

An illustration of a man from the chest up, wearing a dark suit jacket, a white dress shirt, and a green and blue striped tie. A yellow pocket square with small pink floral patterns is tucked into the left breast pocket. The man's hands are clasped in front of him. A white rounded rectangle with the word 'ICON' inside is positioned over the man's neck and upper chest area. The background is a dark grey with a faint, repeating pattern of a pocket square.

ICON

The Pocket Square

By Andi Teran

“One should either be a work of art or wear a work of art,” said Oscar Wilde, a faithful pocket square devotee. Whether you’re donning a bespoke suit or a threadbare sport jacket, pop a puff of fabric into the left breast pocket, and they’ll say, just *who* is that man? A movie star? A president? An anchorman? A hip-hop mogul? All of the above? Quite possibly. If the clothes make the man, then the pocket square makes the *gentleman*.

A direct descendent of the handkerchief, the pocket square had regal beginnings. Richard II of England is often credited as the original dapper dresser due to palace expenses listed on his Household Rolls describing “little pieces [of cloth] for the lord King to wipe and clean his nose.” Carried for personal hygiene, the handkerchief was first worn slightly protruding from the left jacket sleeve where it could be easily accessed for dabbing a bit o’ spot and assisting a tearful lady.

The 19th century saw fashion evolve into the Age of Aestheticism, and men (finally) discovered the virtues of being extravagantly well groomed. When the dandy emerged in his tailored frock coat, accoutrements such as the cravat and the floral boutonniere added to the aristocratic package. Upper welt (or chest) pockets were added, and the “little” cloth pieces of yore simply would not fit. Thus, tucked into trouser pockets they went and out burst a brilliant spray of silk from the heart.

A continual display of wealth, status, taste, and creativity, today the pocket square remains the sartorial accent of choice for the *flâneur* and financier alike. Bold colors and patterns suggest flamboyance, while clean white linen remains an austere classic. Individual styles may be initiated or imitated; choice is not limited. There are *One- to Four-point Folds*, adjusting the corners of the cloth to make one or multiple points. Clean and simple, the *Presidential* forces fabric into precise right angles, while the *Puff* is flashy, confident, and just that—a round puff slipped into the pocket. Jazz up the puff by pulling some peaks and you have the *Astaire*. For classic with a twist, reverse your *Four-point Fold* to create the *Cagney*, or keep things conservative with the *TV Fold*, a hint of horizontal fabric barely peeking from the breast pocket popularized by newscasters of the 1950s.

So choose a classic Paul Stuart paisley or Ralph Lauren’s dandy polka dots. Give whimsical Hermès graphics a go or turn it out Japan-style with Tomorrowland’s checkerboard prints. Whether you’re paying homage to elegant style or mixing it up haphazardly, there really is no right or wrong way to wear the pocket square. Just give it a try, dear gentleman, and stuff it with style.