

# Buying a suit for the 1<sup>st</sup> time?

## Pros explain the process

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Few purchases can make a guy feel like a million bucks—fancy cars, big screen TVs and Rolexes can cost thousands, if not hundreds of thousands. But for a couple of hundred bucks, the classic suit can do the work of all of those items without breaking your wallet. Long the staple of men's dress, the suit, after many years relegated to the back of closets thanks to the dot-com khakis-and-oxfords revolution, is back.

"For a while there, nobody was wearing suits, certainly until the 1980's," says Peter Brickman, professional lecturer in the fashion merchandising department at Marist College in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. "Things became more relaxed, then it became more permissible to leave out the tie, then we lost the jacket. I sense it's heading back to becoming more dressy, more formal...you're going to start seeing more suits—more suits and ties."

If you're a recent college graduate who never needed to dress up, or if you're an older guy who hadn't bought a suit since the piano key necktie was all the rage, there are a few things to consider before checking out the stores.

"I think the biggest mistake they make is rushing the purchase," say Thomas Cunningham, owner of Sacque Suit by Thomas Cunningham, of first-time buyers. His suits have been featured in several young men's magazine including *Razor*; *Mr.*, and *Cargo*.

"They go into the store, they start throwing on some jackets, and they don't let the assistant work with them sufficiently," he says.

### TAILORING

In addition to taking your time, using the skills of a tailor after the purchase is also important. "No matter what kind of suit you buy, you should be ready to pay to have it tailored," Cunningham says. "If the store doesn't offer free tailoring, you should factor that into your price and set aside maybe another \$50 to \$80 to make sure you can get the suit tailored properly."

Areas that might need a tailor's touch are the back of the jacket, sleeves and the waist and leg of the trouser:

Because guys come in all shapes and sizes, finding the type of suit and suit trouser that fits your body style deserves some consideration.

"If you're a thinner person, particularly now, it's easier to find a flat-front pant with a slimmer cut," says Steve Brinkman, a retail consultant. "If you're a medium-sized guy, you can go either way. If you're a bigger guy, flat-front pants aren't the way to go. If you're hard to fit, you'll have to go to a custom tailor."

### COLOR AND STYLE

Now that you've made the time for your buying experience and found a reputable tailor, the next step is deciding on color and style for that first suit. "I would suggest getting one that's conservative—blue, gray or black," Brickman says. "Pinstripes is OK

in any of them. ...It shouldn't be anything outrageous—four or five-button suit or extra-wide lapel.”

“You want to buy a two-button, notch lapel suit right now,” adds Cunningham.

“The three-button is really sort of falling out of popularity. If you buy a two-button, it's going to be in style a lot longer than a three-button,” he says.

## **THE FABRIC**

For that first suit, one particular fabric is paramount—wool. “You want to find a 100 percent wool suit,” Cunningham says. “And if you can find what they call the three-season suit, which is really a four-season suit, you can wear it throughout the year.”

Ties, shirts, dress belts and dress shoes are also important. The key is to make sure the whole ensemble works together. As Cunningham puts it, think in terms of a painting.

“The shirt is the background for the picture, the suit is the frame and the tie is the thing that you can focus on.”

## **DO'S**

- Try on both the jacket and trouser at the store; give yourself time to shop around.
- Make sure the jacket is smooth across the back and doesn't pucker at the shoulders. You should have the proper sleeve length on the jacket with about a quarter of shirt cuff visible when your arms are at your side.
- Go for a charcoal or navy two- or three-button suit made of wool.
- Take the suit to a tailor for any tweaking it might need.
- Button the top button on a two-button jacket or the top two buttons on a three-button jacket. Never do the bottom buttons. If you do decide to go with a double-breasted jacket, always wear it closed.
- Remember, brown shoes, brown belt; black shoes, black belt.
- Wear a white or pale blue shirt with your suit. Wear an undershirt. The last thing you want is sweat stains showing up under your arms.
- Wear the proper shoes with your suit. Thick black leather lace-up with a cap toe. You could wear brown if your suit is blue. In some case, brown will also go with the gray.
- Wear over-the-calf socks so they don't keep dropping and bunching up at your ankles, or even worse, exposing a hairy calf or shin. Socks should match your trouser so it's a relatively seamless color transition from pant leg to ankle.
- Keep in mind most suits will come with a 6-inch drop, meaning if the jacket is a size 44, the waist on the trouser will usually be 38 inches.

## **DON'TS**

- Expect to be terribly active in your suit jacket. It should be comfortable, but the most movement you should have to worry about is hugging someone. So hug yourself with your jacket on; if you can't without risk of ripping, then it's too small.
- Try to let out the waist of the trouser more than an inch or take it in more than two inches. You could ruin the trouser's shape.

- Focus on extreme styles and colors. Avoid extra-wide lapels and four- or five-button jackets.

### **FITTING GUIDE**

- Keep an eye out for clues the jacket is tight. Ridges on the back are telltale signs of strain.
- Too big? You see it when it puckers at the shoulder and along the back seam. Remember, it should look smooth.
- Don't make the mistake of wearing sleeves that are too long. You should let your shirt cuff peek through a bit.
- One of the most common mistakes with wearing suits is treating the trouser length the way you would a pair of jeans or chinos. Too long just doesn't look right.