

Prince of Ties

An eye for style turns a traveling salesman from Fort Mill into a menswear trendsetter. By **Patricia Wilens**

Here's a puzzler for you—what do Winston Churchill, George Will, Charles Osgood, Manolo Blahnik, and Bill Nye the Science Guy all have in common with professional football star Dhani Jones? All are strong, successful men. And they all wear bow ties.

"It takes a certain kind of guy to wear a bow tie," says Randy Hanauer. "He has to be self-confident, assured of his masculinity." Randy should know. He sports a jaunty bow tie on most days and makes his living designing and selling stylish menswear—mostly ties—made by his Fort Mill company, R. Hanauer.

Not for Nerds Now A lifetime working in the apparel biz makes Randy an expert on what's hot in men's fashion. And this style maven declares that bow ties—especially those in cheerful colors and fun patterns—are all the rage, notably in our region.

"Men in the South dress better than they do in any other part of this country," Randy says. "There are more fine men's shops here than anywhere else."

R. Hanauer's retail Web site, however, indicates that demand for these accessories comes from all over the United States, Canada, and even Europe.

So who are the men who wear the bright dots, stripes, plaids, and prints that distinguish R. Hanauer ties? "We glean information from our Internet business about who they are and what they do," Randy explains. "A lot of physicians wear bow ties, because they don't get in their way. Makes sense, as ties can be carriers of germs. Attorneys and professors seem to like bow ties, but you'll rarely see a banker in one. Wedding parties order ties for groomsmen, sometimes with matching cummerbunds or coordinating pocket squares."



Perhaps surprisingly, Randy sees growth in the bow tie business coming from young people. "College guys love bow ties. They want to make a mark with their own style," he says. "And girls love them. Women on the street compliment me on my bow tie. Or if I'm checking into a hotel, a female desk clerk almost always says, 'I love your tie.' Women *love* bow ties. So young men wear them to impress the girls."

Beyond Basic Black R. Hanauer makes elegant black silk bow ties—perfect for a classic tuxedo. But if a man wants something with more oomph, Randy has colors and designs for the choosing. Traditional plaids and stripes, sure. Then there are Jolly Rogers, fish, beach umbrellas, sailboats, lots of dots, and dots and stripes together on one tie. And the sky's the limit when it comes to color.

"Men have a love affair with ties," Randy explains. "You can breathe life into a stodgy old suit with a great tie."



FAR LEFT: Randy Hanauer's festive tie and son Randall's striped neckwear show how R. Hanauer takes men's accessories beyond basic black. LEFT AND ABOVE: Bright colors and cool designs let a man have fun with his wardrobe.

Men who love clothes buy ties the way many women collect shoes, Randy explains. "A tie or a bow tie, that's one of a man's favorite things to buy. If he's had a great day, he'll pick out a new tie. If he's had a bad day, he'll pick one out to lift his spirits. If he doesn't wear ties, he'll go for a pocket square."

Pocket squares, in fact, founded the company. As a sales rep for apparel companies in the mid-1980s, Randy noted a scarcity of white cotton pocket squares. A local seamstress made some for him. When they sold well, he



expanded his offerings with madras and small prints and finally branched out with coordinating ties.

"A pocket square is important for men who don't wear ties," Randy explains. "It's the only place where you can put a little color. If you have on a blazer or a tweed coat, a pocket square brings the outfit alive."

A Family Affair While Randy plays the role of traveling salesman, his wife Jayma holds down the fort at the Fort Mill workshop, working with 10 employees who cut, sew, ship, and keep the books.

"Jayma and Kathy, our cutter, make everything happen—they're the organizers," Randy says. "I come up with all these ideas, and then I go out and sell them; but they're the ones who make sure our product gets delivered. And we deliver a beautiful product—all made right here in Fort Mill." ●

R. Hanauer: Visit www.bowties.com to see the current line of accessories, to place an order, or to find a retailer near you.

PHOTOGRAPHS: GARY CLARK