



Greg Chapman with Mayor Tom Bradley

Photograph by Paul Kennedy

Greg Chapman

Elements of style assure Mayor Bradley a perfect fit

By Margaret Stevens

"I have many imitators but the original concept is mine," says Greg Chapman, who established his custom clothing shop on South Robertson Boulevard in 1968.

On the outside, Greg Chapman Executive Tailored Clothes looks like any other menswear retail store. On the inside, it is entirely different. There are no endless, confusing racks of clothing; neither is there an army of salesmen. Instead, the prospective buyer will see a few exquisitely tailored garments—some only partially completed—displayed on suit mannequins to illustrate the intricate process of true custom tailoring. The decor is elegant English leather and hunting prints; the atmosphere friendly but professional.

According to Chapman, most menswear retailers rent a facility, stock merchandise and then attract people to come in and buy through advertising and location.

Chapman, who admits that his biggest challenge has been to create an awareness of how clothes are *supposed* to fit, says, "Comparing a ready-made suit to a custom-tailored one is like comparing a Chevrolet to a Rolls-Royce."

True custom tailoring takes every aspect of the client's physique into account—from the slope of his shoulders to the shape of his seat, whether he is long- or short-waisted, whether he has a barrel chest or a round back, Chapman explains.

"We have different posture forms that show all of these traits," he continues. "It's not really size that makes people look good in their clothes—it's structure. When you try to fit one structure into a suit that's been made for another structure, it calls attention to all the anomalies of that person's body."

Semi-custom clothing, says Chapman, is what 95 percent of the industry refers to as custom tailoring. Sometimes, it is described as special-order tailoring. "We do legitimate custom tailoring."

He believes that custom-tailoring sometimes has a marginal name because many tailors have inadequate experience. "What our customer is buying is our experience. Over a 17-year period, we have made over 25,000 suits," he says.

Files, each with a complete record of all purchases, are kept on each client. "This

allows us to do 60 to 70 percent of our business over the phone," Chapman explains. "Many of our people are well-known—senators, congressmen, professional athletes, etc. They'll either have me select a fabric or have swatches sent out for approval. A man can be perfectly dressed in clothes that fit without the need to personally go shopping.

"We interview each client and get to know him," continues Chapman. "Regardless of whether he is a traditionalist or high stylist, we plan and design a wardrobe for him that is suitable in size, fabric weights and color—then we make it up for him."

Fit is the most important ingredient in custom clothing—and is also the reason Greg Chapman started his business. "I had always thought of myself as a so-called 'perfect 40.' I would walk into a store and buy a suit and just have the sleeves shortened."

When he left for India to get married, he bought some expensive American ready-made suits. "But," he explains, "I was marrying a leading Indian movie actress, who, by the age of 22, had starred in 22 films. We were to be married with the press and 15,000 people looking on and I wanted to be well-dressed."

When he arrived, it was suggested that he have some clothes custom-made. "There was no comparison between the custom- and ready-made suits," he says. "It was an absolute black-and-white difference in terms of fit. I felt like a different person—it made me project a different image—I felt so well-tailored."

The secret of a consistently perfect fit, Chapman discovered, was the special pattern the Indian tailor made for each of his customers. Chapman decided that that concept would be the basis of a marvelous business to serve busy American executives.

"It made so much sense to me," he recalls. "Executives do everything else by plan. They sit down and have meetings with experts—they get consultants if they don't have enough information. But when it comes to clothes, they know they don't know much, so they become intimidated.

"Putting people in the proper style and cut is important. I often ask a new client to bring in a couple of his favorite suits. We then help him evaluate how he looks

in each one and demonstrate ways to improve the client's professional image."

The first-time client is given a color session so Chapman can determine the best color tones based on the 'color season' as well as eye and hair colors. Each garment the customer subsequently buys is given a number that indicates the best combination of prior purchases to wear with it.

"Many of our clients have such vast wardrobes that, even with impeccable taste, they tend to lose track of what they have. This is why we created the system we call 'packaging and numbering,' which identifies the original combinations we put together. People in a hurry tend to grab clothes at random, whereas I may spend hours finding the perfect shirt and tie combination."

For the executive who likes to stand out in the crowd, there is a workable formula, says Chapman, which he calls the "seven elements":

- ✓Fit
- ✓Style
- ✓Cut
- ✓Color
- ✓Fabrics
- ✓Accessories
- ✓Ongoing attention

The last element, according to Chapman, is often neglected. "I view being well-dressed as an ongoing process rather than a sometime event. It's not unusual for busy executives to wait two or three years before adding more clothes to their wardrobes."

Consequently, if the man is not paying attention to style changes, point lengths or tie widths, he begins to look dated. Chapman says this problem is eliminated if a client comes in regularly.

"We put together a 'wardrobe plan,' which is an agreement to pre-set dates for clothing to be ordered. Then we set an annual budget. It's a discipline that most people enjoy," he comments.

"Executives who buy only to save money are likely to waste it in the long run," advises Chapman. "They may save \$100 on the wrong suit and then they'll only wear it a tenth as often as if they loved it. It will end up hanging in the closet. If you divide the number of times the suit was worn by what it cost, it becomes a very expensive suit.

"The name of the game," he stresses, "is to eliminate that kind of mistake."

Mayor Tom Bradley, long known for his fashionable appearance as well as his political acumen, is a favorite Chapman client. He is seen here wearing a gray English wool suit, \$750. The pure cotton shirt, \$70, is made to measure. A silk tie, \$35, and pocket handkerchief, \$15, complete the ensemble. Prices include all consultations. □