

IN STITCHES

Daniel George, Chicago's go-to for custom menswear, converts the fashionably challenged one ill-fitting suit at a time.

By Elise Hofer Shaw

Portrait and showroom photography by Carasco Photography

Fashion photography by Oren A. Photography



Daniel George Custom Suits' triple threat: Grant McNamara, Daniel George and Bryna Pascoe

Daniel George isn't one to mince words, especially about men's fashion. "If someone is complimenting you on your tie, then there's something wrong with your suit," he says during our conversation at his eponymously named suiting salon in the Loop. He should know. George has been manning his own custom menswear outfit for the last 19 years, catering to business moguls, sports stars and dapper gents who know the difference between peak and notch lapels—and those looking to learn and upgrade their look.

Growing up in Connecticut, George was groomed on fashion's finer points from a young age. According to his count, his parents took him shopping twice a year for suits, sport coats and accessories. "I was the best dressed 8-year-old you'd ever seen," laughs George. "My dad had a classic car collection and smoked a pipe. He was an old-school gentleman and he imparted on me a refined style and appreciation for craftsmanship."

George's higher sartorial education took him to San Francisco in 1992, where he cut his teeth as a designer at the

largest custom clothing house in the U.S. at the time, The Custom Shop. A stint at Alfred Dunhill of London followed, and in 1997 he launched his own by-appointment business, tailoring custom suits for clients at their home or office. Trunk shows at luxe hotels like the Four Seasons and The Ritz-Carlton garnered him media attention, and soon he was serving the Bay Area's social elite (think Larry Ellison, the CEO of Oracle, and governor of California Jerry Brown).

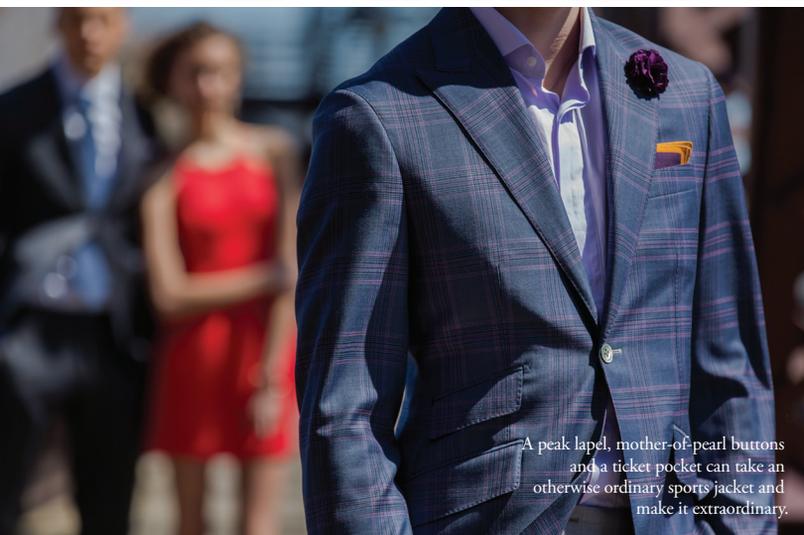
For 10 years, San Francisco was a good fit for George, but in 2007 he was ready for a change. "New York's fashion scene was saturated," he says. "Chicago made the most sense for my business plan, and the climate is perfect for wearing suits!" He set up shop on the sixth floor of the Millennium Park Plaza building on North Michigan Avenue, and word of mouth quickly established him as Chicago's go-to, appointment-only custom clothier—and garnered him big-name clients like Chicago Bulls' power forward Nikola Mirotić.



A custom Santos Rosewood table with glass display shelf by Lagonorph Design shows off Daniel George's selection of Italian silk ties and shoes by José Real and Winston & Lee.



The new Daniel George showroom boasts a generous bar so that creature comforts can be enjoyed while shopping or during a fitting.



A peak lapel, mother-of-pearl buttons and a ticket pocket can take an otherwise ordinary sports jacket and make it extraordinary.



An authentic bespoke suit made of Super 130's navy and royal blue plaid by Vitale Barberis Canonico for Daniel George.



"A half-lined blazer and linen trousers are summer wardrobe essentials," says George.



At Daniel George, the belts are custom, too. Choose your hide, stitching and buckle.



Up close and personal or from a distance, a Daniel George look is distinctive.

But as George will readily admit, converting men into fashion aficionados can sometimes be tricky. “Most men don’t know about clothing anymore,” he says. “Recently I was waiting to go through security at the airport behind a father and his son. The kid says to his dad, ‘Daddy, why do they call it a suitcase?’ And the dad replied, ‘Because men used to wear suits and put them in there.’ The father totally dismissed what could have been an enlightening conversation about sophisticated men’s dressing, image and confidence. Instead, the message his son received was that suits are no more, and that’s a terrible message.”

Unfortunate because George firmly believes that a bespoke suit and poise go hand in hand. And with the help of his inner circle—designer Grant McNamara and business manager Bryna Pascoe—he’s determined to school the masses. “We’re taking guys from Jos. A. Bank and Men’s Wearhouse, where they’re buying manufactured, ill-fitting suits for \$400, and selling them \$1,500 suits,” says George. “It’s like trading in a Honda and getting an S Class Mercedes. How do we do it? By educating them about fabrics, fit and how to accessorize. After that, the product sells itself.”

The tony tutorials on George’s website are a great jumping off point for those still on the learning curve. Better yet, book a visit to his brand-new, 1,600-square-foot showroom. Here, George has spun a design aesthetic to match his vestimentary sensibilities. There’s a gentleman’s lounge that’s perfect for trying on loafers by Magnanni and José Real, a whiskey bar nestled by the north windows, a nook for displaying his new private label outerwear offerings, and a handsome Santos Rosewood and glass table by Lagomorph Design that shows off his selection of Italian silk ties. “We’re happy to provide our clients with a few creature comforts,” says Pascoe. “The

experience should be fun. But it’s the safety of a private showroom, where men can ask us anything—especially if it’s their first suit—that keeps them coming back.”

George is also happy to address the competition and how price points can be deceiving. “People will price shop, and they will be disappointed. The last thing you want is a machine-made suit of Chinese fabric, and a so-called \$700 ‘custom suit’ isn’t quality. Price shopping cuts everything that’s good about a suit out of the equation—a soft shoulder, luxury fabric, hand-workmanship. We don’t have the cheapest suit in town, but we have the best suit. If you take your budget and add a third to it, we can make you a beautiful suit.”

So how confident is George in the quality of his product? So confident, in fact, that he offers a no-questions-asked, full return policy. “It hasn’t come back to bite us,” he laughs. “About every six months we write a check, and it’s usually because a guy bought a fine Italian fabric suit and then decided to sling a 35-lb. backpack over his shoulder day in and day out, to and from work—again, there’s an education process to everything we do. Don’t even get me started on grown men carrying backpacks... but that’s how much we believe in our garments.”

This spring, George is taking his haberdashery to New York for a series of pop-ups in the Crown Building on 5th Avenue, sharing space with Gladson Ltd., the to-the-trade provider of fine cloth that he’s used for years to source his fabrics. “If our soft launch in New York is a success, the sky’s the limit,” says George. “I want everyone who wears a suit to experience one of our custom tailored garments.” **sl**

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