

DRESS

INFORMATION

DRESS - THE BASICS

Looking good, feeling good, ‘fitting in’, all adds to a sense of confidence in being a Consort, but the dress code in ‘The City’ as Consort, is not always clear, especially for women. Of course, it is likely you have been to plenty of livery functions in your own Livery Company and built up some experience about what to wear, when, but with more functions and more varied functions to go to, many of you have asked for some dress guidance. So, we have drawn together some guidance here from different sources, and from members’ own experiences.

On one level the dress code for women is straightforward because it takes the lead from the men’s. The men’s dress code is fixed and constant and stated on the invitation. There are four dress codes- **Lounge Suit, Black Tie (dinner Jacket), Evening Dress (White Tie) or Morning Suit**. These reflect the level of formality of the event and women’s dress follows that formality.

However, when one looks in detail about women’s dress within these categories, it is not always quite so obvious for women. There are fewer well-defined hard- and- fast rules. Instead there is a ‘general understanding’ about what is appropriate dress within these four codes, so you will sometimes have to use a bit of judgement in the code categories dependent on the nature of the event and the time of day, and especially ‘black tie’.

The guidance is summarised in the table

Men	Details	Women equivalent dress	Notes for women
Lounge suit <i>Fundamentally smart and applicable to a number of ‘business’ and day events such as: livery lunches; church services</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart dark suit • Any shirt • Must wear a tie • Ties can be coloured and patterned. Many wear a company tie. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart business daywear – dress, jacket, skirt, trousers, and jacket/top • Simple cocktail dress for an evening function • Evening trousers for an evening function 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use your judgement here in relation to the type of event you are attending e.g. wearing a cocktail dress would not be right when visiting a factory. • A Cocktail dress is a fitted dress, around knee length. The fabric should be suited to evening such as silk, crepe or chiffon.
Black Tie/ Dinner Jacket <i>Dress code of formal wear for evening events and social functions, traditionally worn only for events after 6 p.m.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black Dinner Jacket never cream in the City! • Matching black trousers • Black bow tie (never coloured or spotted!) • White dress shirt • Do not wear a coloured cummerbund or coloured tie. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long evening dress • Long skirt and jacket • Mid-calf length dress • Cocktail dress - short • Evening trousers might be acceptable but not tight fitting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is wider scope in women’s dress for a ‘black tie’ event. There’s lots of opportunity for personal touches and dressing up a bit. • Some sources suggest it should always be ‘long’ for a black tie. This is the default position for dinners. • Some ‘black tie’ events are not formal dinners, and this is where you check or use your judgement about what to wear.
Evening dress (White Tie)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White bow tie • Winged collar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal Long evening dress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always wear ‘long’ at a Mansion House dinner and

<p><i>The most formal of all dress codes associated with prestigious livery dinners, royal affairs, state dinners and formal balls.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stiff white shirt • Low cut white linen waistcoat • Black tail coat • Matching black trousers • Patent or polished shoes • For serving members of the military, Mess Kit is an alternative to White Tie. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long skirt and jacket • Shoulders covered i.e. dress has a bodice • Long gloves can be worn but take them off before eating. • Tiaras can be worn • For serving members of the military, Mess Kit is an alternative 	<p>cover the shoulders i.e. the dress should have a bodice which extends to at least the beginning of the upper arm.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trousers must NOT be worn. • The tops of the arms are generally covered so take a bolero/ shrug, scarf or stole to be on the safe side, if your dress does not have any sleeve. • Wear your 'poshest' jewellery
<p>Morning suit</p> <p><i>Usually worn at a Buckingham Palace Garden Party or a Ward Club lunch at which the Lord Mayor is guest of honour</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single breasted black coat with tails, • Matching black waistcoat • Formal striped trousers. • Tie rather than cravat • Grey or black top hat normally carried except at races is optional <p>These can be hired from many gentlemen's outfitters.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart formal daywear – suit, dress and jacket around knee length or below the knee. • Trousers not acceptable • Hat is usual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daytime jewellery; pearls are often a good choice, and flattering • Hats are usually worn

A Comment on dress for Mansion House Banquets from a past Mistress:

The preferred dress code at most Mansion House banquets is white tie, national dress or uniform for gentlemen and a long dress or skirt and evening top for ladies. Cocktail dress length does not normally accompany white tie and many ladies enjoy the opportunity to dress to the highest fashion at these special events. Decorations should be worn, usually miniatures; this will usually be specified in the invitation.

White tie means a plain white tie, dress shirt with a collar that does not turn down except for two small wings, a white waistcoat, a tailcoat and dress trousers. It is perfectly acceptable for liverymen and guests without white tie to attend in black tie with a white dress shirt and black dinner jacket plus sober waistcoat or cummerbund, and they will not feel out of place in doing so. Liverymen and guests on top table are expected to wear white tie. If you are a host, it is wise to check with your guests (and vice versa) to avoid any sartorial embarrassment.

Mansion House staff reserve the right to refuse admission to anyone wearing a coloured shirt or coloured bow tie.

A couple of things to note....

Military and national dress is acceptable at formal functions and most others.

As a woman, wear things that suit you. Do enjoy having your own personal style within these broad guidelines and feel free to wear colour and accessorise interestingly, and reflect the 'fashions.' When it comes down to it, whether your hem is mid- knee or below the knee is not a big deal, neither is wearing traditional pearls or modern jewellery, but wearing day trousers instead of a long dress at the Mansion House is.

Do be careful not to wear anything over-revealing especially as consort. Showing too much flesh is generally regarded as bad manners in The City so don't wear strapless and avoid thin straps unless you cover your shoulders with a scarf, stole or have a bolero or shrug to wear, and let your guests know too. Sometimes in your own Livery Company functions there is more flexibility about dress so that thin strapped dresses may be OK especially for the younger attendees, but if your aim is to fit in then avoid them or wear a cover up which can of course be floaty, see-through and elegant.

And most of all dress to feel good and confident.

Main sources of Information : Livery Committee (<http://www.liverycompanies.info/fellowship-of-clerks/dinners/dress-codes.pdf>), Mansion House, 'Guide for Consorts' Sonya Zuckerman and Pauline Stewart, <https://www.debretts.com/expertise/etiquette/dress-codes/>, various guidance from Livery Companies.

DRESS TIPS for women Consorts

- Wear clothes that make you feel good and confident. Feel free to wear colour. Enjoy what you wear and your accessories.
- Be aware that you are often representing your Company at Livery and City events - you are an ambassador for your Company. You will feel more confident if the clothes you have on are well presented- pressed and brushed - and that they are in line with what's expected.
- You will find that two or three smart day outfits will see you through the day functions, mix and match is great. Some past consorts have said that they have needed more for day than evening wear. It depends on the programme of invitations.
- You can look good without incurring a great deal of expense.
- Its Ok to wear the same outfit more than once, and you can wear different jewellery or scarves for a different look.
- Buying dresses for evening functions ahead of time will make you well prepared and you can take advantage of sales.
- A pair of smart black shoes will do you for many functions including evening.
- Shoulders are generally expected to be covered at dinners, but the interpretation is not always clear, and it is often interpreted as covering the arms! So, as a minimum the top of the dress should have a bodice to cover the shoulders (from top of arm in towards the neck), so sleeveless would be OK. If in doubt have a sleeve of some sort – cap, short, three quarters, long, and/or take a wrap or shrug to cover the arms.
- When in the Mansion House, or at an event where the Lady Mayoress, is present follow the dress code that the Lady Mayoress sets. You could check with the Mansion House through your Clerk.
- At the Ironbridge Weekend there are two "Black Tie" dinners, but the Saturday evening is a more formal one and most ladies wear a long dress or skirt.
- Some Companies do have written dress codes for women, (e.g. Framework Knitters), and some identify the women's dress code on the invitation.

- Members of your own Company are likely to take their dress guidance from the Master's Consort or the Master if the Master is a woman, so as consort you will be a role model for others.
- Always turn to the past consorts in your Company about what to wear at functions that are a regular part of the Company's programme, and those in the City that your company is regularly invited too.
- You might follow the practice of some other Consorts who record what they wore to each event they were invited to in their year, to pass on to the next consort; or even start a guide for them, if it doesn't exist.
- You might want to work with the Clerk to have a dress code for your company in line with common practice, that members' partners can have, and which is also available for guests at your functions. (The engineers have a guide for each function in their annual programme of events).
- Advise any of your guests about the dress code for the event you have invited them to.
- If in doubt, follow the basic guidelines here and/or check with the Clerk – your own or the company that has invited you.

ACCESSORIES

Hats

- It would be unusual these days to dictate whether women should or should not wear a hat. Women who like wearing hats will wish to do so at daytime City church services (not after 6pm) and on other formal occasions in the City. Don't make it too big
- HM The Queen's Garden Party is the only occasion during the year when, for ladies, dress code requires that a hat must be worn.
- Many Women Consorts do wear hats to the United Guilds' morning Service at St Paul's, held two weeks after Good Friday, but it is not essential. The general view is for a large hat when under the dome of St Pauls.
- For some years it has been the custom for ladies to wear hats at day functions (usually church services) attended by the Lady Mayoress. The Clerk's Assistant will check with Mansion House if necessary.
- If you are invited to lunch or tea in the Mansion House by the Lady Mayoress for one of her informal gatherings of Masters' ladies, you do not need to wear a hat, but if you choose one don't make it too big.
- At the Installation Day church service (if there is one) on the day you become the Master's Consort, you need to decide, in discussion with the incoming Wardens' ladies, whether to wear hats or not. It is your day.
- When men wear morning suits, hats are usual but not always required.
- Fascinators are OK as hats

Bags

- Use a small evening (clutch) bag for dinner- elegance is the name of the game
- Avoid a large handbag whether carried or over the shoulder (bring it with you and leave it in the secure cloakroom)

Consort Brooch/Badge and Decorations

- Ladies livery brooches may be worn as wished at livery events.
- Wear your brooch/badge when you accompany the Master and he/she is wearing theirs.
- Sometimes you are specifically requested to wear your brooch/badge at an event such as Buckingham Palace or Ironbridge
- Take your badge off after the event – don't wear it in the street.
- Wearing your brooch/badge is a good ice-breaker at an event as you ask what company a person is from

- Invitations state whether decorations are to be worn ('Decorations' are for example MBE, OBE etc and miniature medals and insignia.). It would be usual to wear them with evening dress, and often at livery black tie dinners.