

By Hilary Achauer

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MUSCLES, MO' — PROBLEMS —

Style advice for the athletic man.

Stylist Catherine Bachelier Smith has a message for men over 35: Your clothes are too big.

“Most men over age 35 wear their clothes a size or two too big,” she said. “Fitted clothes make you look thinner and younger.”

Even the young and perfectly sculpted walk around in ill-fitting clothes because most off-the-rack garments are not designed to fit the traps, lats, quads and glutes of CrossFit athletes. “Good style equals good fit,” Bachelier Smith said.

The best way to ensure a perfect fit—and to look younger and trimmer without diets or plastic surgery—is to have a piece of

clothing custom made. Custom, or bespoke, clothing is not just an option for the fabulously wealthy. You’ll pay slightly more than what you’d pay in a department store, but the end result is a perfectly fitted, well-crafted, one-of-a-kind piece.

And fit, according to Bachelier Smith, is everything.

To help bring some style into the lives of CrossFit men, we gathered three athletes and a professional stylist at Crow Thief, a bespoke men’s clothing store in San Diego, California, to talk about custom and off-the-rack clothes, vests, pocket squares, and the manly art of perfectly cuffed jeans.

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Perfect Fit

Buying clothes can be intimidating, especially for men who spend most of their day in workout attire.

Men with athletic builds often have difficulty finding dress clothes that fit. CrossFit makes people look better naked, but some events in life require clothes.

Alec Zirkenbach is an owner and full-time trainer at Fathom CrossFit in San Diego. The 30-year-old said he has trouble finding dress shirts that fit—especially casual, short-sleeved button-down shirts.

“If the shirt fits the chest, the sleeves are too tight,” Zirkenbach said.

That’s where Melissa Hendrix, owner of Crow Thief, comes in.

Hendrix knows many men are reluctant to try bespoke clothing. Custom clothes cost more than those you’d find in a discount store but are comparable in price to garments found in high-end department stores. For example, a custom long-sleeved button-down from Crow Thief costs around US\$150 to \$180. Custom pants run about \$180 to \$200.

However, a pair of pants or a shirt made for your exact measurements from handpicked fabric more than justifies the price difference. Bespoke clothing is especially valuable for hard-to-fit types. CrossFit athletes work hard for their wide shoulders and narrow waists, and it’s a shame to hide that fitness with ill-fitting clothing.

Going to a store like Crow Thief also supports the local economy—it’s the sartorial equivalent of bypassing the nationwide chain to dine at a restaurant that serves locally sourced food. Sure, the food costs more, but it also tastes better.

Hendrix makes clothes for all types of men.

“I have a client who is 6’11”, and he can never find jeans that fit. I’ve made him 20 pairs (of jeans),” she said.

Hendrix’s process requires a time commitment, but the experience is unlike battling the crowds at the mall and sorting through racks of clothes.

In the first meeting, Hendrix talks with her client and gets a sense of his personal style and the challenges he faces buying off-the-rack clothes. Then, once they decide what pieces Hendrix is going to make, she takes measurements. This initial meeting usually takes about one-and-a-half hours.

Hendrix then makes the pattern and sends it with the fabric to her local sewing experts. More complicated pieces sometimes require a sample

fitting, which means a second visit and fitting for the client, but the clothes are usually ready in six to eight weeks.

Hendrix made a custom vest for Zirkenbach, then Bachelier Smith put together the rest of the versatile look. His dress shirt, slacks and custom-made vest can easily go from day to evening, from the office to a night out with friends.

Zirkenbach said he likes the idea of wearing a vest but hasn’t found an off-the-rack piece that fits well.

“It takes time to build confidence,
but the more confident a man gets,
the more layers he can add.”
—Catherine Bachelier Smith

“The chest would fit, but the bottom wouldn’t,” he said.

He particularly liked the details of his custom vest, such as the contrasting fabric on the back and the metallic buttons. The vest, made of 100 percent wool, costs \$178.

According to Bachelier Smith, the vest is what makes the look. She says shirts and trousers are like a blank canvas. A third piece makes the outfit stylish.

“A third piece adds visual interest,” Bachelier Smith said. The same rule goes for women, whose third piece can be a piece of jewelry, an extra layer or a scarf.

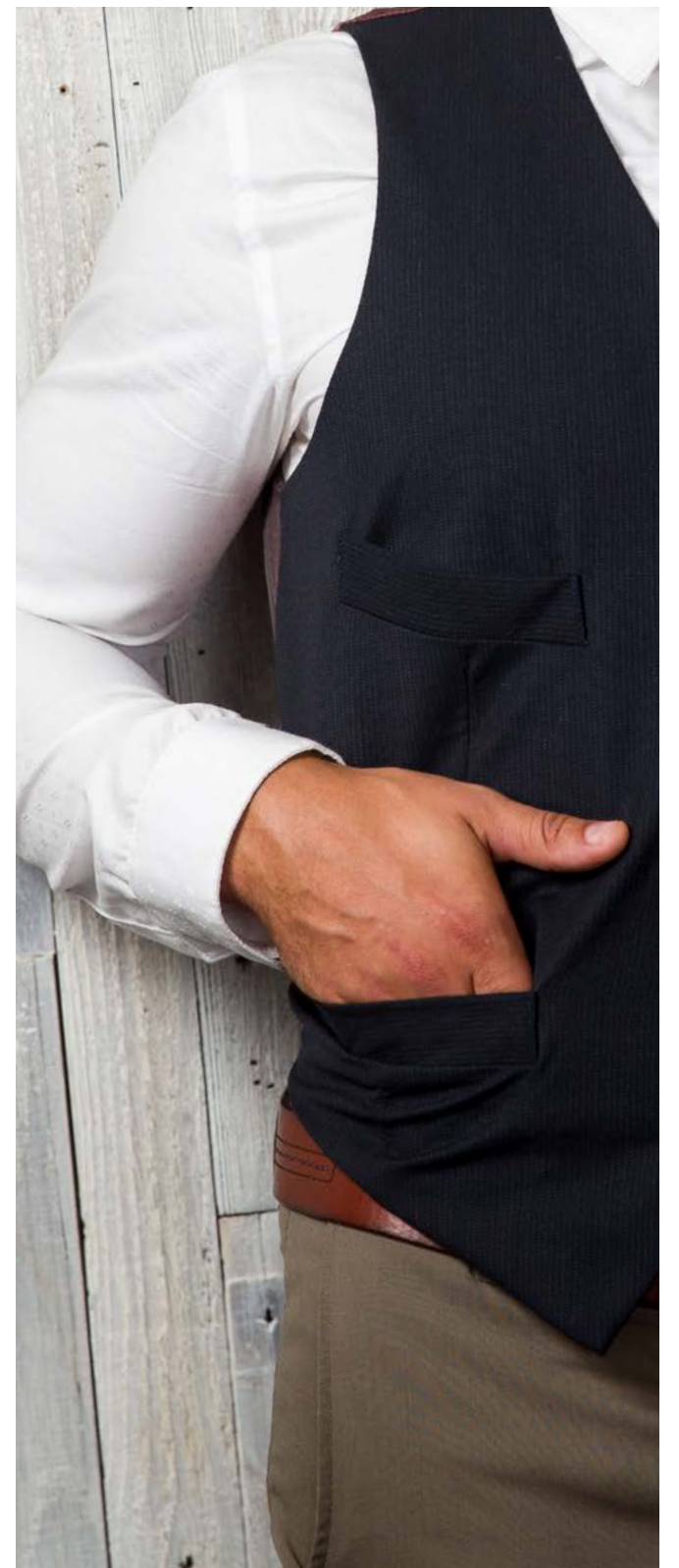
Zirkenbach is wearing his own belt, shoes and watch. The neutral trousers, shirt and tie are basics most men own.

Bachelier Smith said many men are hesitant to wear something like a vest.

"It takes time to build confidence, but the more confident a man gets, the more layers he can add," she said.

“I can see wearing this with a nice white V-neck T-shirt, going for drinks with friends, or date night,” Zirkenbach said.

“I’m single,” he said with a smile.





Find a Tailor

Grant Foreman, also an owner at Fathom CrossFit, will be the best man in his friend's wedding, and he needed a suit for the occasion. Foreman paid \$250 for the suit and then almost as much—\$200—in alterations as he tried to get the off-the-rack suit to fit his athletic 6-foot-4 frame.

When he was shopping for the suit, someone at the store told Foreman he has “the shoulders of a fat man and the waist of a regular guy.”

“I buy shirts that fit smaller people with shorter arms and then cuff the sleeves,” he said.

Foreman's dress pants have made repeated trips to the tailor to mend the crotch, which is no match for his squat-strong legs. Foreman has never purchased bespoke clothing.

“I don't make enough for custom-made clothes,” he said.

Bachelier Smith says looking stylish is not all about spending money.

“As a stylist, I spend more time teaching people how to fit the clothes they already have. Instead of buying a new shirt, spend \$10 and get it tailored,” she said.

Bachelier Smith encourages people to look at what they have in their closet.

“People assume I want them to spend a lot of money,” she said, “but we all have more clothes than we need.”

However, every man should own a good suit. While a completely bespoke suit will ensure the best fit, it's also the most expensive custom option.

A fully tailored suit can cost thousands of dollars, although Nordstrom offers [made-to-measure custom suits that start at \\$795](#). A custom suit is an investment not every man is willing to make, especially if he wears a suit but once or twice a year.

When shopping for an off-the-rack suit, such as the one Foreman is wearing,

the first step is to obtain your measurements, which you can do at any good men’s clothing store. If the difference between the jacket measurement and the pants waistband is substantially more than the standard 6 inches (as it is for most athletic men), consider buying a suit from a store that sells separates, such as J. Crew. A tailor can only take in the waist of the pants so much before ruining them.

After buying an off-the-rack suit, immediately head to a tailor to get it altered to fit you perfectly. It’s an important step many men skip. Those adjustments are going to dramatically improve the look of the suit and make it yours.

“Men and women should mix masculine and feminine elements.”
—Catherine Bachelier Smith

In recent years, a new option has arrived for suit-seeking men: online tailors like Blank Label, Alton Lane, Indochino and J. Hilburn. These companies offer custom-made suits for about \$500. A customer picks his style, fabric and details and then submits his measurements. The suits are manufactured in China, and the fit is dependent on the customer’s submitting accurate measurements, but the suits cost substantially less than hand-tailored garments, and they offer more customization than off-the-rack clothing.

No matter where you get your suit, you can add style and interest without great expense. For instance, Bachelier Smith added a floral pocket square from J. Crew to Foreman’s suit.

“Men and women should mix masculine and feminine elements,” Bachelier Smith said.

Most people are wary of mixing stripes with florals, but Bachelier Smith said there’s a rule of thumb for mixing prints: Look for the dominant color in the print. The dominant color in Foreman’s striped tie is cobalt blue, and the dominant color in the pocket square is light blue. Cobalt blue and light blue go well together, which is why these prints complement each other.

“Don’t be afraid to mix patterns,” Bachelier Smith said. “It’s a sign of confidence.”

Suits automatically come with their own third piece—the jacket—but men shouldn’t be afraid to add metallic elements such as cufflinks or a tie pin.

“Every man should own a good pair of cufflinks,” Bachelier Smith said.

Foreman’s tiepin is smaller, so it doesn’t compete with the cufflinks.

The final piece of Foreman’s look is the socks. The color palette is a mix of blue and black, unifying the elements of his suit.

Although Foreman spends most of his time in workout clothes, he said he loves the more formal look.

“I like to dress up, and I’d rather be overdressed than underdressed,” Foreman said. “I want to stand out.”

Custom Casual

Luke Maznio is a 23-year-old student of electrical engineering. He works out at CrossFit Invictus in San Diego and classifies his style as “laid back.” He’s a jeans-and-T-shirt kind of guy.

A high-end, custom suit might not make sense for someone like Maznio. For a man who lives in jeans, custom denim is a better option.

“We create the perfect fit,” Hendrix said of her custom denim.

Most of Crow Thief’s raw material is from Japan, which produces some of the world’s finest denim. Higher quality denim has a tighter, denser weave, which makes the final product sturdier and more distinctive.

Hendrix works with her clients to design every part of the jeans, including the pockets, zippers, stitching, rivets and pocket lining. A pair of custom jeans costs about \$200, not including the \$65 pattern fee.

Unlike most commercially sold denim, which has been chemically washed, Hendrix’s custom denim starts out raw and then gradually fades in a way that’s unique to the wearer.

Maznio is also wearing a custom-made shirt from Crow Thief. The fabric, imported from Japan, is 100 percent cotton, but it reads like linen. Hendrix says this is because of the texture of the fabric, which adds visual interest.

Bachelier Smith says another way to add texture is to roll up the sleeves and the pants.

“If you’re shorter, make the pants into a thin roll,” Bachelier Smith said.

The final detail is Maznio’s boots, which offset the more formal shirt and tie.

“He could also wear Chuck Taylors with this, or a crisp, white tennis shoe,” Bachelier Smith said.

In addition to the fit of their clothes, men should also pay attention to the condition of their shoes. Get rid of bedraggled flip-flops and keep old, worn-down tennis shoes in the gym. Shine your shoes regularly. Not only will they look better but they’ll also last longer.



Looking over Maznio’s outfit, Bachelier Smith went back to her first lesson of the day: Make sure your clothes fit. She said most men she sees wear their jeans almost two sizes too big.

“These guys have great bodies,” she said. She noted it’s a shame to hide them in shapeless clothes.

Making It Work

Style and fashion are different.

Fashion is ever-changing. It can be intimidating and sometimes ridiculous. Style is about expressing your personality through your clothes, about understanding what works for your body type and lifestyle.

Style does take effort, though. Most good things do. The trick is knowing where to focus your effort and your money. The **style pyramid** is a simple-but-effective reference point. At the top of the pyramid is fit. That’s essential. To ensure the best fit, look for a bespoke store like Crow Thief in your neighborhood. Even a small piece, such as a custom-made shirt or vest, will instantly elevate your wardrobe.

Just below fit are fabric and style. A perfectly fitting polyester shirt is a bad choice. If something makes you uncomfortable or makes you feel as if you’re wearing someone else’s clothes, it’s not the right style for you. At the very least, go through your closet and get rid of anything that is stained, ripped or just never fit in the first place.

Life is too short—and you look too good—to wear ill-fitting clothes. ■

Learn More

Catherine Bachelier Smith: [CBS Life Stylist](#)

[Crow Thief](#)

<http://lifehacker.com/5909754/five-best-online-custom-clothing-stores>

About the Author

Hilary Achauer is an award-winning freelance writer and editor specializing in health and wellness content. In addition to writing articles, online content, blogs and newsletters, Hilary writes for the CrossFit Journal and contributes to the CrossFit Games site. An amateur boxer-turned-CrossFit-athlete, Hilary lives in San Diego with her husband and two small children and trains at CrossFit Pacific Beach. To contact her, visit hilaryachauer.com.



Simply Style for Men

Shoes every man should own:

1. Dress shoes.
2. Clean tennis shoes.
3. Workout shoes.
4. A great pair of sandals or clean, new flip-flops.

How to be stylish:

1. Shrink clothes down.
2. Add a piece or two.
3. Match your belt to your shoes.
4. Don't match your socks to your shoes. Choose some element of your outfit—shirt, jacket, vest—and match the socks to that.