

A Cut Above

When master tailor Serafino Falvo makes you a suit, he creates a work of art

By Nancy Jakubic

As the eldest son of a fine Italian family, Serafino Falvo was intended for the priesthood. Fate had other plans in store.

While studying for the clergy in Rome, Mr. Falvo spent time with his uncle, a master tailor. He so admired his uncle's beautiful clothing and elegant lifestyle that he decided to forego the priesthood and follow another Italian tradition – that of a professional tailor.

After an intense apprenticeship under his uncle's eye, Mr. Falvo decided to indulge his thirst to see the world. His travels ultimately led him to his future wife, Paolo, a Venetian dressmaker working in Australia. The couple was married in Italy, then spent a number of years working with well-known clothiers in England, Scotland and South Africa.

In 1974, the couple moved to Montreal, where they first heard of Winnipeg from his brothers. By now, they were ready to start a family and a visit to Winnipeg appealed to them as the perfect place to settle down.

Mr. Falvo set his skills at work for Winnipeg's Hanford Drewitt and Eaton's. In 1984, the Falvos realized their dream and opened a shop on Corydon Avenue. Some of his Eaton customers followed the tailor and remain clients to this day.

The world has changed since the young Falvo served his apprenticeship. The trend of designer brand names has largely replaced the custom tailor in the public's eye. The perception that a brand name is the same as a custom suit is frustrating for an artisan like Mr. Falvo. He sees his art disappearing.

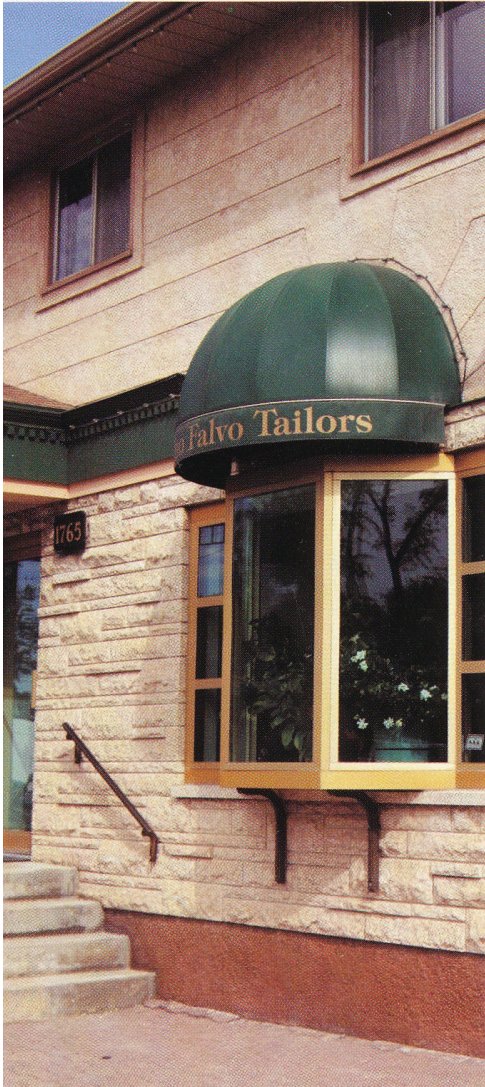
"We take complete measurements of a

client's shoulders, chest, hips, waist, neck, legs and arms. One arm is always longer, but most people do not know that. Sometimes a gentleman has a thin neck so on a suit off the rack, the collar will gape. Not on our suits. We also look at their posture. That is very important."

Before he cuts the fabric, Mr. Falvo does a drawing. He may also take pictures of the client before styling his suit.

"Then you decide how you're going to make him look good," he says. "Tailoring is an art. It is a very hard trade to learn. You need a lot of patience. When you do sew, your whole body is concentrating. Your mind, your body, your hands, your feet. You have to like it to do it. You have to have a passion for it."

The Falvos design and create custom clothing for both men and women. While the



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Serafino and Paolo Falvo say they're very fortunate to be doing something they love.

clientele leans heavily towards business wear, the Falvos also offer beautiful custom tailored formal clothes and classic overcoats. The store purchases the finest ties and accessories to complement the wardrobes.

Clients are typically professionals and executives with busy schedules. Serafino Falvo Tailors accommodates them by offering evening appointments for consultations and fittings. The store keeps files on their clients to help them build their custom wardrobe over time.

Mr. Falvo encourages anyone who appreciates fine clothing to visit his shop.

“Do not be afraid,” he says. “People think if they go to the tailor, it’s going to cost them a lot more money. This is not true. In some cases, it costs you the same, even less, than buying off the rack. You cannot even buy a good quality suit from the rack that fits you well. The construction is entirely different.”

Falvo suits range from \$900 to \$4,000 and up. He always recommends a client also purchase two or three shirts and a few neckties to complement the outfit.

The current summer colour trend in Europe is bright but Mr. Falvo’s personal preference is for the classics.

“Gray, black, brown, navy, you cannot get away from those colours,” he says. “Most men can’t go wrong with a nice gray pinstripe.”

Mr. Falvo remembers when he was studying in Rome in the 1950s and 1960s. It was the Golden Age of Hollywood when men’s style was fashioned by dapper stars like James Stewart, William Holden and Frank Sinatra, and the impeccably dressed John F. Kennedy.

Quality and fit never go out of style. Mr. Falvo recalls a woman who asked if her husband could look like the well-dressed men in the classic movies.

“Don’t worry. I told her. I’m going to make him look exactly the same.”

Mr. Falvo is one of a few Canadian members of the Custom Tailors and Designers Association of America. He and Paolo have both established distinguished careers and are fortunate enough to be living what they love.

His satisfaction in his trade goes much deeper than the bottom line. He takes pride in delivering the impeccable quality, fit, style and service he believes his clients deserve.

“I think about how happy I’m going to make this customer when he leaves my place,” Mr. Falvo says. “We want the customer to come back.”

Even when clients do relocate, they return to the Falvos on visits home to replenish their wardrobes. Mr. Falvo will send clients fabric samples in advance of their trip to save time.

“Once you establish a relationship with the customer, once he wears a tailor made suit from a good cloth with good construction, he’s never going to leave you.”

