



STYLE

DEATH TO DRESS CODES

WHAT DOES "DRESSY CASUAL" REALLY MEAN ANYWAY? ASKS **BENJAMIN LESZCZ**

For his extravagant, Tolkien-esque wedding this summer, Silicon Valley billionaire (and former Facebook president) Sean Parker didn't merely suggest a dress code, he dressed his guests. With the help of Academy Award-winning *Lord of the Rings* costume designer Ngila Dickson, Parker inflicted silk brocade vests and three-quarter-length jackets on the men, and velvet-and-silk numbers for the ladies. The event resembled a medieval battle re-enactment, with better wine and a cappella Sting performances.

His impulse to dress his guests is understandable: he just wanted them to be as thoughtfully art-directed as the event itself. However, Parker's over-the-top approach failed to yield an elegant wedding; it was, instead, a costume party. Like so many hosts, Parker didn't use his dress code to make guests' lives easier, but as an attempt to control the uncontrollable. This is why—with the exception of

black tie, which clearly tells guys to wear a tux—I am lobbying for the death of dress codes. They aren't just ambiguous; they're downright insidious.

Part of the problem is that there's no official rule book. The closest we may get, *Emily Post's Etiquette*, offers no less than 10 codes, including: white tie, black tie, creative black tie, festive attire and dressy casual. The differences, per Ms. Post, are laughable. So is her suggestion of holiday-themed ties. (*Never.*)

Many hosts have responded to the lack of clear dress codes by concocting their own. A friend recently attended a wedding at a ritzy Calgary hotel with a "fashion formal" dress code. "Since it's an ambiguous term, many guys just dressed as they normally would for a winter wedding," he said. "They looked far better than the ones who dressed in trendy, extremely undersized suits." Telling folks to be fashionable is like telling them to be beautiful; if they could, they would.

No matter how clever the wording,

dress codes cannot instill good taste. The key is to trust an invitation to communicate clearly by virtue of the nature of the event: the venue, the language and the design. If an affair is on a beach or in a garden, noting "beach chic" or "garden party" adds little. If it's at a posh hotel, guys should wear suits. If in doubt, guys should wear suits.

But what Parker missed, and hosts must accept, is that the guests are an unpredictable element. This is a good thing: the offbeat choices of a few guests create the crucial sense that anything could happen.

The invitation for my own wedding this summer stated only that we'd be on a vineyard. Sure, a few guys sweated it out in ill-fitting dark wool suits, but no dress code could have saved them. The other gents rose to the occasion, wearing crisp cotton suits and colourful trouser-and-blazer pairings, with a smattering of bow ties. It was a varied, unpredictable group. And it was a hell of a party. ▀

DRESS CODES YOU SHOULD KNOW



White tie

Wear It to: dinner with the Queen



Black tie

Wear It to: the Academy Awards



Business formal

Wear It to: work



Creative black tie

Wear It to: the last event you ever get invited to

* How to buy a tux: keep it classic, two buttons or less • Black is best, or midnight blue • Clip-ons are for renters • Don't break the bank (Suitsupply.com has tuxedos from \$469)