



So guys have no excuse for not caring when tweaking the basics has become so easy.

"The hardest part for men is breaking away from tradition," says Peter Papapetrou, stylist and fashion director for Hazelton Lanes in Toronto. The men's fashion industry, he adds, is driving the message home that even small style risks get rewarded.

This means feeling confident in a shirt of pink, "washed-out" plaid instead of predictable palettes of blue or grey. This can also mean dressing down a look with fancy sneakers, as long as you graduate from Air Jordans to a pair of Fred Perrys or Nike's collaboration with French label APC.

Tyler Thoreson, the executive editor for Men.Style.com (the online home of GQ and Details), calls the new men's look "easy luxury" and points to classic Americana as a reference point. Think backyard barbecue as opposed to New England yacht club. "It's clean-cut but not twee preppy," he says from New York. "A little less highfalutin."

The preppy influence is strongest in the navy blazer, which may just be the single most ubiquitous wardrobe item of the season. It's also available at all price points.

And for every classic blazer there is an unconventional pant - elasticized waists, unusual pockets - or a pair of rolled-cuff shorts. Papapetrou says this reflects the options now available to men. "I think a lot of borders have been dropped now."

Overall, there's less emphasis on complete ensembles. Sportswear including zip jackets in techno fabrics, lightweight leathers and knit blend cardigans offers an opportunity to mix up elements creatively.

"Things still need to be put together," says Thoreson. "But this is also the time when you don't want to be the worst-dressed guy in the room or the guy who doesn't get it. You don't want to stand out for your stylistic ineptitude."