



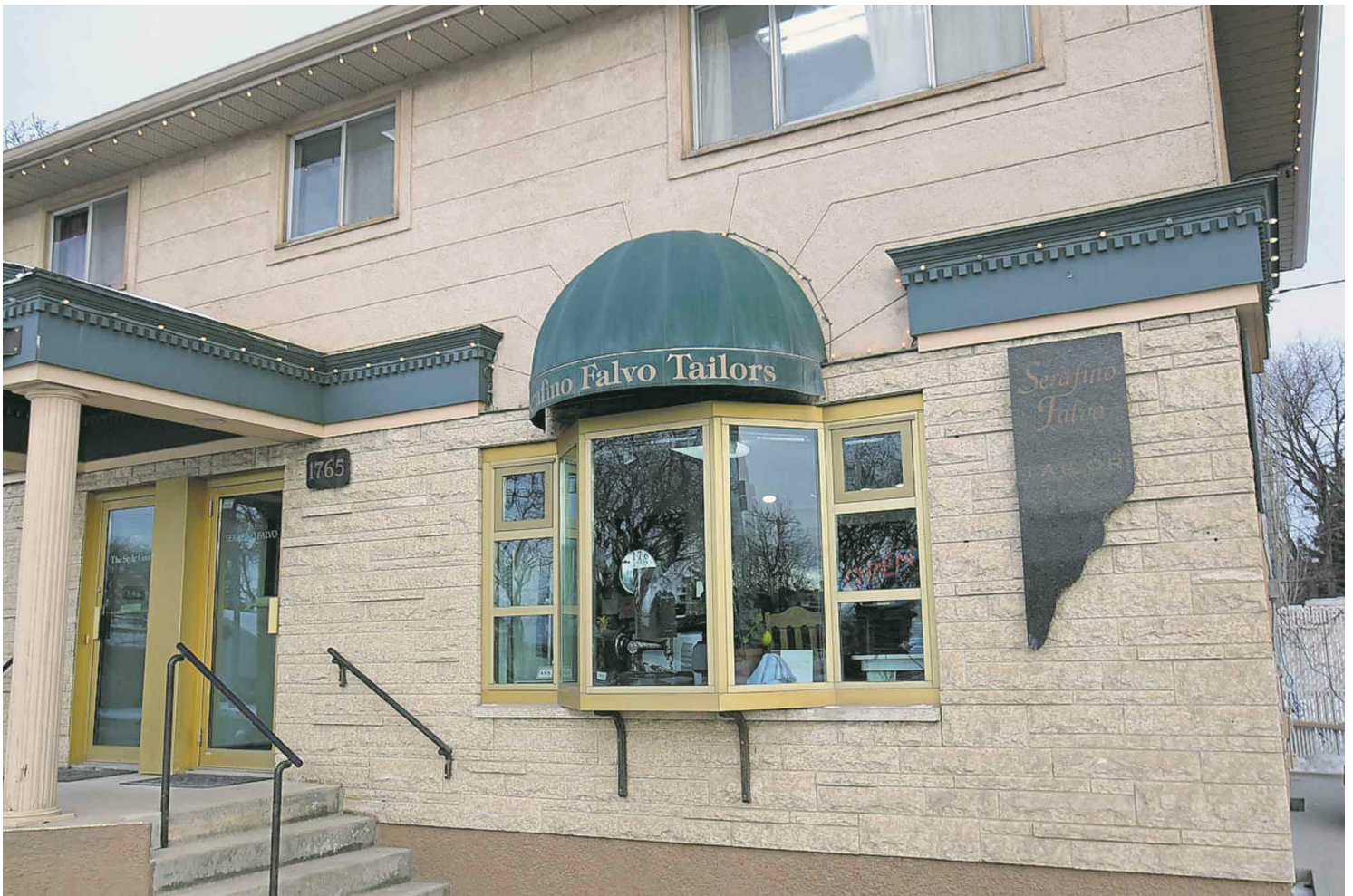
Local

## Made to MEASURE

### Tailor has been dressing people for decades

This City By: David Sanderson

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When seeking to start his own business in the 1980s, Falvo nearly agreed to rent a different location before seeing a for sale sign at 1765 Corydon Ave.

Serafino Falvo chuckles when a visitor mentions his website -- a domain chock full of information about the tailoring business Falvo and his wife, Paola, started in a converted, two-storey duplex at 1765 Corydon Ave., 30 years ago.

"Is it good? Other people have told me that, but I've maybe looked at it once, so I don't really know," Falvo says, noting the couple's son, who lives in Copenhagen, put the site together in 2010, the year Serafino Falvo Tailors celebrated its 25th anniversary.

Falvo, named one of the top bespoke tailors in North America by the Globe and Mail, stresses he is not a "computer guy." By way of explanation, he leads a reporter to his work area -- a brightly lit space populated by a decades-old Singer sewing machine, rolls of imported cloth, a shelf of classical CDs and a filing cabinet containing information on every person Falvo has made clothing for, including customers' measurements, the dates of their visits and fabrics they selected.

"When my son comes home, he sees all these sheets of paper and goes crazy," Falvo says, opening drawer after drawer. "He



Falvo with his wife, Paola.

tells me it would be so much easier to have all this information stored on a computer, but I tell him I'd barely know how to turn it on.

"We've always done things a certain way here, and I don't think that's ever going to change."

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Falvo was born in Amato, a small town in southern Italy. He moved to Rome at age 14 to begin preparing for a life as a priest. But after spending time at his uncle Pasquale's tailoring shop, located in the heart of the Italian capital, Falvo had a new calling in life.

"In the 1950s and early '60s, Rome was the Hollywood of Europe," Falvo says. "My uncle was an extremely good dresser; his wardrobe was big, big, big, and one day I said to him, 'I love the way you dress... I want to make clothes, too.'"

His uncle's response: "Become a priest; it's a better job."

Despite his uncle's remonstrations, Falvo apprenticed under him for four years. Following his 18th birthday, he moved to Australia, where he landed tailoring jobs first in Lismore, then in Brisbane. Falvo met Paola in the latter city -- he popped into a bakery for a loaf of bread one afternoon, and Paola was behind the counter -- and the two travelled to Venice, her place of birth, to get married.

For the next nine years, Falvo was employed by leading clothiers in England, South Africa and Scotland. In 1974, he was offered a job in Canada, and the couple decided to uproot again.

"I had a position lined up with a large company in Montreal, but on the way there, we stopped in Winnipeg to visit one of my brothers," says Falvo, the eldest of four siblings. "We arrived in November, and it was the first time in my life I had ever seen snow. I wanted to leave immediately, but after finding out we were expecting our first (child)... well, it's easy to move around when you don't have children, but afterwards, it's not as simple."

Falvo spent six months working for Hanford-Drewitt on Broadway before being courted by Eaton's to work in the downtown location's tony Pine Room. By the mid-'80s, Falvo sensed the national chain's best days were behind it, so he and Paola -- by then a highly regarded seamstress -- began shopping around for a place to call their own.

shopping around for a place to call their own.

Falvo says it was a fluke he ended up on Corydon, not far from his home in River Heights. He had settled on



Photos by Joe Bryksa / Winnipeg Free Press Serafino Falvo has been running his Corydon Avenue tailoring business for 30 years. Born in Italy and trained in Rome, he took his craft around the world before settling in Winnipeg. Falvo is considered one of the top bespoke tailors in North America.



Falvo keeps files, including measurements, on all his clients.



*"We've always done things a certain way here, and I don't think that's ever going to change"*

*-- Serafino Falvo*

a building in a different part of town, but when he went to sign the lease agreement, the landlord had upped the rent by 50 per cent.

"I was so mad I walked out of the office, went for a drive and spotted a 'for sale' sign here. It was a struggle to get a mortgage because I had no money at the time, but my thinking was, take a chance and if things go bad, so what -- I could always get another job."

"At the very least, I could say I tried."

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A sign on the door states the business is open from 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m., five days a week. Don't believe everything you read. Most mornings, Falvo, who will celebrate his 75th birthday and 50th wedding anniversary this year, is at work by 6 a.m. and not home for supper until after 7 p.m. That includes Mondays, which are supposed to be a day off. (Sunday morning is the only time you're guaranteed not to see Falvo's car parked in his lot. That juncture is reserved for watching soccer on TV, "the English (Premier) League, the European leagues -- whatever's on," he says.)

"To me, it's not a job anymore. People ask me, 'What the heck am I going to do when you retire?' I tell them not to worry, because I'm not going anywhere. I enjoy seeing my customers too much. Some now come in with their sons or grandsons for their first suit. When my customers come to see me, it's more of a social event than a business transaction."

Falvo offers a wide range of services, from hemming a pair of trousers bought elsewhere to designing an entire wardrobe, including shirts, ties and cufflinks. The shop's client list reads like a who's who, but Falvo disputes the notion a made-to-measure suit is a luxury item.

"People think going to a tailor is going to cost a lot of money, but in the long run it costs the same -- or less -- than buying something off a rack. Here, we carry the best cloth in the world and deal with the top manufacturers. Our work is handmade and made to last. Last week, I had a fellow come in with a pair of pants I made for him 20 years ago that were a bit frayed at the bottom. He asked, 'Can you fix them?' and I said, 'Of course.' "

Finally, about that adage, "Clothes make the man." Well, you'll be hard-pressed to find a bigger believer in that saying than Serafino Falvo.

"I cannot go out if I don't have my 100 per cent cotton shirts and ties; it's the way I grew up," Falvo says, laughing when a scribe asks if, after a long, hard day at work, he ever slips into a T-shirt and pair of sweatpants.

"I don't have sweats, and I don't have jeans. In fact, I've never worn a pair of jeans in my life, no sir," he says. "Even when I'm at my own table for dinner, I don't sit down unless I'm properly dressed.

"I guess I'm just old-fashioned that way, too."

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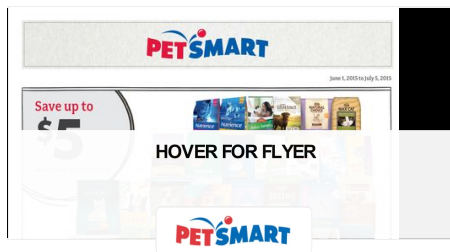
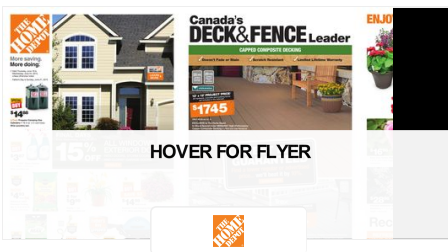
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