



Rebuilt to order

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give way to
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**PUGET SOUND
Business Journal**

**EASTSIDE
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in
STYLE

Suit Yourself

More fashion-conscious men are choosing high-priced, immaculately tailored clothing to express their success

By **LINDA WILLIAMS**
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Discriminating men of the late '90s know that Super 150 is an important term, and that it has nothing to do with cars, computers or college ball.

For the small but knowledgeable group of Seattle-area men who are turning their tastes to high-priced high fashion, Super 150 indicates a special grade of wool fabric used for \$3,600 suits.

And the fact that this super-fine, super-expensive (\$600 a square meter) fabric is in demand at all surprises both Seattle retailers and residents, who are accustomed to seeing businessmen downtown in Dockers and Teva sandals.

Some suggest that the growing fascination with high fashion is a reaction to the Northwest's casual standard.

"I often say, 'I don't know how we stay in business when you look at what's on the street,'" says Gian DeCaro of DeCaro Sartoria, a Pike Place Market-area clothier. "But we

have more business than we could handle. I think people are getting sick of seeing people go to work in clothes they wouldn't even mow their lawn in."

A small handful of dedicated clothiers like DeCaro are set to change the city's profile, so to speak, and to make the finest wearables available to those for whom, in the words of John Richards, sportswear buyer for Butch Blum, "great quality clothing is as much a priority as a fine car."

And while these high-end retailers certainly aren't turning the city on its top hats, they claim that the local business

elite — in particular high-tech executives — are keeping bread and butter on their tables. The former stereotypical "computer nerd" just doesn't cut it in a global economy, where job descriptions now include worldwide travel to



BUSINESS JOURNAL PHOTOS/RICK DAHMS

Gian DeCaro, owner of DeCaro Sartoria in Seattle, says fine clothing simply makes a man feel good. "When someone wears a \$3,000 suit, they're saying, 'I'm worth it,' " he says.

meet business counterparts and government officials, retailers say.

"Style is a lot more important to men today than it has been in the past decade," says Sharam Sharei, owner of San Francisco-based Barcelino, which has seven outlets in the Bay Area and one at Bellevue Square. "It's because of globalization — the world is becoming a lot closer. A business executive can be in Seattle one day, then in London and Tokyo within the next 10 days. He needs to portray an international image."

Sharei notes that the rapidly expanding high-tech industry has proved fertile ground for new customers.

"Our clients are executives who are younger, active, more spirited," he says. "In the Bay Area, our clients include chairmen of

high-tech companies including Oracle and Intel."

For his part, DeCaro says he doesn't want to name names, but reportedly outfits one Medina-based billionaire.

"The high-tech industry has been extremely good to me, in Seattle and in the Bay Area," says DeCaro. "They want to learn about these things."

Similarly, another high-end boutique in Seattle, Butch Blum, claims its clientele "is men ages 30 to 70 — usually entrepreneur types, people who own businesses," says buyer Richards. "I also see lots of lawyers and doctors."

Yet these high-profile executives aren't shelling out \$500 for pants just to show they

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Creative compensation keeps best employees

By LARRY KNUDSEN

Business owners in the Northwest all face similar challenges. We face a high demand for our new and key employees that are brighter, quicker and more well-adapted to the competitive working environment.

These key people are being offered creative and competitive compensation packages by our competitors. These include (especially in the technology industry) ownership packages and spiraling salaries.

The more important a person is, the higher chance they'll be hired away. What are you going to do to retain these pivotal employees?

As business owners, compensation and employment agreements go hand in hand with your relationship with your employees and how they work together with you and for you to build your business of success.

The common thinking and biggest mistake business owners make is thinking that employees get rewarded by the same things that reward themselves. We all have the same hierarchy of needs. But it may not be in the same order or priority.

Many times business owners come up with compensation packages that reward and recognize employees as they would want to be recognized or rewarded. Sometimes, this is a big mistake. Did you ever give a present to a child that you were ex-

cited about giving, and the child was more excited about the box it came in?

An alternative

A better alternative may be to have your employees work with you for the accomplishment of long-term objectives and be rewarded for the achievement of specific goals and have rewards match their priorities.

We all know your key employees work hard and they deserve to enjoy the fruits of their labor. If they're good employees, they will help you achieve your goals and dreams. Why not have them know that they are a part of your success and reward them along the way?

All journeys of greatness begin at the end. It's challenging to reward your employees for achieving goals, if they don't know where they are going. The first step in successfully compensating your unique and key employees is to know, understand, and communicate clearly your shared destiny.

Do you know the answer to the question, "What is your business end?" Do you want to develop your business to be sold, to go public, to be taken over by family members, to have it acquired by your employees, is liquidated, or is left intact and provides an income stream?

All businesses have an end. Knowing, or at least having an idea of, the transition of your business helps you develop critical goals in building and working together.

Designing and implementing short-term goals such as profitability margins and expanding market places make more sense and can be implemented more effectively when this common purpose is understood.

Next, we recommend you identify and communicate with clarity the specific goals that each employee can accomplish and how these match the long-term objectives of the business. With quantifiable and measurable goals, your key employees have control of their destiny and understand what and why they are doing their job.

This creates the difference between employees thinking they are laying bricks so they can go home as early as possible or employees understanding that they are part of building a great monument.

After communicating the objectives of the business and matching these to goals which your key employee can achieve, you can now reward each employee in a way that is meaningful to them.

Creating solutions

In designing creative compensation plans, we recommend that either an independent interview is completed by a third party, or as part of the annual review, you outline the priorities that your key individuals may have.

We have seen these ranging from an increase or change in the benefits package, vacation, more responsibility, accumulation

for retirement, personal goals, or, as we all traditionally may believe, a higher salary. Many key employees want to own a piece of the business but don't want to take the risk.

These needs and preferences combined with your own thoughts are the critical link to the design of a successful recognition package.

With your destination and quantifiable goals matched to the needs of key employees, you can now create solutions. Below are some of the creative compensation ideas that may be considered:

- Stock options
- Executive bonus
- Deferred cash
- Survivor benefits
- Deferred retirement benefits

We all want the very best from our employees and ourselves. We want them to share in the rewards of the fruits of both our and their labor. Choosing the right plan for the right person takes a little time and effort, but with the above step-by-step process you can select the right plan to match the right person.

With time, effort and focus you can build a company made up of a coordinated team committed to a shared destiny that both helps achieve your goals and those of your employees.

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FASHION

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can afford to.

"I really don't think it's status, because in Seattle I think there's still a large group of people who don't think it's cool to dress up," says DeCaro. "But I think there's a segment of the population that realizes, 'I just built a \$3 million house, I've got French and Italian furniture — I can't have on a Keep on Truckin' shirt and walking shorts when I have guests over.'"

Fine clothing simply makes a man feel good, DeCaro adds. "When someone wears a \$3,000 suit, they're saying, 'I'm worth it, I've worked hard, I'm worth wearing the best the world has to offer,'" he says.

Dave Foraker, a 42-year-old attorney, is typical of the new breed willing to spend \$1,000-plus on a suit, \$200 on a shirt and hundreds on ties. He says it's not status he's seeking in his acquisitions, but quality and personal feel, from the fully equipped Toyota Land Cruiser he drives to work, to the 300-thread count cotton sheets he sleeps on, to the luxe suits he

purchases at Mario's.

"I feel better with a suit that fits and feels well," he says.

For Foraker and others willing to finance such finery, "touch is very, very important," explains Sharei of Barcelino. "When you become a connoisseur of clothing, one of the things you learn is the touch, the luster of the fabric, the slight sheen is important. You can only achieve the perfect touch with the highest quality yarns.

"A \$3,600 suit may be made of a very exclusive, very limited cloth called Super 150," Sharei continues. He explains that the name comes from the yarn, which is exceptionally fine and strong, yet so lightweight that 1,500 square meters of it weighs just one kilogram.

At up to \$600 a square meter for Super 150 wool, \$1,800 of a suit's cost can be in the fabric alone. And because only five mills, in England and Italy, make the fabric, Super 150 has a cache of exclusivity.

"When you buy a suit made of Super 150, you know you're getting the very best," says Sharei.

DeCaro agrees that pricey suits in Super 100, 120 and 150 are "hot. It's very curi-

ous. We will lay out three different fabrics at different price points, and people will usually choose the pair that's \$550. People will choose a fabric for the feel."

"Americans are driven by textile — softness, drape," says Richards. "I think a European buyer is driven more by silhouette and color, and I think the younger Asians are driven more by fashion."

Now is a good time for men's fashion, says Sharei. "You have a very elegant silhouette now. Shoulders are wider — they give the image that a man can carry the world on his shoulders. The waistline is suppressed — showing that the man has a good physique. This is only achieved through fine tailoring, otherwise you'll have a sack hanging from the shoulders."

While texture is important for the suit's wearer, there's no overlooking the fact that it impresses the viewer, too.

"A recent study showed that impressions are formed within the first four seconds of meeting someone," says Sharei. "What can you judge in four seconds? There's only time to look at the packaging."

And the texture and shape of someone's suit is an important element of that im-

pression, Sharei notes. "There's a big difference between the image of a \$250 Sears suit and a \$3,000 suit."

Of course, finding the buyer who cares enough about that image to spend thousands on a new ensemble is no simple task. Butch Blum has spent 24 years building what Richards terms "a nice quiet, loyal following. We've never done gangbusters business like some of the others; it's been a slow, steady climb for us."

DeCaro's 10-year-old business is nationally known and has attracted new business through profiles in *Town & Country*, *GQ* and *Horizon Air* magazines. Still, he says his best marketing is via his customers. He takes time to educate clients, and knows that when they are pleased and successful with their purchases, they will lure others to the shop.

Bay Area-based Barcelino holds office-based "training sessions," in which salespeople demonstrate the do's and don'ts of fine dressing to busy executives.

Butch Blum makes "house calls," driving to Bellingham or flying to Eastern Washington to outfit an important customer. "If they need us, we're there," says Richards.

KAYAK

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slowly at best, and a paddler who hasn't learned to read current charts could be sucked into the swirling waters of Deception Pass, or out into the open spaces of the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

Big tides also can create big chop under certain conditions. An unwary kayaker can suddenly become beset with short standing waves that seem to spring out of nowhere,

but are actually created by a brief collision between two currents, at a certain point in the tide change.

Last up on the hierarchy of kayak trips are the big journeys, which require great skill and energy, and well-honed survival skills. Many locals have spent weeks paddling up the coast of Alaska, or circumnavigating Vancouver Island.

A trip like that, which will include serious exposure to the Pacific Ocean and the potential for sudden bad weather, must be

approached with great caution and preparation.

"Serious sea touring really isn't a family sport," Parshall said.

If you want to buy a kayak, it's best to rent several first. Kayak design is more art and inclination than science, and even Northwest builders have fiercely varied ideas about how kayaks should be designed and built. Find a boat that works for you.

Some of these are Mariner Kayaks, Necky Kayaks, Eddyline Kayaks, Northwest

Kayaks, and Easy Rider Canoe & Kayak Co., Find something that works for your expected use and your own physique and intentions.

In terms of initial investment, sea kayaks aren't cheap. A fully outfitted fiberglass boat can cost upwards of \$2,500, and a lighter Kevlar boat will cost even more. But the good news is that a good kayak requires nearly no upkeep, can be stored (preferably covered) behind a garage, and will last essentially forever.