

SCENE

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Tailoring

THE LONG AND SHORT OF SUITS IS FIT

Ladies and gentlemen, when you suit up this fall, it won't be with shoulder pads the size of a football linebacker's. It won't be with a jacket as boxy as a medical lab coat.

The jacket silhouette for men this season is longer, more fitted, with higher armholes and "roped" shoulders, i.e., a slight rise where the sleeve attaches to the shoulder. Jacket styles for women range from cropped to below-hip length. But a proper fit — shapely, yet not binding — is their common denominator.

This season is a return to classic suit lines, says Gian DeCaro, a Seattle-based tailor and president of the Custom Tailors & Designers Association of America, Inc. For men, catch those old movies with Cary Grant or Humphrey Bogart, Gary Cooper or Fred Astaire to review the look. In a word: debonair.

DeCaro says it's also a backlash to dressing down. "I think my customers are seeing what everybody else looks like in the office," DeCaro said. "Successful people don't want to look like the messenger guy."

TEN TIPS

As the Riddler in "Batman" might say, when is a suit well-suited? Here are 10 dos and don'ts for a properly tailored suit from DeCaro

- 1.** A well-fitted suit collar should hug the nape of the neck. Wrinkling just below the back collar means the suit is too big and needs to be taken in.
- 2.** A suit jacket should hang smoothly and evenly in the back and front. Uneven shoulders can cause a jacket to droop to one side. A shoulder pad can even the hang, but can also restrict arm movement if the cut of the armhole is too narrow to accommodate the shoulder pad.
- 3.** Posture affects the hang of a jacket. Sloping shoulders can cause a jacket to draw up in back and droop in front. If an erect stance is unattainable, a custom jacket can be fitted to a person's posture.
- 4.** In a man's suit, the jacket sleeve length varies depending on personal preference, but usually leaves one-quarter to one-half inch of shirt cuff showing. In a woman's suit, the jacket cuff should end just above the thumb.
- 5.** A good wool suit should last five to 10 years. Wool blends may look good initially, but they don't wear like wool.
- 6.** The trouser rise (area from the waist to the crotch) should hang one-half to three-quarters of an inch below the crotch for comfort as well as to reduce wrinkling when seated.
- 7.** Horizontal pull lines — across the back or front of a suit jacket or the top front of the trousers — or gaping across the lapel means the suit is too small. It needs to be let out. A suit that looks too tight makes the person look heavy. It also restricts movement, contributing to discomfort and fatigue.
- 8.** Women who are lean across the shoulder and chest need a suit with higher cut armholes to get a better fit across the chest.
- 9.** Sometimes all an ill-fitting or outdated suit needs is a trip to a tailor or alterations specialist for a new collar or additional room in the midsection. Alterations by the tailors mentioned above range from \$6 to \$12 for a simple pant hem to \$25 to \$75 for collar, shoulder and armhole refitting, depending on the amount of work needed.
- 10.** Lastly, classic is not synonymous with old. "There are certain styles that just aren't coming back," DeCaro said. "If it looks like a suit the father on 'The Brady Bunch' wore, it's not coming back."