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A TAILOR AT WILLIAM  
FIORAVANTI IN NEW YORK  
TAKES A MEASUREMENT  
DURING AN EARLY FITTING  
FOR A CUSTOM-MADE SUIT.  
PHOTO BY KENT HANSON.

# SUITING UP

PERSONAL TAILORS FASHION CUSTOM-MADE PRODUCTS  
THAT FIT BEAUTIFULLY AND PRECISELY

by G. Bruce Boyer

By nature, tailors are not gloomy men. No, indeed. Optimistic if anything. How else could they take all the time and trouble to make us look our best? You couldn't blame them, though, if they were a bit on the dour side. When it comes to excessively demanding customers, tailors have seen them all.

The most exasperating-customer-story award must go to Leonard Logsdail of New York. "When I had my shop in London, there was one customer who was never happy with the length of his trousers," explains Logsdail. "He would complain about the unevenness of the carpet, or the height of the heels on his shoes,

or that the fabric had stretched. He was obsessive, and there seemed no way of convincing him that the measurements were accurate. Finally, in desperation, I rigged up two tape measures from the top of the door jamb, made him stand in the door frame and marked the measurements with ink on the side of the jamb to satisfy him. He was actually one of my best customers, but absolutely bonkers about the length of his trousers."

There's something endearing and satisfying about the level of service a tailor is willing to provide. More and more men seem to be disenchanted with the service and quality provided by the



consumer marketplace. What ever happened to personal attention, to quality, to style? Well, it's still out there.

A man used to have two choices when buying a suit: he either got it off the rack or he had it custom-tailored. Today there are several other choices, even as the distinction between off-the-rack and custom tailoring has blurred considerably. The confusion makes entering the waters beyond the safe shores of department-store racks a tad dangerous. But once you wade in, you will undoubtedly find that it's worth the effort. Men who have their clothes tailored for them have seen that the level of quality, service, selection, convenience and individuality simply cannot be found in off-the-rack garments. And, of course, these lucky individuals receive the physical comfort and self-esteem that accrues from wearing something made especially and exclusively for them.

And the price? Ah, yes, the price. A suit made expressly for you is most assuredly expensive in initial outlay, but as an investment, it's unbeatable. Why? Simple. We shouldn't merely think in terms of initial outlay, but of maintenance and longevity as well. If you buy a suit for \$200 and it lasts a year, and you buy another suit for \$1,000 and it lasts 10 years, which is the less expensive suit? The truth is that a cheap suit looks cheap even when it's new, while a good suit can look great (if you take care of it) even when it's old.

To help make the sartorial choices facing a man today a bit clearer, let's start with ready-made suits. An off-the-rack suit is just that: you pick from what's in stock and an alterations tailor will try to make it conform to your body in a few obvious places: sleeve and trouser length and perhaps an inch in or out at the waist. Some stores offer "special order" for a percentage more in price (usually 10 percent to 20 percent above stock). Special-order



A TAILOR STANDS OVER ONE OF THE CUTTING TABLES AT SULKA IN NEW YORK, ABOVE. A SAMPLE TABLE AND FITTING ROOM AT SULKA. PHOTOS BY KENT HANSON.





WILLIAM FIORAVANTI, ABOVE RIGHT, FREQUENTLY OVERSEES THE WORK OF TAILORS IN HIS SHOP. ABOVE, HE LOOKS OVER THE SHOULDER OF ONE OF HIS TAILORS AT WORK ON A SUIT. AND, BELOW, HE RECEIVES COMMENTS ON THE FIT OF HIS OWN SUIT. PHOTOS BY KENT HANSON.

offers a selection of fabrics (from a swatch box) and a choice of style models (usually two or three), but the suit will still be cut from the factory-standard pattern.

The higher forms of the art—"made-to-measure" and "custom-tailoring"—both mean personalized, individually tailored clothing. The difference between the two is in the pattern from which the garment is made. The most expensive, time-consuming and exacting work is found in true custom-tailoring (also referred to as "bench-made" and "bespoke") because an individual paper pattern is constructed for that customer. At its best, there is no better garment for fit, styling, quality and durability.

With made-to-measure, a standard pattern is modified to account for the many ways in which the customer may differ from the norm: a high shoulder, perhaps, or a forward-sitting head, a lower left hip or a pigeon chest. Choices of fabric are the same as for custom, and styling is usually open to all but the most idiosyncratic requests.

Made-to-measure is, in a very real sense, an attempt to bridge the wide gap between a ready-made garment (which, because it is constructed to fit everyone, usually fits no one very well) and custom-made (which is expensive and in many cases unnecessarily

fastidious). It should be noted that while custom-tailored and made-to-measure employ a high amount of skilled handiwork and the finest fabrics and findings (those parts such as linings, pads, threads or buttons), they are not always evidence of quality, depending on execution. The best made-to-measure suit is considerably superior to mediocre custom work. Names such as Brioni and Oxxford bring top-notch quality to that category.

The real problem with personalized clothing is finding the tailor who's right for you. This is usually done in a variety of ways. A man may seek the tailor who dresses certain celebrities or his boss or someone his wife hears about from a friend. There are better ways.

First, the right tailor for you is the one who, stylistically, speaks your language—someone you can communicate with. It's important to find a tailor who makes the kind of clothing you want, rather than trying to persuade him to your way of thinking. Good tailors are experts: they know what they do and they do it well. But that doesn't mean they do everything well. Brooks Brothers' style is not Savile Row, and Savile Row is not Milan. Ask the tailor to discuss his "house style" with you. You should both have the same picture—the same ideal—of what a man should look like in a suit.



This isn't a question of fit, because fit is ultimately a subjective idea. If our clothes indeed closely conformed to the actual shape of our bodies, any tailor would be good enough. But the expert tailor is interested in improving us. He's part reconstructive surgeon, part psychiatrist. Can he give us the view of ourselves that we have in our minds? The silhouette (what tailors often refer to as "line") is ultimately the most important consideration. Does the tailor have a very formal, highly structured view of things? Or does he believe in a more casual elegance, for example?

For some tailors the ideal is the Continental Boulevardier: the dashing young man with expressive shoulders, narrow waist and hips, trim sleeves and trousers. For another, it may be the English gentleman, with that studied balance of ease and elegance produced by waist suppression and flared skirting (the tailor's term for the jacket part beneath the waist). Or perhaps it is the American look of classic casualness with its soft natural shoulders and chest that emphasizes comfort and a nonchalant approach.

Second, a good tailoring firm will have access to the finest fabrics. Cloth merchants such as Dormeuil, Holland & Cherry, Loro Piana, Isles Textiles, GRM International and Scabal should be represented. Their names on swatch books are a guarantee of superior cloth. Good tailors are reluctant to waste their skills on inferior material. The materials one looks for are the natural ones: woolsens, cottons, linens and luxurious cashmeres and silks. Today's fabrics are infinitely more comfortable than those of even 25 years ago. The Super 100s woolsens (weaves of the finest Merino wool available—one pound of yarn can be spun thin enough to stretch 31 miles) can weigh a mere eight ounces per yard, producing a suit



PAUL BECKER, ABOVE, IN HIS SHOP IN KANSAS CITY, WHERE HIS SUITS SELL FOR \$1,400. LEONARD LOGSDAIL, BELOW, ABANDONED HIS SHOP IN LONDON TO SET UP BUSINESS IN NEW YORK. PHOTO BY KENT HANSON. GIAN DECARO, BELOW LEFT, IS A SEATTLE-BASED TAILOR WHO SPECIALIZES IN AN EASY SILHOUETTE WITH BROAD LAPELS.







THE SALES STAFF, TOP, AT ALAN FLUSSER OF SAKS FIFTH AVENUE PAYS INDIVIDUAL ATTENTION TO CUSTOMERS AND, BOTTOM, OVERSEES THE FINAL ALTERATIONS TO AN ALAN FLUSSER SUIT. PHOTOS BY KENT HANSON.

weighing about two pounds; a half century ago, a year-round suit weighed twice that. Modern woolens outperform heavier cloth due to a combination of softness and superior strength. Fabric technology has also produced “high twist” worsteds and silk-and-wool blends that are marvels of lightweight beauty and comfort for warm weather. Look for cloth that has a soft feel (the technical term is “hand”) but isn’t flimsy. It should drape well without wrinkling.

Third, a good fitter takes careful, methodical measurements. A good tailor tends to think in half inches and quarter inches. He will measure each arm and leg separately, because each of us is different (with athletes these differences may be more pronounced). The chest should be measured under the arms, then over the arms (this is, after all, usually the widest part of the body and crucial to understanding the line); inseams and outseams of trousers will be noted to determine the correct “rise” (the tailor’s term for the distance between waistband and crotch, which determines how high on your hips your

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## U.S. TAILORS

PHOTO BY KENT HANSON



*Starting price is listed; luxury fabrics will cost proportionately more. All firms provide three fittings over a four-to-eight-week period.*

### PAUL BECKER

424 Ward Parkway  
Kansas City, Missouri 64112  
(816) 531-6200

Suits: \$1,400; sport coats: \$1,000. The style here is clean and crisp; jackets have ample shoulder, some "give" at chest, trim seat. Wool crepes and lightweight reverse twists are popular for suits, silk-and-wool blends for sport coats.

### BERGDORF GOODMAN MEN

745 Fifth Avenue  
New York, New York 10022  
(212) 339-3393

Suits: \$1,400; sport coats: \$995. Classic Anglo-American look with seminatural shoulder, some drape and waist suppression.

### BERARDI BROTHERS

802 Walnut Street  
Des Moines, Iowa 50309  
(515) 288-8362

Suits: \$1,750; topcoats: \$3,000; sport coats: \$1,250. Medium-shoulder, two-button, American traditional silhouette, nine-to-10-ounce, year-round worsteds preferred.

### CHEO TAILORS

30 East 60th Street  
New York, New York 10022  
(212) 980-9838

Suits: \$2,000; sport coats: \$1,500; topcoats: \$2,000. Old Savile Row tradition of 1930s London styling: soft chest and shoulder, nipped waist and full-cut trousers.

### GIAN DECARO

2025 First Avenue, Suite D  
Seattle, Washington 98121  
(206) 448-2812

Suits: \$1,295; cashmere worsted sport coats: \$2,000. Easy silhouette with high armhole, slightly longer coat, broader lapels and lower button stance. Clear-finished, 11-to-12-ounce gabardines and venetians are favored.

### DESPOS TAILORS

500 Crescent Court, Suite 152  
Dallas, Texas 75201  
(214) 871-3707

Suits: \$2,000; sport coats: \$1,500. Straight, clean lines with square shoulder, higher waist and trim hip. Favors double-breasted and single-breasted with vests (\$350 extra).

### DORMEUIL PRIVATE

Phone: (800) 506-4400

### TAILOR SERVICE

or (908) 486-1900

Suits: \$1,450; sport coats: \$1,100; tuxedos: \$1,500. A private tailoring service that comes to the customer's home or office (New York area). International business silhouette, standard four to eight weeks for completion with fittings on location; all work done by master tailors.

### DUNHILL

450 Park Avenue  
New York, New York 10022  
(800) 541-0738

Suits: \$2,000; sport coats: \$1,300. Updated traditional with trimmer, youthful silhouette.

### WILLIAM FIORAVANTI

45 West 57th Street  
New York, New York 10019  
(212) 355-1540

Suits: \$3,850; sport coats: \$3,150; tuxedos: \$4,250. The international-businessman approach, elegant and trim with straight shoulders, subtle waist and slimming hipline. Customers often prefer luxury fabrics.

### ALAN FLUSSER

49th Street & Fifth Avenue  
New York, New York 10020  
(212) 888-7100

Suits: \$1,350; sport coats: \$1,150. Two styles here: (1) Anglo-American silhouette with elegant drape, and (2) a youthful, more wedge-shaped line with ultrasoft construction. Traditional fabrics as well as exclusively designed ones.

### GILIBERTO DESIGNS

142 West 36th Street  
New York, New York 10018  
(212) 695-4925

Suits: \$1,000 (in-stock fabrics, higher on ordered cloth); topcoats and tuxedos: \$1,195. Does both natural shoulder, soft-chested, traditional styling and slightly more European design with more shoulder expression and fuller-cut trouser.

### LEONARD LOGSDAIL

510 Madison Avenue, Suite 200  
New York, New York 10022  
(212) 752-5030

Suits: \$2,500; sport coats: \$1,700; trousers: \$700. Savile Row-trained, Logsdail espouses the contemporary London styling of moderation in business dress; also expert in a variety of country looks.



**EDGAR POMMERROY**

2985 Piedmont Road, NE  
Atlanta, Georgia 30305  
(404) 365-0405

Suits: \$1,000; sport coats: \$800. Decidedly hour-glass silhouette and very British with fitted waist and flare and full-cut trouser. Cloths that have good drape are admired.

**MICHAEL RENZI**

610 Newport Center Drive, #250  
Newport Beach, California 92660  
(714) 729-4445

Suits: \$1,200; sport coats: \$900; trousers: \$300. Euro-British look reminiscent of 1930s international approach with higher waist, square shoulder and side vents; full-cut, higher-waisted trousers. High-twist, super-100s worsteds are popular as well as silk sports coats.

**SAVILE ROW  
NEW YORK**

18 East 53rd Street  
New York, New York 10022  
(212) 532-7935

Suits: \$2,000, sport coats: \$1,700. Anglo-American styling with good shaping and an easy fit. Super-150s worsteds are in demand as well as a range of exclusively designed flannels.

**SULKA**

430 Park Avenue  
New York, New York 10022  
(212) 980-5200

Suits: \$3,200; sport coats: \$2,750. Gentleman's mid-Atlantic cut with slightly wider shoulder, higher armhole and straight hipline. Cashmere sport coats are very popular here.

**GIACOMO TRABALZA**

723 North La Cienega Boulevard  
Los Angeles, California 90069  
(310) 652-6396

Suits: \$2,200; sport coats: \$1,800; tuxedos: \$3,000. A slimming silhouette, fairly close to the body. Higher waistline, shoulder and gorge and slightly longer coat.

**VENTRESCA**

315 Old York Road  
Jenkintown, Pennsylvania 19046  
(215) 576-1178

Suits: \$1,150; sport coats: \$850; trousers: \$325. A contemporary version of 1930s Hollywood with soft drape in the chest and blade and structured shoulders; a good look with gabardines and soft flannels.

**OTHER OPTIONS:**

For high-quality, made-to-measure and special-order clothes, check out Brioni or Oxxford. Some department stores also have made-to-measure services; Barneys, Neiman-Marcus and Saks Fifth Avenue are among them.



MICHAEL RENZI, ABOVE, RUNS A TAILOR SHOP IN NEWPORT BEACH, CALIFORNIA. IN LOS ANGELES, GIACOMO TRABALZA, BELOW, SUPERVISES THE FINAL TOUCHES ON HIS CUSTOM-MADE SUITS.





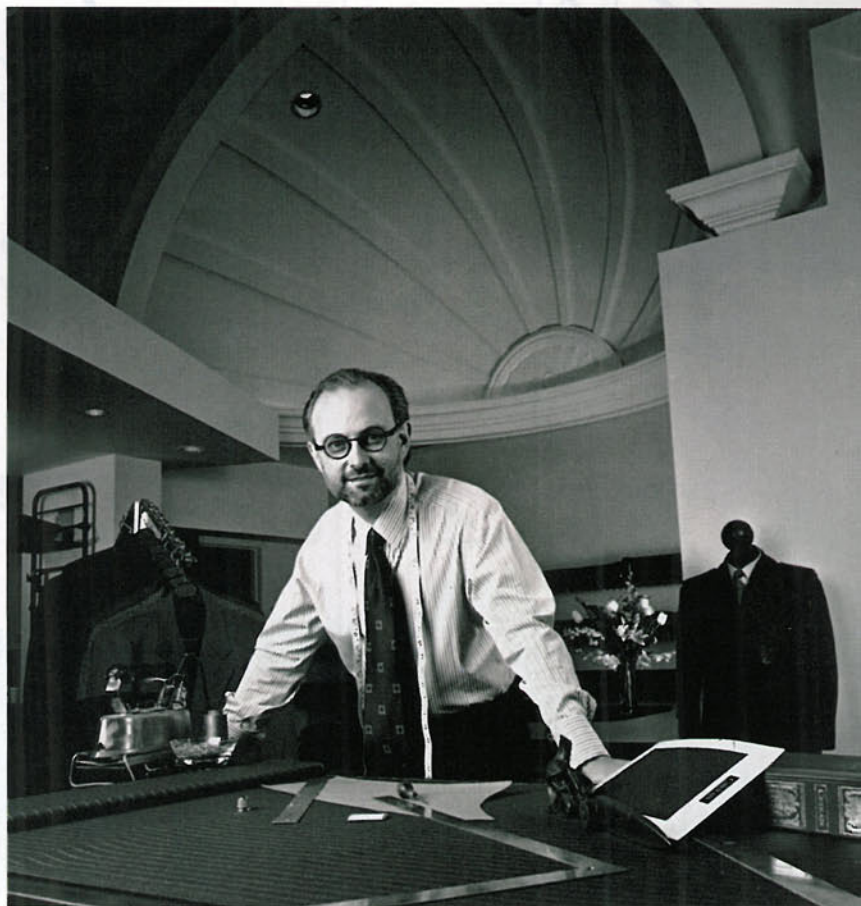
trousers will sit—important for comfort and to determine the fullness in the leg). The height of each shoulder must be considered (a competent tailor will tell you that no one has two perfectly square shoulders or a perfectly straight neck set perfectly between them) as well as both waist and hipline (to note any slight curvature in the small of the back, which produces a “hollow” in the rear of the coat). Even the size of the shoe is an important consideration in the width and height of the trouser cuff. This is not a small, medium and large operation: if he doesn’t take these dozen or so measurements for both coat and trousers, something is wrong—with him.

Finally, there should be several fittings—especially early on, to get the pattern right. If the tailor has measured properly, the pattern he constructs will be an accurate blueprint of your body. The first try-on will be a basted fitting: the trousers will be half finished (no waistband, zipper and perhaps no pockets at this stage). The coat will be a mere shell of outer fabric covered with white lines of basting thread (sleeves may be loosely attached, making it easier to rip them off and realign them). The emphasis should be on proportion and a balanced torso shape in the coat. Because the shoulders and chest are the most important parts to get right, the emphasis is on them at the beginning (they cannot be easily altered once they are set).

The second fitting will take into account the correct length of sleeves and legs in relation to the stance of the shoulders and drape of the chest. Is the collar sitting close on the neck without pulling? Do the sleeves hang straight down from the shoulder without bunching around the armhole? Is the back flat? Is the front wide enough so that the lapels do not “break” or the skirt pull apart? Trousers must be comfortable even when sitting with legs crossed. Don’t just stand ramrod stiff in front of the mirror; walk around, sit down, fill your pockets with all the paraphernalia you normally would. Maybe you shouldn’t carry your reading glasses in your chest pocket, but if you do, the pocket should be deep enough to hold them. The tailor must take into consideration your habits; that’s what individually made clothing is all about. The suit must fit you, not the other way around. You must insist on getting what you want and need.

The suit may now be completed with buttonholes, cuffs and all the finishing touches. All the while the pattern will be corrected as the adjustments are made. Perhaps there will be just one more fitting so you and the tailor can marvel at how handsome you look. The second time that you buy a custom suit (and each suit thereafter) will be easier because your pattern will have been adjusted, corrected and stored; you can move directly to a final fitting. And, resplendent in your new togs, when someone at the office asks whether you’ve taken up an exercise program, you can merely smile. ♦

G. Bruce Boyer is the author of *Eminently Suitable* (1990), 206 pages, W.W. Norton, \$19.95.



DALLAS IS HOME TO DESPOS CUSTOM TAILORS AND BOB MADER, ABOVE, THE TAILOR. THE SHOP FAVORS A SQUARE-SHOULDERED LOOK AND DOUBLE-BREASTED OUTFITS.

