with the modern oxford.

Imagine walking upon the Palace of Versailles. As you look everywhere, you see statues made of marble, gold leaves at every turn, and paintings and tapestries adorning the walls: a perfect marriage of design and opulence. As you enter further, you are overwhelmed by the hustle and bustle. Noble men walk about discussing matters, servants run their errands and tend to their tasks, rich bourgeois women huddle and chat about the latest news and trends. The Palace is alive. There is one thing you notice above all: the fashion. Everyone is wearing the finest of threads. As you enter the innermost part of the palace, you stumble upon the royal court, with the Sun King in attendance. Here, the fashion is most concentrated. Upon further examination, you can't help but notice King Louis XIV's attire. He is wearing the most luxurious ruffled dress shirt you have ever laid your eyes on. Made from the finest silks of Lyon, this shirt is truly the epitome of lavishness. You can sense and feel him from this shirt alone.

The Ruffled shirt was more avant-garde than a typical linen/muslin shirt. A play on the shirt and cravat, the Ruffled shirt was the choice for King Louis XIV. It was worn mostly by the rich nobles and bourgeoisie, functioning as a class and status symbol for the latter: because the Bourgeoisie made fashion an everyday aspect of their lives, dressing the part

and keeping up appearances was part of the game. This was also a limited choice due to not much variation in men's tops at the time, though camisoles were also an option (Waugh, 1968). Aesthetics was the driver for wearing such elaborate dress.

For this shirt, only the finest silks from Lyon were used. Luxurious, comfortable, lustrous, and the most absorbent of fabrics (equal to wool), silk provided the best fabric for drape and the best fabric for color. It was therefore a very important textile to France, especially for the city of Lyon. Louis XI began establishing silk manufacturing in Lyon in 1466. Two Italian men caught wind, and moved to Lyon to invest/tum profit on the new silk market, opening schools to teach young French girls how to weave silk. As the industry began to grow, the King of France at the time, Francois I, named Lyon the monopoly of manufacturing silk for the country. Therefore, Lyon became the capital of silk in France, the city through which all imported silk from other countries had to first pass (Walters). By 1620, there were more than 10,000 silk looms in Lyon, and the technology of weaving silk flourished. However, this did not last for long, as the ending reign of Louis XIV brought poverty and war to Lyon (Walters).

Now, imagine taking a train to Wall Street. As you get out of the station, it becomes clear to you what a different world it is. Tall buildings of concrete and steel loom over you. You can feel the productivity in the air. Of course, that's not what grabs your attention; the fashion does. You notice everyone dressed formally and in business attire. These "power suits" do not stand alone. They all require the simple, yet elegant, collared shirt. The shirt gives variation and distinction to the suit. It comes in many different materials, but you notice cotton first and foremost. It can be complemented with a tie or left relaxed without one. Rather than the suit wearing the shirt, the shirt wears the suit.

The men's collared shirt has undergone many changes through the years. The modern oxford is currently the "go to / staple" shirt of the modern man. It can be dressed up or dressed down. UNTUCKit is a unique company that has helped blur the lines between formal and informal shirts, creating a line of men's collared shirts that are made to be untucked. UNTUCKit conducted a survey of 500 men, revealing 90 percent of respondents owned only one or two shirts, with the correct length to be properly worn untucked (Kane, 2017). These modern oxfords are an equal mix style and comfort. Because of this, the UNTUCKit's White Oxford Collared Shirt functionality is varied. Long gone are the days of starched shirts; cotton has become the material of choice.

Two machines are responsible for the success of cotton and modern shirts: the cotton gin and the sowing machine. The cotton gin, invented by Eli Whitney, made picking and sorting cotton much more efficient and

effective. The sewing machine made piecing together fabrics much easier and faster. Combined, they helped to accelerate the boom of cotton and the modern shirt. One of the most important textile fibers in the world, cotton accounts for about 25 percent of total world fiber use (USDA, 2017), with the United States the leading exporter. Cotton is soft, absorbent and breathable, durable and inexpensive. The fiber is so versatile that it can be woven or knitted into a bunch of different fabrics like corduroy, chambray, lace and velour. It is also easy to dye, plays nice with other fabrics, and is easier to wash and care for than other fabrics. Thus, it has become a staple fiber in all of our wardrobes.

In the recent decades, but above all in the current one, men's fashion has seen an explosion in creativity. Though men's fashion/ clothing has always been very simple, we are now in a time where so many more options are available. While men's fashion has historically tended to be bland and conservative, today, we are no longer bound to limited style or colors. Instead, the fashion industry is experimenting and breaking down structured views.

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