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Here are 20 rules for country fashion

By Curtis Seltzer

BLUE GRASS, VA.—The great international designers often hire me during New York Fashion Week to provide yes-no decisions on their latest creations. If I like it, if it looks good on a normal woman, they throw it in the trash; if I gag or wince, they trot it down the runway.

My taste in women's fashion is infallible.

My reverse genius comes from a simple insight: Those who design high fashion for women hate women. This explains why their "creations" are either ugly or ridiculous, and why their models are built like skinny 14-year-old boys.

What other industry gets away with making its customers look bad? Real estate, cars, fitness centers—no, no and no. There is one, however: the business of producing Halloween costumes.

The fashion gurus love it when I scold them. It's like we are blood-wed to a pact of silence as the emperor walks by with no clothes.

Infrequently, someone out here learns of my hush-hush consulting practice. They might see Vuitton and Givenchy duking it out with handbags on my front porch, or Ralph Lauren docking his yacht in my back field where Melissa keeps her horses—Polo, Nolo and Poopsie-Pie.

The rules of high fashion and those that govern Blue Grass fashion are not cut from the same cloth. Here, then, are the 20 rules that work out here.

Rule 1: Anything rubberized should be worn both outdoors and inside. This obviously includes boots and rain gear but also items that might not immediately come to mind—like eyeglasses, which also need to repel water.

Rule 2: If the garment's interior is rubberized, you have it inside out. Reverse and wear the yellow side to weddings and funerals.

Rule 3: All footwear must have steel toes and be black as a Model T. This applies to all sandals and most flip-flops.

Rule 4: The only accessory you will need is a pocket knife. But do not carry it in a handbag, not even a clutch. If you can't live without purse junk, get a metal tool box with decals.

Rule 5: A ring of keys hung from a belt is a hotly debated accessory. Conservatives argue that these jingle-jangles should be worn at all times, while liberals believe they might be safely removed during hunting season when asleep.

Rule 6: Never wear jeans that have sequins on their back pockets. In the country, sequins always belong on the front.

Rule 7: Always wear tooled-leather belts with silver buckles the size of deflated beach balls. They make everyone look good, even anthropology professors in Birkenstocks.

Rule 8: Don't smoke Marlboros unless you want to be a dead poseur. Wearing a cowperson hat and crinkling your eyes will not put the whammy on carcinogens.

Rule 9: All caps are not equal. You must know the difference between a feed cap and a baseball cap.

A feed cap, or trucker cap, is also known as a "gimme," since it is an advertising give-away. A gimme has a foam front and a mesh rear. Baseball caps are made of cloth. Gimmes sit high on your head and cover bald guys; baseball caps sit low and signal prosperity—sought, achieved or lost.

Rule 10: Keep the bill of your cap pointed straight ahead. Don't turn it to the back or side unless you want to be identified as a teenager with a learner's permit.

Rule 11: Caps should advertise something that America invented, like civil liberties, or a product we still manufacture, like moonshine. Caps that advertise foreign-language bookstores or Jacques Torres chocolates are increasingly evident out here, but they're known to spook the livestock.

Rule 12: All farm caps must be dirty, preferably with a greasy spot and a white crust of sweat where the bill meets the foam. Clean baseball caps are worn by guys like Bernie Madoff.

Rule 13. Farm boots and cowperson boots are different.

Farm boots are as big as orange crates. The winter ones are insulated with felt liners; the summer ones are insulated with manure. Farm boots can be worn for every special occasion, unlike galoshes which are limited to bridal showers.

Cowperson boots are good for riding and swaggering. People on Seventh Avenue use them in their collections for the same reason we wear them out

here: height and sex.

Good dancers prefer cowperson boots to farm boots...for reasons I've never understood.

Farm boots, however, are more honest in bar romances.

Rule 14: Always wear pants under leather chaps, particularly when you're riding.

Rule 15: Some cowperson hat somewhere will look good on you, even though you've tried on a million and you still don't look like John Wayne. If the hat is perfect but doesn't fit, adjust your head size.

Rule 16: You can wipe your sweaty brow with the same bandana you've used to blow your nose, but offer it to a person you're trying to romance only after rings have been exchanged.

Rule 17: In really cold winters, you'll need a hat with ear flaps. Trapper hats and bomber hats are acceptable. If style is a concern, buy one with a chinstrap.

Rule 18: In cold places you will also need an adult model of the embarrassing snow suit you hated when you were the only five year old still required to wear one to school. They're now called "coveralls," and they still have leg zippers. The Artic styles are also good in summer weight-loss programs. The better versions come with elastic bands and clips at the wrist so you don't lose your mittens.

Rule 19: Practice walking like a model behind drawn curtains, not out in the pasture where it might be misinterpreted.

Rule 20: Understand that farm clothes are what they are. Cowperson couture and hillbilly chic are not.

Buy outer garments at your local farm store. Buy undergarments wherever you want. No one looks unless you're in a serious car wreck.

Bonus rule: Make sure that you dress appropriately for your funeral. Whatever your destination, you're never wrong in farm boots and a gimme hat.

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