

# Epoch Times Style Spotlight: Bridesmaid Chic

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June is here, and we all know what that means! It's the start of the official wedding season. There is nothing more traditional than a June bride... and a June bridesmaid for that matter.

The other day, while flipping the pages of the most recent J.Crew catalog, I couldn't help but shout hallelujah that finally a mainstream clothier has designed very stylish, reasonably priced, basic, and absolutely lovely dresses and gowns for brides, their maids, and even grandma (if she's willing to go there).

There were gorgeous shades of pink, tangerine, espresso, and of course basic black in glorious silk charmeuse fabrics and even cotton. With prices ranging from \$295 to \$325, I think there may actually be hope for any of us who are frightened by the idea of being asked by a girlfriend to join her bridal party.

Some of us know that bridesmaid dresses can be... well... ugly, expensive dresses that you will most likely NEVER wear again.

Retail chains may seem "uncreative" to some, but if you want a classic look, and have multiple bridesmaids to please, your best bet may be to stick to simple colors and shapes. There will still be plenty of room for you to accessorize and personalize, in less expensive and much more manageable ways. Think: flowers, shoes, jewelry, shawls, hair... the possibilities are endless.

I happen to have a few prize winners collecting dust in my parents' attic—lots of shiny puffy fabrics in various shades of purple... and an absolutely unforgettable pair of metallic gloves that would even give



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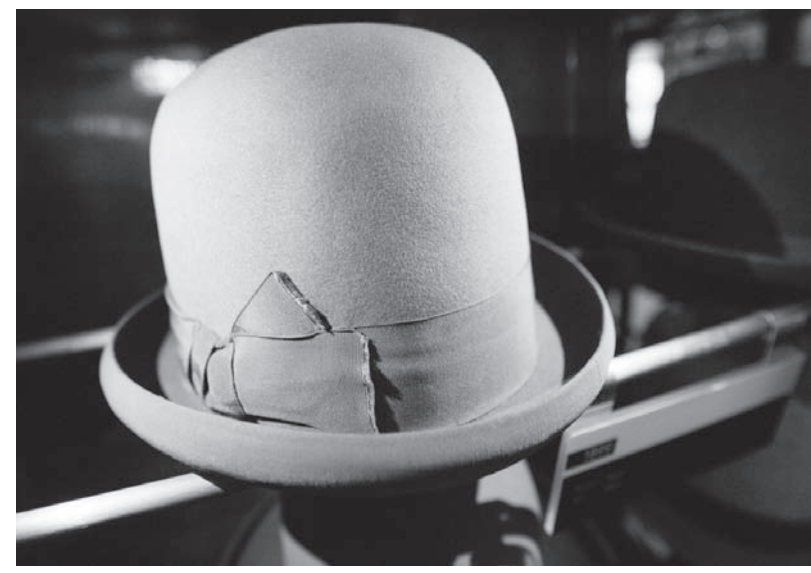
**GIRL TIME:** Classic, simple shapes in soft colors are a timeless choice for brides and bridesmaids. We still like the look of soft colors as shown in this creation by Vera Wang in April 2007. Their relaxed lines of the dress bring out the sincere beauty and meaning that weddings can hold.

the gloved one (Michael Jackson himself) a run for his money. What I would give to have a coral-pink, A-line dress in my closet instead. ...

So ladies, if you are getting married or know somebody who is, make sure to check out J. Crew, Banana Republic, and Ann Taylor for reasonably priced selections and classic styles. Your girlfriends will be glad you did.



Giuseppe Cacace/AFP/Getty Images



Giuseppe Cacace/AFP/Getty Images

**OLD HAT? NOT SO!** The craftsmanship and care required to make these special hats is on display at the Borsalino Museum of the hat factory in Alessandria. The Borsalino company is celebrating its 150th birthday.

## Old Hat Still in Vogue at Italy's Borsalino

ALESSANDRIA, Italy (Reuters)—Entering the Borsalino hat factory, high altar for headwear worshipers, is like stepping into a time warp.

Wood-encased machinery from the 19th century cranks out fluffy sheets of beaver and rabbit felt and workers use antique wooden forms to shape crowns the same way their predecessors did for headgear that has graced Hollywood stars, kings, and popes.

A favorite of 1920s Chicago gangster Al Capone and Japanese Emperor Hirohito, Borsalinos have remained the gold standard for luxury hats for 150 years, through war, corporate buy-outs, and the collapse of their market.

Now resurging from decades of postwar hatless fashion, Borsalino sees no reason to change. "Some of the steps we do have to be done the same way we did it 50, 60, 70 years ago," said Sales Director Claudio Mennuni.

"We found we couldn't get the same quality using new gear," like lighter irons to shape brims instead of old gas-fired heavyweights, he said. "In a lot of cases you have to fix the equipment, you can't find it

anywhere else."

### Old Hat Techniques

Relying on old techniques has worked for Borsalino, which has made hats for people ranging from emperors and Sephardic Jews to Canadian Mounties.

Screen stars from Humphrey Bogart in "Casablanca" to Denzel Washington's dapper detective in last year's "Inside Man" have topped off with Borsalino's signature trilbies, or fedoras.

In some parts of Italy, the word was synonymous for "hat," and Borsalino offices carried a warning sign: "Those not wearing a hat are not welcome."

With its felt hats costing 200 euros (\$270) to more than double that for those made with exotic guanaco wool, "it is probably the highest-quality premium brand in the world," said Carol Denford, fashion editor at Britain's Hat Magazine.

"It's the ultimate trilby, the ultimate hat."

Founded in 1857 by French-trained Giuseppe Borsalino, the company saw its best years in the

1920s, when output peaked at 2 million hats a year.

But in World War II, allied bombs flattened Borsalino's factories, and then the lifestyle revolution of the 1960s and the growing use of cars, which protected men's heads from weather, sent sales into a tailspin.

Borsalino's heirs sold the company in the 1980s and, as the company moved to a new site in 1986, production plunged. A group run by the Gallo and Monticone families bought it in 1993.

Now Borsalino is staging a comeback, particularly with hats aimed at the under-35s, featuring new fibers, colors, and hats that can be folded up and still keep their shape.

### Topping Off

These days, fashion-watchers note a trend of nostalgia for the styles of the 1930s and 40s, which include pin-striped suits, overcoats, and elegant accessories.

Interest in fedoras and porkpie hats among younger customers has been fueled by celebrities as pop stars Justin Timberlake, Sean

"P. Diddy" Combs, and the Black Eyed Peas.

"Beyond the suit, the overcoat, there is particular attention being paid to details, to the belt, the shoes, things like that," Mennuni said. "Hats are taking on their place as a fashion statement."

Borsalino's revenues hit 20 million euros (almost US\$ 27 million) in 2005 and have grown about 10 percent a year since 2002. Sales have been boosted by stand-alone stores, the launch of women's hats, and a clothing line.

Output, which includes Montecristi Panama straw hats and baseball-style caps, is now about 250,000 pieces a year.

The company has about 400 workers, half at a plant in China that produces hats for other labels.

Giovanna Uselli Borsalino, the 92-year-old widow of the family's last heir, strolled through a museum at the company's old headquarters, which features rows of top hats in raspberry, pink, and sky blue, and lustrous bowlers for Andean highlanders.

"These are wonderful hats they make today because Borsalino is still alive," she said.

## Japan 'Cool Biz' Campaign off to a Chilly Start

TOKYO (Reuters)—An unseasonal chill had some cabinet ministers shivering in their short-sleeved shirts as Prime Minister Shinzo Abe launched Japan's annual "Cool Biz" fashion campaign to save energy and fight global warming.

Japan began its "Cool Biz" push two years ago to get office workers to shed their stuffy suits and ties and keep thermostats at 28 degrees Celsius (82 degrees Fahrenheit) as a way to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Known as a stylish dresser himself, Abe had instructed his cabinet members to wear "kariyushi" summer wear from the southern island of Okinawa, similar to Hawaiian aloha shirts.

"It's nice and comfortable. But today it seems a bit chilly," Health Minister Hakuo Yanagisawa, clad in a blue short-sleeved shirt imprinted with tiny red cats and birds native to Okinawa, told reporters.

"I ordered a long-sleeved shirt but they were out of stock so I could only get short-sleeved," added Yanagisawa, who appeared pleased to have something to talk about other than a furor over mismanaged pensions that is dogging Abe's administration.

Administrative Reform Minister Yoshimi Watanabe welcomed the chance to substitute a collarless shirt for his jacket and tie.

"It's good for people like me with no neck," said the stocky politician.

Economics Minister Hiroko Ota, one of only two women in Abe's 17-member cabinet, was complimented by reporters on her striking red "kariyushi" with a butterfly and floral print.

"Thank you. It's actually still a bit cold to wear this. But this building is hot, so it's nice," Ota told reporters.

The temperature on last Friday morning was around 4 degrees below the June 1 average of 21.8 centigrade (71 degrees Fahrenheit), but was expected to warm up later, an official at the Japan Meteorological Agency said.

Later in the day, Abe, keen to polish his anti-global warming credentials ahead of this week's Group of Eight summit in Germany, took part in a demonstration of Japanese clean diesel cars at his official residence.

"I feel certain that Japan's energy-saving technology is the best in the world," he said before test-driving several cars.



Yoshikazu Tsuno/AFP/Getty Images

**COOL DRIVE:** Mitsukoshi department store's Ginza branch manager Ken Shigematsu (R) and male sales clerks in casual "Cool Biz" dresses greet their customers at their shop in Tokyo. Japan kicked off its third summer "Cool Biz" casual clothing drive with politicians flaunting southern island fashion wear as the country engages in the fight against global warming.



Yoshikazu Tsuno/AFP/Getty Images

**DESIGNER COOL:** Malaysian architect Ken Yeang's unique summer suits enabled him to remove parts of his clothes, such as sleeves and a collar. This shot is from the "Cool Asia" fashion show at a Tokyo shopping mall last year.

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