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Anchor Men's Wear stresses importance of understated elegance

Scott Schweizer has been in the men's clothing business in Port Washington for more than three decades.

That has given him plenty of time to develop an immutable axiom when it comes to formal affairs — It is all about the dress.

Schweizer said he learned that lesson when getting ready for his own senior prom. He planned to wear a pair of Nightwatch Plaid pants with his black tuxedo.

"My date, who later became my wife Pat, didn't think that was such a very good idea," he said.

Schweizer is in the middle of high-school prom season, the busiest time of the year at Anchor Men's Wear, 121 N. Franklin St.

"On the Thursday or Friday before prom, I can have 100 tuxedos lined up waiting to be picked up," he said.

The store has become the formalwear focal point for male students from Port Washington, Grafton, Ozaukee, Random Lake and Cedar Grove high schools.

"I've been in business long enough where my former customers are sending their sons to the store to pick out their tuxes," Schweizer said.

In many cases, Schweizer said, it is the first time the guys have had to wear anything so formal, and he is always ready with advice.

"Tuxedos come in lots of different colors, but I always try to steer them into getting a basic black tux, and then adding a personal touch with the vest and tie. That can save $15 or $20, which they can always spend on flowers," he said.

Just what color to add to that basic black suit should be determined by the color of the dress the girl is wearing, Schweizer said.

"The rule for prom is the same as with weddings. You don't want to be too flashy. You want something that goes with the girl's dress — guys need to think of themselves as an accessory to the girl's dress," he said.

Color choices for accent pieces have become increasingly vivid over the years.

“I see a lot of orange, hot pink, fuchsia and seafoam,” Schweizer said.

Fabric sample books of color swatches are available to make sure the exact shade of lavender is selected.

Schweizer said the color samples can also be taken to the nearby Brown’s Floral & Gift for more matching.

“We have a great relationship with the flower shop, and how much more convenient can you get than walking two doors down?” he asked.

Anchor has access to several top tuxedo designers, including Calvin Klein, Perry Ellis and Joseph Abboud, ordered through Nedrebo’s Formal Wear of Madison.

“There are two-button and three-button tuxes, but most people are not going to be able to tell the difference. You can pay more money if you want a designer name, but the only difference is that one is going to have the Calvin Klein label on it,” Schweizer said.

The store also sells tuxedos, but he said going the rental route make more sense in most cases. The store’s most popular tuxes sell for between $200 and $400.

“You don’t wear a tuxedo that often, and it is surprising how most people — at least in my own case — have a difficult time staying the same size,” Schweizer said.

Rentals dominate the store’s business, with the exception of groups like the Ozaukee Chorus, whose members buy a lot of tuxedos, all the same traditional style.

Schweizer said he enjoys dealing with high-school students who are excited about attending their first formal dance.

“The odd thing is almost all of the high-school guys who come in are the same size — 40 Regular. If you are a big football player who wears a 46 Large, you won’t have a problem getting your size. But for most high-school guys, it is a good idea to place your order early or they might run out of your size,” he said.

Schweizer said making the task of outfitting young men as painless as possible is the best way ensuring future business.

“If they have a good experience and feel they can trust my advice, there is a good chance they will be coming back for their own wedding,” he said.

Schweizer said he has noticed that guys don’t spend nearly as much time searching for the perfect ensemble as their female counterparts.

“Guys just want to get it done,” he said.

Schweizer said most of his customers take good care of their rental items, but the one that often shows how good a time the wearer had at the event is the shoes.

“I own the shoes we rent, and the most thankless part of this job is having to clean the shoes after a big event. You can only imagine what kinds of things get stepped in or spilled on them,” he said.

“And then there are the farmers who get married and wear their shoes to do chores in the barn.”

Schweizer said tuxedo rentals are an integral part of the business.

He said he typically has 30 days to pay his supplier for rentals, which significantly improves the shop’s cash flow.

The store also sells men’s clothing, primarily recreation wear like the Tommy Bahama brand, but that merchandise has to be paid for long before it is sold to a customer looking to update his summer wardrobe.

“We would be in trouble if we didn’t have the income from the tuxedo rentals, but we don’t make enough from them to just do tuxedo rentals,” Schweizer said.

Image Information: GRAFTON HIGH SCHOOL student Dieter Hess returned his tuxedo Monday to Anchor Men’s Wear in Port Washington after attending the school’s prom over the weekend. Photo by Mark Jaeger