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Is Your Weekend Wardrobe Due for an Upgrade?

Retailers wish American men would dress with a little more panache outside the office. Here are a few suggestions for easy substitutions to make your off-the-clock look sleeker.

By **RAY A. SMITH**

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The men's fashion industry wants guys to work a little harder on the weekends.

After years of pushing men to dress more stylishly Monday to Friday, several brands and retailers now want them to step it up on Saturday and Sunday, too.

It's an effort to expand the options in the often-confusing, still-evolving mode of dressing known as "slash casual"—smart/casual, business/casual, dress/casual—all describing attire that is informal yet polished.

Saks Fifth Avenue calls it "Relaxed & Refined" and hopes men will feel inspired to adopt it with some wardrobe upgrades.

Retailers suggest that men replace that beloved hoodie with a suede bomber jacket, and put away those go-to khakis in favor of slim-fitting five-pocket chinos. Replace a baggy T-shirt and sweatshirt with a slim-fitting fine-gauge cotton tee or collared shirt, maybe with a trim, lightweight sweater.



The fashion industry, having successfully nudged many men to dress better at work, now is taking on the weekend. It's time to trade in those beloved baggy comfort clothes for something a little sleeker. *PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES*

There are sweatpants in this new weekend dressing, but they are trim-legged and preferably made of cashmere. Jeans are crisp, dark-rinse and straight or slim-fitting. Sneakers are elegant takes on classic Stan Smiths—and they typically aren't white. Instead they are tan, brown, grey, or black.

Everything is high-quality and well made—which brings us to the second part of the message retailers have about men's weekend clothes: Prepare to pay more for them.

Men in Europe have been dressing this way for a long time now, retailers say, and seem to understand better than their U.S. brethren how to put together sleek weekend looks. Variations, often mixing tailored and casual pieces, appeared in many shows in Milan



Designer Tomas Maier offers faded, flat-front cotton chinos for weekends. *PHOTO: DAVID SCHULZE*

and Paris during men's fashion weeks earlier this year. With a few exceptions, menswear designers in New York tended to show sports-inspired or underground-scene-inspired clothing with references to skaters and punk youths.

A polished weekend style "isn't as intuitive for American men as it is for our European counterparts," said Eric Jennings, vice

president, fashion director at retailer Saks Fifth Avenue. "It's our job to make it intuitive for American men."

Saks calls the look "Relaxed & Refined." Its website features weekend and office-friendly looks from labels like Brunello Cucinelli, Etro and Isaia. In stores, associates are trained to educate customers on the concept, and looks are displayed showing men exactly which items they need to pull the look off.

"It's very important to make sure the mannequins and visual displays tell the story," Mr. Jennings says. Saks has found men "really do shop a mannequin," he says. "They say, 'I want that entire look, head to toe.'"



Brunello Cucinelli suggests tailored trousers, a collared shirt and sweater with a vest on top—and classy calfskin sneakers. *PHOTO: BRUNELLO CUCINELLI*

Retailers say mainstream guys are getting more interested in clothing as influential pro-athletes, pop stars and rap artists have helped make an embrace of fashion more acceptable. Guys are paying more attention to the way they look in general, whether on the clock or off. Social media and selfies have made everyone more aware of their appearance, especially when followers give instant feedback.

The goal is to get men to be more like Jack Luu, a 38-year-old strategic consultant in tech who lives in Los Angeles. Mr. Luu says when he is hanging with his friends, he likes to wear “something like a soft dress shoe with some skinny jeans, vibrant dress or T-shirt, nice watch and comfortable dress or Converse-type shoes.”



A suede bomber jacket from Ralph Lauren goes more places and fits in better than a hoodie. *PHOTO: RALPH LAUREN*

“I’m a little of a peacock on the weekends,” Mr. Luu says. His peers, who he says typically dress more casually, used to make “childish remarks” about his weekend outfits, he says. But they are used to his look, even if they don’t emulate it. “Rarely do I see my peers step it up,” he said. “If anything, it’s down, [like] shorts and sweats.”

Jeans and tees were the most commonly purchased men’s clothes in the 12 months that ended in January, a survey by Mintel of 963 men ages 18-plus found. In a second survey, one in five men ages 18 to 44 expressed a desire to dress more stylishly but didn’t know how. “This shows they’re taking a serious interest in their overall appearance, not just

for workplace attire, but even their weekend look,” said Rupa Ghosh, the research analyst who worked on the report.

Jennifer Mahoney, a personal stylist and owner of A Sharp Dressed Man, a Chicago-based style consulting firm, says many of her male clients struggle with weekend dressing and want to avoid looking sloppy. She advises them to compare a smart/casual weekend ensemble with a mullet haircut—“where it’s business on top, with a button-down and a blazer, and party on the bottom, with jeans.”

A good example of this look would be to pair a khaki blazer and a button down shirt with slim-straight, dark-rinse jeans, which look more polished than lighter denim. A chukka boot is a classy alternative to a dress shoe or sneaker.

Some designers of polished weekend looks eschew the word “casual,” because they believe it implies “sloppy.” A weekend look from fashion label A.P.C. in Paris in January was a weighty wool tartan button-down overshirt worn with olive corduroy pants, a wool Mackintosh-style coat and leather derby shoes. “I don’t find it casual at all,” A.P.C. president and creative designer Jean Touitou said during an interview at the presentation. “I find it so sophisticated.”

Luxury label Tomas Maier specializes in luxurious off-the-clock menswear, even naming one of its trousers “Weekend Pant.” “I wanted men to have a place to go for clothes that weren’t too sloppy nor too gym-oriented,” said Mr. Maier, the label’s founder and designer. He is also creative director at Bottega Veneta, a luxury fashion house that is another smart/casual specialist. His Tomas Maier collection is about “time-off,” Mr. Maier said. “The colors and shapes are relaxed and easy.”

Men who work in offices with smart-casual dress codes may have an easier time adopting the upgraded weekend look, since some pieces can work for either or, Mr. Maier said. “For a lot of men who work in creative fields, it is a perfect wardrobe,” he said.

The blurring of work-weekend lines is a guiding principle of the new weekend style. Among the looks in online fashion retailer Farfetch’s proposed “modern office wardrobe” is a soft, unstructured blue wool Prince of Wales check suit with a black crew-neck sweater. It works for weekends, too. “It’s not about using your old nine-to-five structured suit and not wearing a tie,” says Tony Cook, menswear editor at Farfetch.

Magasin, a men’s store that opened this month in Culver City, Calif., carrying labels like Massimo Alba, Salvatore Piccolo and Engineered Garments, promotes mixing their



Time to trade in that collegiate T-shirt for something like this: a fine jersey T-shirt from Officine Générale. *PHOTO: OFFICE GENERALE*

different aesthetics for looks that transition from on-duty to off.

Customers “want to be able to walk into a room where everybody’s wearing suits and have everybody in that room say, ‘I respect this guy,’” said co-founder Josh Peskowitz, a former Bloomingdale’s men’s fashion director. “And they want to be able to take that same outfit and go out to the bar or the nightclub, or away for the weekend, and have everybody be like, ‘He fits in here just the same.’”

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Cashmere ribbed sweatpants from Michael Kors are sleeker and more versatile than the pants you wear to the gym.

PHOTO: MICHAEL KORS

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