

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

SATURDAY/SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 10 - 11, 2007

CXLIX NO. 34

\*\*\*\*\*  
**WEEKEND EDITION**

\*\*\*\* \$1.50

WSJ.com

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### A Highland Fling

*Designers push muted plaids for men*

By Ray A. Smith

**T**HE SCOTS are coming. Tartans, which date back to the 13th century, got a makeover at some menswear shows during New York's fashion week. In many cases, the designers used more muted colors than the traditional reds and greens associated with everything from kilts and private-school uniforms to lumberjack jackets and golf pants.

Perry Ellis showed a double-faced wool topcoat in gray and black plaid. John Varvatos featured more than a dozen shirts in dark-hued plaids such as prune, beetroot, nutmeg and seaweed. John Bartlett did suits in gray and brown plaids.

It's all part of a broader trend of designers updating traditional men's styles that have become tired over the years. Designer Phillip Lim says the plaid in his fall 2007 collection, which included a brown button-down shirt, "was inspired by iconic masculine figures in American society and plaid is a traditional fabric worn by them." The co-designers of the Duckie Brown label, whose collection included a plaid double-breasted jacket, say they were inspired by a recent trip to Denver, where they saw a lot of people wearing the pattern.

Plaid, however, can be tough to match with other clothes. And it can make large men look even larger, though some designers dismiss that as a myth.

Small patterns and darker colors attract less attention than louder plaids, making them easier to wear. Samantha von Sperling, a New York image consultant, suggests sticking with "a small plaid, almost like a houndstooth, worn in muted colors" to avoid looking like you're wearing a costume.

For the office, a subtle plaid shirt might work, but image consultants suggest making sure it's made of dress-shirt material, rather than more-casual flannel. It can also be dressed up with a solid-colored tie that picks up on at least one color in the pattern. "Plaid in general tends to casualize things; it's not a particularly crisp look," says Drew Sisselman, an image consultant in Atlanta.

Sport coats and overcoats are trickier, because they are harder to balance with solid colors than shirts or pants. Ms. von Sperling likes the idea of plaid overcoats, as long as the colors are subtle -- but she doesn't recommend wearing them to the office.



[Photos - Getty Images]

From top: John Bartlett suit, Perry Ellis coat

Write to Ray A. Smith at ray.smith@wsj.com