

How to Order a Custom-Made Suit

By Christian M. Chensvold

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Sure, casual dress is on the rise in the workplace. But there are many work environments, such as Wall Street firms, where formal business attire is still the norm and looking the part still matters. In some organizations, nothing sends a clearer message about your status and self worth than a custom-made suit. “If you want to look like the boss, or a guy who’s made money, the natural evolution is to get your suits custom made,” says Alan Flusser, the New York tailor who made Michael Douglas’ authority-oozing power suits for the 1987 film *Wall Street*.

If your idea of workplace style is a pair of khakis and a blue button-down, you might consider: Tailor-made suits can convey subtle qualities like intelligence, attention to detail, and creativity. “It signals that I take myself and my work seriously, and that when I care about something, I dedicate myself to learning the ins and outs,” says Zachary Tyler, the director of business development at Creative Marketing Concepts in San Francisco who has been wearing custom suits for the past four years.

Like all exclusive realms, the world of custom tailoring can be intimidating, not to mention expensive. So if you don’t know the difference between bespoke and made to measure, don’t worry — we explain in this Crash Course how it all works. Female readers, please note that we’re focusing on men’s suits for a couple reasons: 1) They tend to be more rule-bound and therefore more complicated than women’s suits; and 2) Let’s face it, men need more help in the fashion department anyway.

Things you will need:

- Custom-tailored suits can run anywhere from just under \$1,000 for a basic two-piece handmade in Asia to \$25,000 for the full, perfectly fitted three-piece monty made by the finest tailors. The median range is between \$2,500 and \$5,000.
- You’ll need at least an hour for your first fitting, and your tailor may recommend one or two more visits.
- **Gear:** You can’t wear a custom suit with a cheap shirt from Ross and pair of Doc Martens. You’ll need a nicely fitted shirt, cuff links, a complementary silk or linen pocket square (a handkerchief), high-quality socks, and a pair of dress shoes — preferably from [John Lobb](#) if your custom suit has not already broken your bank.
- **The Appropriate Occasion:** You wouldn’t wear a custom suit in an office where your peers are in jeans and golf shirts, unless you’re the CEO. You want to come off as having character, not being a character.
- **Understatement:** A quality custom-made suit is always understated, never flashy. Your attitude should reflect that. After all, it’s not about the suit, it’s about putting a better you on display. Never point out that your suit is custom-made unless someone asks you directly.

Bone Up on Bespoke

Goal: Understand what a custom suit is and whether it's for you.

Ordering a custom suit involves getting measured by a tailor, who then creates a pattern specific to your body. He or she uses that pattern to cut the fabric and then sews the suit *by hand*. Custom tailoring is often referred to as “bespoke,” an old tailoring term meaning that a certain fabric has been “spoken for” by a customer and is therefore no longer for sale.

What makes a bespoke suit different from one bought at a department store may be imperceptible at first glance: It's all in the fit and the details. Just about every man looks better in clothing that was made just for him, because custom tailoring takes into consideration the asymmetry of the wearer's body. Most men have one shoulder or hip that's higher than the other, or one arm or leg that's longer, for example. If your weight fluctuates wildly, however, custom-made may be a bad investment.

In addition to perfect fit, custom suits also have these hallmarks:

- **Working buttonholes** on the sleeve, also called “surgeon cuffs”
- A real silk interior, in the color and pattern of your choice
- Slightly imperfect (compared to a machine) stitching, which indicates that the garment was made by hand
- A hand-stitched canvas lining

The hand-stitched canvas lining is the most important of these details. In most readymade suits, the lining is a piece of synthetic material fused to the fabric with vegetable glue, resulting in a lifeless shape prone to puckering. A custom suit's lining is made of canvas stitched in by hand, giving the suit a more defined structure in addition to longevity and greater comfort.

What others will most notice in your suit is the cut or line. “You'll look like a better version of you,” Flusser says.

Nitty Gritty

The Hierarchy of Fit

Why spend so much on a custom suit when you could pick something up for a fraction of the price at Men's Wearhouse? Here's the difference between the degrees of haberdashery and what you get for your money.

Suit Type	What It Means	Price Range
Bespoke	Fully custom made with multiple fittings; best fit	\$1,500-\$25,000

Made to Measure	Adjustments made to a standard pattern according to your measurements; more alterations upon delivery; very good fit	\$1,000-\$8,000
Off the Rack, Altered	Manufactured to a standard pattern; altered after purchase; pretty good fit	\$200-\$6,000
Off the Rack, No Alterations	Bought and tossed on; fit can be OK if you're a standard size	\$200-\$6,000



Choose a Style

GOAL: Pick a cut of jacket and pants that will suit your personality — and flatter your body type.

If you're going to spend the money on your first custom suit, you'll want to choose colors and fabrics that are the most versatile. Flusser suggests starting with a medium charcoal gray. "It does the most: It's a business suit, great for interviews, but is also very elegant for the evening," he says.

While your tailor can make suggestions regarding the cut, you'll have a better experience during your first meeting if you consider what style of suit you want beforehand. The following come down to body type and personal taste:

Single- or Double-Breasted Jacket

Single-breasted jackets are more common, but some prefer double-breasted jackets because they make the wearer look slimmer. On single-breasted suits, a two- or three-button closure is standard. The taller you are, the more buttons you'll want (though never more than three). Four- or six-button closure is standard for DBs, though six is considered the more elegant.

Two- or Three-Piece

A coat and trousers with a shirt and tie is the standard uniform among businessmen and politicians today ("the business suit"). This is considered the most no-nonsense look for men in finance, law, and other traditional professions. A coat and trousers worn with a vest is considered the most formal, but also a little more fanciful in some circles. It's an outfit you're more likely to see on a museum director or university dean than on a manager or C-suite exec.

Natural or Padded Shoulders

Your choice here depends on the natural broadness of your shoulders, but in general, you'll want your suit to follow the line of your body. Overdo it and you'll end up looking like a 1930s gangster or a televangelist.

Single or Double Vent

Single vented is classic American, while double vented (with the vents off to the sides) is classic English, although side vents are becoming more common in American fashion these days.

Peaked or Notched Lapels

Notched lapels are considered standard on the American single-breasted business suit, though peaked lapels are the more elegant. **Peaked lapels** give the illusion of added height. Keep in mind that double-breasted suits should always have peaked lapels.

Checklist

Finding the Perfect Fit

Going custom allows you to get a suit that fits just right. But what exactly *is* a perfect fit? The primary considerations are:

Jacket

Length: Your suit jacket should be long enough to cover the posterior with a half inch to spare.

Collar: The collar should fit snugly around the back of the neck and not hover in the air above it.

Lapels: When buttoned, lapels should lie flat against the chest and not pucker outward.

Sleeves: Sleeves should fall in a straight line over the shoulders, not stick out an extra inch beyond the shoulders, and they should not form a dent of extra fabric at the top of the sleeve. Sleeve length should fall to the wrist bone, not the beginning of the hand. A small amount of shirt cuff should show.

Trousers

Fall: Pants should fall straight from the waist with no wrinkles or pulling over the belly and no tugging in the crotch. If pleated, the pleats should not pull apart.

Length: The inseam of pants should break slightly on the shoe, but excess fabric should not bunch up around the ankles.

Find a Tailor

Goal: Hire someone who knows what they're doing.

Once you decide to give custom a try, your biggest challenge lies in finding a tailor with a stellar reputation. Your more dapper associates may have a recommendation for you, or visit the [Custom Tailors and Designers Association](#), which can direct you to a competent practitioner.

Here's a list of some of the best custom tailors in the United States, compiled in part by the Robb Report:

- Joe Centofanti, Ardmore, Pa. (610-642-1926)
- Chris Despos, Chicago (312-944-8833)
- William Fioravanti, New York (212-355-1540)
- Christian Garcia, Coral Gables, Fla. (305-567-1324)
- Leonard Logsdail, New York (212-752-5030)
- Manuel Martinez, Baton Rouge, La. (225-928-9107)
- Tony Maurizio, New York (212-759-3230)
- [Frank Shattuck](#), New York
- Giacomo Trabalza, Los Angeles (310-652-6396)
- [Bruce Zuckerman](#), San Francisco

In addition to local tailors, there are also “itinerant tailors” — those who are usually based in countries where labor is cheap and who make seasonal trips to cities across the world to take commissions and arrange fittings. These tailors can be a less expensive alternative to American or European tailors. They include:

- [WW Chan](#)
- [Ravis Tailor](#)
- [Astor and Black](#)
- [My Custom Tailor](#)

What Not to Do

Etiquette Alert

Once you get your custom suit, you may be tempted to leave the bottom button on your sleeve undone to show that it has working buttonholes and is therefore custom made. This may impress the plebes below you, but those in the know will consider it

attention-seeking. Most custom-suit aficionados rely on cut and quality to convey their suit's bespoke origin, and save this gauche gesture for the arrivistes.

step 4

Prep for Your Fitting

GOAL: Know what to expect when commissioning your first suit.

Tailors generally prefer you to wear your best suit to your first fitting, since it gives them a sense of what you're used to. If you always carry a thick wallet and a cell phone, then you should wear those to the fitting so the tailor can plan to accommodate them.

Think of choosing your suit as a collaboration between you and the tailor. It's a business arrangement not unlike the arrangements you probably have with other vendors. Plan on spending at least an hour at the first fitting, and realize that top tailors require multiple fittings (usually two or three) before they're satisfied with the job they've done. Don't expect to walk in before lunch and walk out with a suit after. The entire process usually takes 8 to 10 weeks.

Other Resources

These books offer more on custom suits and dressing for success:

Dressing the Man: Mastering the Art of Permanent Fashion by Alan Flusser

The Suit: A Machiavellian Approach to Men's Style by Nicholas Antongiavanni

The London Cut: Savile Row Bespoke Tailoring by James Sherwood

A Well-Dressed Gentleman's Pocket Guide by Oscar Lenius

The Elegant Man: How to Construct the Ideal Wardrobe by Riccardo Villarosa

But perhaps the greatest wealth of information can be found on the Internet's top men's clothing forums, whose collective knowledge is unbeatable:

The London Lounge. A free-for-all forum where users discuss classic men's clothing.

Ask Andy About Clothes. A resource and forum guided by men's classic style consultant Andy Gilchrist. Its members are exacting and can be scathing to newcomers.

Men's Style Forum. Cond Nast's men's fashion forum, for the younger crowd.

Film Noir Buff. A blog and forum that explores classic men's clothes in detail.

Christian Chensvold is a freelance writer based in Southern California and the editor of Dandyism.net.

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