



Staten Island Advance

Do real men wear sandals?

Designer flip-flops and open-toed shoes for men are hot this summer -- but research shows most males have a hard time revealing their toes in public

Friday, June 11, 2004

By JESSICA JONES
STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE



JESSICA JONES
Fashion & Scenes

It's hot. Really hot. And both men and women are bearing it all in an attempt to keep cool. For the ladies, it's natural: Cute tank tops, shorts and flip-flops are a summertime staple. But for men, showing a little extra skin can be an issue. Especially where feet are concerned.

"The more skin one shows, the less power the person has," explained Beryl Wing, an author and image consultant with a practice in Great Kills. "Men know that the less clothes you wear, the less power you have. And I know sandals sound like a small part of the body to be uncovered, but it makes them feel vulnerable. Not a happy state for most men."

Despite this philosophy, sandals have always been a warm-weather option for men. There have been open-toe designs for the athlete, the bohemian and the business-minded man. But a recent trend in fashion has produced a whole new range of stylish flip-flops and sandals, making the flat-soled, open-toed shoe a dominant force in the market. Still, experts, say, men's opinions about the shoes have not changed.



Beryl Wing

Ms. Wing quoted Ruth P. Rubinstein, an F.I.T. professor of sociology, who points out in her book, "Dress Codes," that lack of clothing in ancient art symbolizes defeat and victimhood. Men, intensely attuned to power, she said, know that that aura of the undressed victim has survived into our own age.

"Men don't ever want to be laughed at," Ms. Wing continued. "It is their worst fear. Wearing sandals -- shoes with very limited guaranteed appropriateness (the beach really is the only place you're sure they belong) -- opens one up to ridicule. Men will avoid this at all costs. Being laughed at, again, means you've lost your power."

Plus, sandals have the hint of the artist in them, Ms. Wing said. While women love the artistic and being "different," men tend to follow the leader and shun the creative.

"Being artistic has many less-than-manly connotations, even in our age when many men are more progressive," the image consultant explained. "This may not be a top-of-mind reason for many men (and many of the more liberal ones might not even admit to it), but it's there. Again, you open yourself up to ridicule or worse. Another power issue."

PRACTICAL?

Practicality is also another concern. Men like to wear what's functional and a pair of shoes that only pops out of the closet on weekends during the summer months is not usually a smart buy.

"They don't want 1,000 pairs of shoes like Imelda Marcos, or even a closetful, like the women in their lives," Ms. Wing said. "They want a few pairs of versatile, functional footwear that can do multiple duty. Why invest in a pair of sandals that are only foolproof at the beach or the pool when you can spend the money on an extra pair of sneakers that you can wear multiple places?"

Ms. Wing recommends that men buy sandals only if they're totally comfortable with it.

"For a man who really wants to, I say go for it," she said. "This man is possibly a superb dresser, maybe a bit artistic or a bit of a rebel. He probably knows to buy the finest quality he can afford., to match the styling to his personality (be it elegant, rugged, functional, artsy or whatever) and to wear them only in venues that are appropriate. But it's definitely not a look for everyone. Nor should it be. It's a risk."

Jessica Jones is the fashion editor for the Staten Island Advance. She may be reached via e-mail at jjones@siadvance.com.