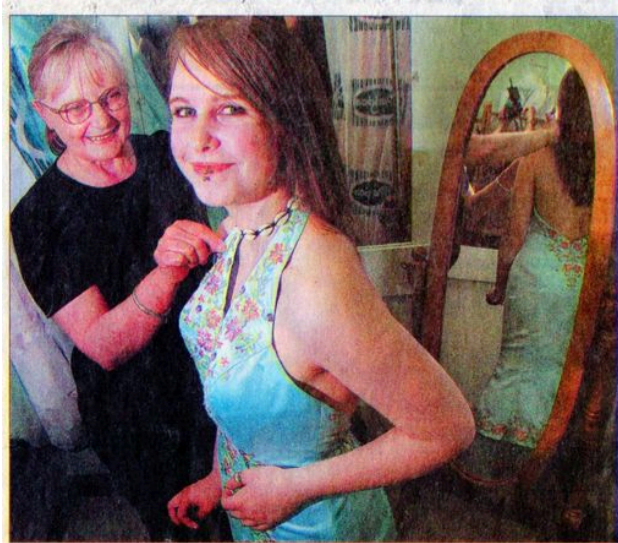


Get it altered

Part four in a five-part series looking at why our clothes don't seem to fit our bodies or our lives, and what we can do about it. The secret, it seems, is in the seams.



Jennelle Schneider, Calgary Herald
Dressmaker Liliana makes sure Liz Lipton's grad dress fits.

KIM HEINRICH GRAY
FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

Liliana Jaliff, an Italian-born, Argentinian-raised tailor likes to fuss.

Right now, the woman behind Calgary's Liliana Knitwear is on her knees pinning a pale blue Cinderella-style high school graduation dress for 18-year-old Elizabeth Lipton and clucking like a mother hen.

"The girls are going to be beautiful this year," she says. "You'll see a rainbow out there. There's neon greens and blues and pinks and yellows."

Jaliff, who has a passion for helping people look their best, boasts a loyal clientele, some of whom date back 30 years.

"They range from lawyers, doctors, retired persons," says the woman who has more than once been referred to as a magician.

"To me, dressing well is about self-esteem. People should always try to look nice. It's good to look nice for everyone else, but most of all, you should look nice for yourself. Like that old saying 'a gentleman dresses for himself.'"

Whether you're male or female, the secret to looking smart is in the seams, says Jaliff, who works as both an alterationist and dress designer. In other words, clothes tailored to your shape and size can and do make all the difference.

An obvious point? Not really. The fact is, experts in the fashion field agree the majority of people wear store-bought clothes that don't fit as well as they should. Just ask Canada's top couturiers and wardrobe consultants and they'll tell you a good tailor or alterationist is critical to dressing well.

Take Toronto-based Antonio Petosa, president of Omega Bespoke Couture, whose company services high-end men's stores countrywide and whose clientele includes the likes of Liam Neeson and Harrison Ford. (In Calgary, his line can be found at Supreme Men's Wear, Thomas Jeffrey, Ed Williams Men's Wear, James and Dickson, and Henry Singer.)

"Typically, the higher end stores have experienced tailors working for them. These stores are the only ones who can afford to pay the good people what they're worth," says Petosa.

"You're not going to find an experienced tailor at the local dry cleaners that does alterations or at a lot of the national chains. A Harry Rosen, for example, will have good tailors."

Petosa, whose company makes custom shirts and custom suits, says historically he catered exclusively to customers who

couldn't find clothes because of their irregular size.

"These days, you're seeing something different. A lot of young guys who are very fit are getting custom clothes made. Their waist lines are getting smaller and they're thinking if they're spending that much time at the gym, they want someone to notice. They don't want something that looks like a tent on them."

A custom shirt can cost anywhere from \$200 to \$300, he says, while a custom suit can range from \$1,200 to \$1,800.

"We're making a lot of custom suits with inside pockets. There's a ton of guys who carry telephones and Blackberries. In the end, they get a garment that will stand up to dry cleaning better, a product that is more alterable if they gain or lose weight and something that will shape to their body as they wear it."

The problem with dressing well, says Petosa, is that it takes work.

"You can't just slap a few things together. It takes time and effort to look good every day."

Ask Margo Bardwell, a Toronto-based "detailed wardrobe consultant" who advises film and media personalities countrywide on their trousseau, and she immediately refers to a tailor who has worked at her side since 1973.

"She does every stitch of clothing to be altered for every woman I help for an entire television network. It's a riot. We go on a Saturday morning to pin someone and we make fun of it. Dressing is supposed to be fun," says the lively Bardwell during a telephone interview.

"Is a tailor worth your money? Absolutely. They can make you feel brand new. Clothes that fit are as important as a good hairdo. Your clothes frame your body."

Bardwell, whose mother was a fashion model and whose father owned a women's clothing store in Sudbury when she was young, says dressing well is in her genes.

"I can tell you that you don't have to be beautiful, to be beautiful. You have to make



Jennelle Schneider, Calgary Herald

sure the shoulders are on the shoulders. You have to make sure that the back of the neck, where the collar is, doesn't gape more than three fingers. Your sleeve can't be too wide. You should wear your clothes - they shouldn't wear you," she says.

In Bardwell's opinion, buying clothes off the rack and having them altered is preferable to having a dress made from scratch. "My clients come back from around the world with beautiful silks. It never turns out. It's just not worth the cost."

Liliana Knitwear's Jaliff, on the other hand, has photo albums full of pictures and thank-you cards from women who have commissioned original wedding dresses from her.

"My passion is dress design. I love fashion. I love to discuss what is in. I love the people and I love making them look beautiful," she says at her Calgary shop.

A nip here, a tuck there

A good tailor/couturier's duty is to "provide his or her customers with modest concealment, protection from the elements, higher social standing and subtle sexual allure," according to an article published recently in the men's magazine *Cigar Aficionado*.

On a more practical note, a good alterationist can also provide the following:

- Completely redesign a garment and bring it up to date. ("We do that a lot," says Liliana Jaliff of Liliana Knitwear in Calgary.)
- Raise the shoulders of blouses or blazers because the truth is that most clothes were designed for six-foot- tall models and most of us are short-waisted in comparison.
- Bring in waistlines on pants. ("When people lose weight, they need to bring in the waistline, bust-line and hip area. Otherwise they can't show off their newly trimmed figures," says Jaliff.)
- Extending the crotch seam on a pair of slacks that are too snug.
- Replace broken zippers. Word has it a ton of us have fabulous clothes stashed away in the backs of our closets that can be easily mended.
- Hemming pants, skirts and sleeves. Very important, apparently, or you are at risk of looking, well, sloppy.
- Moving a button or two can achieve the same contour change that one might get in an actual seam alteration.
- Fix snag in favourite knitwear. Is there a poncho sitting in your drawer that you have given up on because of a few snags? Don't sweat it, according to Jaliff, this can easily be repaired.