

Style Master: Get your head in the right space

BY JJ LEE, SPECIAL TO THE SUN OCTOBER 25, 2011



Eric Lynes, president of Canada's Biltmore Hats, demonstrates angling with attitude.

Photograph by: handout, Files

Style Master is a monthly men's fashion advice column from Vancouver style expert JJ Lee. Look for it in Tuesdays Style section.

Q: First, it was small fedoras with narrow brims. Now, I hear it's supposed to be wide-brimmed hats. How do I know what's right for me?

A: The expert says ...

There are basic rules to follow. If the hat on your planetoid-like cranium looks like a tiny fascinator — you know, those minuscule feathery headpieces the ladies are wearing to racetracks, weddings, and anywhere they can get away with — then the hat brim is too small. If the hat makes you look like Yosemite Sam, then the hat is too big.

My wise friend, actor and comedian Tetsuro Shigematsu, a.k.a. Shiggy, puts it this way: “A hat is like an eye patch. It will set you apart. But, like an eye patch, when worn, hats need to be a believable accessory.”

By “believability,” he means it will look like a snappy sartorial extension of your style rather than a costume piece.

Credibility begins with simple fit principles: bigger men need bigger brims, let's say more than two inches; short men can wear smaller brims; but any one can wear seemingly big or small brims according to personal taste but they should avoid fixating on actual sizes. In other words, put the ruler away.

Eric Lynes says the real secret of making a hat look like it belongs on your head is proportion. Lynes should know. He's the president of Biltmore, one of Canada's oldest dress hat makers. He says, "A two-inch brim can look stingy [hat talk for 'narrow'] on a big guy."

But there's more to it than brim size. Lynes says one also has to consider face shape and the depth of the crown (the bowl part of the hat).

Deeper bowls suit broad faces. Lynes says, "If you have a high crown, you're going to extend your face and stretch it out a bit. Look at Johnny Depp and what he wears (tall fedoras with wide brims). His face looks slim. He looks great."

Another detail most novice hat wearers overlook is attitude. Lynes stresses, "You have to play with it in a mirror. You have to tilt it back to front and left to right. You have to get it right, so it looks like it belongs."

Q: Steve needs to learn how to tie a bow tie for his wedding next week. Help!

A: The experts says ...

Okay! Steve needs to start practising now. If he doesn't, he will sweat bullets trying to knot one on his big day. Wet pits at nuptials are a no-no.

So get Steve hopping. Tying a bow tie is not any more challenging than tying a shoelace.

How-to diagrams are all over the Internet so that's not the problem. Practising it is.

The best way to learn is with a little leg action. I've read, I can't quite recall where, it's good to practise around a thigh. That way a man can watch football and increase his knot-ledge.

Of course, the knot will be in reverse. You usually tie a knot while facing a mirror. But I see this as a way of introducing complex muscle memory.

The biggest tip I have for the novice knotter is once the ends of the bow tie are crossed fold one of the ends into the bow shape immediately. I call it "presenting the bow." It makes the whole ordeal a no-sweat affair.

Congratulations, Steve.

Ask JJ Lee your own style dilemma questions at <http://jj-lee.com/askjj>.