

BESPOKE BUSINESS

Formal or relaxed, with stripes, wool or cotton, jacket on jeans or three-piece suit, light or dark...it's difficult to choose the perfect suit to wear to work, particularly as one has to select first thing in the morning! One thing is for sure – a well-made suit is a must for any businessman. For those who combine work with style, our Bespoke Coach offers invaluable advice to set you apart from colleagues and competitors.



Scabal AW 09-10, suit 'Mandarin', ref. 751577

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How uncomfortable does a man feel wearing a suit that doesn't fit properly? But, on the other hand, what a joy it is to open one's wardrobe in the morning, leaf through your suits, to ponder on whether to don the navy double-breasted tailored in soft, lightweight flannel or perhaps the dove-grey three piece in crisp mohair? What a horror it is to rush to a suit department during your lunch break, hoping for something for an upcoming sales meeting, but finding nothing that fits, but what pleasure to select from hundreds of possible fabrics, before finally choosing a cloth that's just right. It is, after all, the great advantage of bespoke clothes – they fit body and soul so well, one can concentrate without distraction.

WHEN BUSINESS MEETS BESPOKE TAILORING TRADITION

Bespoke tailoring and business attire have been synonymous for some time – the office has always been the central arena for well-cut suits. Thus, tailors have long feared the day when a customer retires, because orders for dark two-piece suits tend to dry up soon afterwards. Fortunately, wearing individually made garments normally becomes such an important part of such men's lives that they remain faithful to bespoke tailors for retirement wardrobes. Tailors, on the other hand, are also noticing changes in the nature of business dress – it is no longer restricted to classic dark shades or stripes, with gentlemen sporting a much broader variety of weights, colours and patterns than previously. Business wear now comprises the CEO's navy super lightweight single-breasted power suit, the gallery owner's grey check three-piece tweed and the custom-made red velvet jacket paired with black serge drainpipes for the editorial director of a men's magazine.

MANY FABRICS, MANY STYLES

The higher the ladder a man climbs, the more important his clothes become. The value of a suit must not be expressed ostentatiously with designer suits that may indeed be expensive, but are not at all stylish – understated elegance is required in

high circles. Only the initiated will notice the exquisite cut of the suit, and no one but the tailor and the wearer will know the price of the fabric. Those not in the know will simply have the impression of a suit that looks just right. Dark blue and grey remain the standard colours – patterns should be chosen with great care. The first choice in fibres is fine Merino wool – Mohair may be more resistant to creases (and thus a good choice for the frequent traveller), Cashmere lighter and softer, Vicuna even more luxurious and cotton or linen cooler in summer, but none of these will perform better than Merino in the boardroom when the suit has to be as tough and resilient as its wearer.

MY PERSONAL FAVOURITE FOR BUSINESS IS GREY SHARKSKIN. IT LOOKS MATTER-OF-FACT, TOUGH, VERY UNDERSTATED AND TIMELESS.

The weight of the cloth depends on the season but, as most offices are now air conditioned, many executives will select something between 240-280 grammes. If one commutes to work, which is often the case, even for high-ranking executives in London, cloths should be picked accordingly. Midweights that are woven from not-too-fine fibres would be best suited to a train's upholstery, while getting in and out of cabs also puts a strain on excessively light worsteds, so a midweight Super 130's would be the best choice for an everyday suit.

Stripes are a business classic in London, with Brits tending to choose from slightly bolder varieties. Pinstripes and ropestripes are also very well respected, but chalkstripes are worn on worsted only, as on flannel they are considered too continental. Windowpane checks too are a good alternative, though they are rarely used for business suits outside the US. Pick and pick, birds eye, nailhead, pinhead or herringbone are other well-worn standard suitings and small Shepherd checks or glenchecks are popular business patterns in the US and France, with the Italians and British

preferring them for weekend wear or travel. Grey flannel has never ranked highly in Savile Row business suits, but in the US it has always been part of the executive's wardrobe, as was immortalized in the title of the Sloan Wilson novel *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit*. My personal favourite for business is grey sharkskin. It looks matter-of-fact, tough, very understated and timeless. It's popular with tailors worldwide, and one can never tell whether a grey sharkskin has been cut in Vienna, Paris or New York.

In Italy, business suits are in fact more conservative than many believe. Patterns are usually shunned, with charcoal and navy the staple for the well-dressed leaders of industry and commerce. Unlike their colleagues in Savile Row, Italian *sarti* love unlined or selflined suits to create a sense of lightness and softness. Omitting the lining also allows them to use slightly heavier cloths, even for summer suits. Nevertheless Italians have pioneered the use of extra lightweight fabrics, which are still used with some reluctance by English tailors.

A very special suit for spring is favoured by businessmen in Northern Italy. Connoisseurs know the weave as Solaro. It was invented for the British troops in hot climates and has a tan, khaki or greenish colour on the outside, with red or yellow inside. Milanese gentlemen love to don half lined Solaro suits in spring – in London, this would probably lead to raised eyebrows but well-dressed men in the US or on the continent give much credit to this sartorial extravagance.

In private life, one should be under rather than overdressed – in the business world, the opposite is advisable. Always dress your very best, because your clothes show where you are coming from and where you are heading. However, it is wise not to outshine one's superiors, particularly at job interviews. Fortunately, no business suit is overtly costly and any classic suit would be right for an interview, as long as the colour chosen is dark and the pattern discreet. Again, I would recommend sharkskin, because it appears business-like, while the actual quality of the material could be anything from a Super 100's Merino to a Super 150's Cashmere. ☺



YOUR STYLE REVEALS YOUR PERSONALITY AND BUSINESS APPROACH

- 1. Sir Richard Branson (*Virgin*): Cool and crazy
- 2. Basketball player Tony Parker (*NBA-San Antonio Spurs*): Smart and trendy
- 3. Steve Jobs (*Apple*) & Bill Gates (*Microsoft*): Creative and rational
- 4. Luca Cordero di Montezemolo (*Fiat-Ferrari*): Dandy
- 5. Hamid Karzai, President of Afghanistan: Powerful
- 6. Satoru Iwata (Nintendo): Young and avant-garde
- 7. Russian businessman Roman Abramovitch: Rich and mysterious
- 8. Famous journalist Larry King (*CNN*): Experienced and professional

TELL ME YOUR JOB, I'LL FIND YOU A SUIT

Different workplaces require different cloths. An architect who visits building sites several times a day might leave the worsteds aside and go for woolen cloths instead. Nowadays, worsteds have become the standard cloth for business and formal wear, whereas in the past, woolen cloth was what serious and trustworthy men wore. Woolen cloths are made of thicker and shorter fibres, they are softer, heavier and sometimes even a bit coarse but, on the other hand, they are much easier to tailor and very

comfortable to wear. As some of them are fairly soft, they are mainly used for jackets. A mix of wool and silk could be a good pick for a sports jacket. A pair of light cotton gabardine pants would be a good match, for a rather casual appearance. For a single-breasted navy blazer, one could choose an open weave, such as a hopsack paired with a pair of charcoal-grey trousers in a light worsted weave, for a slightly more formal look.

The more creative the job, the more freedom of choice it offers with regards to cloth and style. A journalist may

choose a fine corduroy in a pale peach colour for an unlined summer suit, while a photographer might have his khaki chinos custom tailored from silk gabardine. Arty professions also offer much freedom of choice – a gallery owner might await his customers in a pink and white seersucker suit or in a white shirt, blue cashmere denim pants and an off-white linen sahariana. As with the business world, bespoke garments offer limitless possibilities.

Bernhard Roetzel



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