

# MR

\$3.50 August 1994

THE MAGAZINE  
OF MENSWEAR  
RETAILING

**Special Section:**

## Chicago

**Main Street Savvy**

**Holiday Preview**

**Chicago  
Men's Wear  
Collective:  
Show Directory**

**Plus:  
Focus  
Europe**

**Elite  
Roundtable**

**Shoes**

# Easy Chic

**SPRING '95  
DESIGNER  
SKETCHBOOK**





## Suitings in Seattle

Gian Decaro's clubby shop inspires customers to loosen their (pricey) ties.

**"THIS ISN'T A STORE,"** says Gian Decaro of his Seattle-based specialty shop. "It's a confessional. My favorite way of doing business is to lock the door, pour the scotch, get out the Cuban cigars and chat."

Granted that's only possible since Decaro's business is half custom made clothing, dependent more on tailoring skill and charm than on foot traffic. "It's not unusual to get only one or two gentlemen in the store one day," he admits. "Day by day, it can be depressing, but at the end of the month, I look at what people spent and feel happier." Located below the upscale condominiums of Seattle's Market Place Tower, Decaro's 1,500 square foot store does the other half of its business in ready-to-made suits furnishings and knitwear, with about \$800,000 in annual sales.

Decaro got his start working at his father's custom clothing shop in Spokane (50 years strong and now also owned by Decaro), "where I had grown up in a rag box beneath the cutting table." In '88, after college and a stint working in a local jeans shop, Decaro opened up Decaro Sartoria in Seattle. "I decided I wanted to sell wardrobes, not suits," he says. "I want all of your money, but slowly."

While clothing (private label ready made suits and sportcoats, domestically made from Italian piece goods and selling in the \$550-\$895 range; custom made starting at \$1000 for suits, \$795 for sportcoats) clearly drives his business, the assortment also

includes knitwear from John Smedley, rainwear from Sanyo and hosiery from Pantherella. One area that's grown recently to 30 percent of total sales is dress shirts, an entirely private label custom-made business. "I sell a lot of upscale accessories and furnishings," comments Decaro. "But one of the most perplexing, yet widespread things I see is men wearing \$1000 suits with cheap dress shirts."

The reason, says Decaro, is automated cleaning machinery with high temperatures that destroy shirts. "Statistically, franchised dry cleaning is a lucrative business. Someone might have worked at Reynold's Aluminum, for instance, been injured and used the settlement money to open up a clean-



Photo: Todd Waffner

ers. They don't know anything about the business. Consumers come to the conclusion that it doesn't matter how much money they spend on a dress shirt because it will fall apart anyway."

Decaro (who gets his own shirts done by hand for a not cheap \$4.50 each at Seattle's Barg cleaners) started strongly recommending reputable cleaners to his customers, convincing more than a few that better dress shirts were worth the investment. So grew his custom shirt business, ranging from \$70-\$200 retail, with the bulk of the business done at about \$150. Sea-

Island and Egyptian cotton in just about every collar style and fabrication are available. "Clients who feel the comfort of expensive cotton and see that a properly cleaned shirt will last come back," he notes.

Two popular looks right now are the deep cobalt blues, great with taupey/chocolate fall suits, and a more tonal striped look. "One of the hardest and most sophisticated things to do is a neutral tonal look: an ecru shirt with faint olive stripes. It's hard to carry off but more customers are doing it." Neckwear business (\$50-\$110, with the bulk around \$75) is being driven by formal British wovens in elegant neats. Decaro also cites "muddy looking" prints and cobalt blue ties with white detailing as two growing trends. "I never ask the price of a tie in the showroom," he says. "We're computerized, but I buy [and sell] in a very old-fashioned way."

Decaro, who caters to a wildly divergent client base (from Microsoft execs to Pearl Jam's bass player to Minnesota Twin Dave Winfield), feels unusually protective toward one of his clients—Bill Gates. "He's always being picked on," he says. "He's actually an elegant dresser, but they use the same old shots of him looking lost and frumpy." (What Decaro would prefer the press to use: photos where Gates is accepting an award from President Bush—wearing a Decaro suit, of course.)

For someone who sells suits in the \$1000-\$2000 range, Decaro is surprisingly grounded in reality. "Most men don't want to look like these fashion models," he says. "Much of that designer ready-to-wear in magazines is so off-the-wall and exorbitantly priced that custom made clothing looks reasonable in comparison." And how has he managed to do so well in the city that gave birth to the g-word and is noted for its laid-back style? Decaro believes comfort does not have to mean rumpled. "Make men feel comfortable and they'll be forever indebted."

—Adriana Brad