



TAILORED TO PERFECTION

KNOWING HOW WELL YOUR SUIT IS MADE IS AS SIMPLE AS KNOWING WHAT TO LOOK FOR. BY WILLIAM KISSEL

to celebrate its centennial year, Ermenegildo Zegna suits this fall are cut with a soft, slightly-roped shoulder to complement the jacket's nipped-in waist and trimmer lapel, a look that characterized the suits of the brand's namesake and founder back in 1910. Brioni is also offering a new shape, called the Senato, which is cut longer and leaner than the classic silhouette for which the suit maker is known. Meanwhile, the gentleman who likes Kiton's sculpted Neapolitan clothing will appreciate the seemingly unconstructed shoul-

ders and natural chest line found in its newest two-button models.

Every suit maker from Armani to Zegna has its own sartorial point of view this season. However, the subtle tailoring nuances that make one suit better than another are not quite as easy to discern. Nothing says you're ready to do business like a suit. And if you've bought one in the last decade, you know that shoulder pads come and go, lapels vary from narrow to wide, and vents change from center to side and back again, seemingly on the whim of some designer's mood. While such

stylistic details can alert you to the latest trends, they have little to do with how well a suit is made.

Like the plumbing and electrical components camouflaged behind the drywall in your home, much of a suit's construction is concealed behind beautiful interior Bemberg silk linings. Opening the seams to see what's inside is simply not an option and, thankfully, not really necessary. That's because many of the hallmarks of fine suit making are visible right there on the surface. That is, if you know where to look.

The easiest way to recognize the

quality of a suit is by touching the fabric used to make it. To paraphrase Anna Zegna, a scion of the prestigious Italian clothing brand launched a century ago by her grandfather, only the finest fabrics with the softest hand are used to produce high quality suits. The finer the cloth, the better the material drapes and retains the shape of the garment. Typically the rarest fabrics, including fine micron wool, silk, cashmere and vicuña, can cost hundreds, even thousands, of dollars a yard and are therefore reserved for only the world's premier suit makers who understand how to tailor them into wearable works of art. As you might expect, the cost of a suit is comparable to the fabric used to make it, so in one sense it's possible to judge quality based on price. But it's much more than that.

"I always suggest putting on the jacket to immediately see the difference," says Kiton chief executive Antonio de Matteis, who often refers to the brand's signature suits as *conforme al corpo*, or second skins, because they are constructed as close to the body as technically possible. Closely following the lines of the body is considered a mark of quality because such precision fit can only be achieved by a highly skilled tailor. If done properly, the form-fitting silhouette should feel surprisingly more comfortable, and look more elegant, than suit jackets extolling a roomier fit.

"A very chic suit is the one that nobody notices from a far distance but it's easy to tell that it's beautiful and well-made when you see it close up," adds de Matteis. Perfection begins "the moment the human hand takes the place of the machine," he concludes.

TELLTALE SIGNS OF QUALITY INCLUDE:



- **Hand-stitched horsehair canvas linings (not fused or glued canvas) inside the chest and waist help retain the jacket's shape. Pinch the jacket at the bottom front. If you can feel three layers of fabric—the cloth, the lining and the floating canvas inner lining—it's the real deal.**
- **A little extra fabric on the trouser inseams and interior seat, as well as a split waistband, make the garment easier to alter.**
- **Interior sleeves that are hand stitched to the shoulders allow for complete ease of movement.**
- **A boutonniere stay under the lapel is a useful detail found only in the finest suits.**
- **Buttons inside trouser cuffs make it easier to "get the lint out."**
- **Hand pick-stitched lapels. Look for slightly uneven stitching as the hallmark of human hands.**
- **Interior pockets sewn into the actual jacket fabric, not the lining, retain the jacket's clean aesthetic.**
- **A knot threaded between the button and the jacket makes fastening easier.**

Sometimes all it takes to recognize quality is a quick peek at the label. Prestige brands often operate their own factories and closely oversee production. By comparison, many designers or no-name suit makers rely on their well-known names or a too-good-to-believe price tag. There are plenty of exceptions, so ask your salesperson to be sure.