

Custom clothing designer David Kahn in his element: Putting the finishing touches on one of his dress shirts.



# STYLE COACH

DESIGNER DAVID KAHN CREATES CUSTOM CLOTHING FOR LOCAL SPORTS HEROES AND THE BAY AREA'S MOST DISCERNING FASHIONISTAS

PHOTOS: GABRIEL BURGOS | WORDS: JENNIFER STEVENS | DESIGN: CHRISTY BEEGLE

David Kahn flips through books lined with samples of the finest Italian cloth for several button-up shirts and sport coats he's designing. He glides his well-manicured fingers over chocolate-colored cotton with cream pinstripes, grey wool herringbone and various colors of the softest six-ply cashmere.

"You can get lost in these fabric swatches," he says.

A few clients have come and gone throughout the day, but now the shop has fallen silent, save the sound of sewing machines in the back, where two small-framed women sit at workstations surrounded by men's suits, Gasparilla costumes, oversized Buccaneer flags and women's blouses.

"This is where the magic happens," says Kahn.

The two women, Migdalia Bautista and Paula Gonzalez, are sisters from Cuba, and have been tailoring and altering clothes at The Alteration Place since 1989. During the last 20 years as master tailors, they have created costumes for the halftime entertainment at Super Bowls XXV and XXXV, as well as wardrobes for local performing arts shows. They've also become the go-to alteration experts for many well-known local personalities. A couple of years ago, Kahn decided to join forces with the sisters, turning the shop into a tandem business: A high-end custom clothing design studio named Bespoke & Co. and a tailor shop all in one.

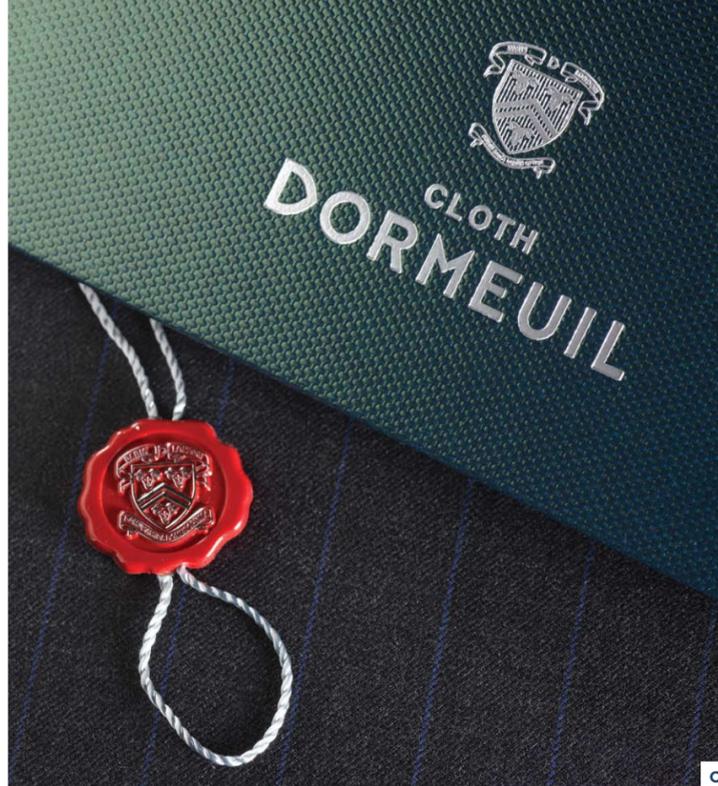
"Bespoke—it means to be spoken for," he says about the custom clothing side of the business. "I remember growing up, and my stepmother telling me a story about how she had a dress made for a wedding. Someone else showed up wearing the same dress and she was horrified. I never want to do that to someone."



A



B



C



D

His one-of-a-kind designs and fabrics now speak for a growing number of Bay-area residents seeking only the best in quality and style.

Dressed in a navy blue sweater vest and khaki-colored slacks, Kahn admits his style hasn't changed much from his early years. He grew up in Moorestown, N.J., a "preppy" suburb of Philadelphia, and was inspired by the fashions worn by the Northeast's elite in a time when "men were becoming more conscious of their appearance." As soon as he was able to work, he started selling clothes at the Cherry Hill Mall.

He tried to soak up as much as he could about art (he began his college career as an art history

**A** Details such as functional buttonholes are indicative of custom-made clothing.

**B** Each suit jacket that Kahn creates includes a hand-sewn personalized nametag. Shown here, a nametag designed for Tampa Bay Buccaneer cornerback Ronde Barber.

**C** Luxury fabrics from European fabric mills—including famous French cloth merchant, Dormeuil—fill the swatch books at Kahn's shop.

**D** Kahn dressed in one of his designs—a mid-blue windowpane fabric made of cashmere and wool.

major), color and fabric. While attending Keene State College in New Hampshire, he worked at a men and women's clothing store, where he helped the owner with every aspect of the business, his favorite being window displays. After college, he bought fabrics and sold clothing for Pincus Brothers Maxwell/Bill Blass and J. McLaughlin. He then became a buyer for Nordstrom, and traveled to Paris and Milan to help design fashion lines for Paul Stuart on Madison Avenue.

Eventually, Kahn became the general manager of sales for Hugo Boss' couture collection, Baldessarini, and opened seven corporate stores in Florida, including the Hugo Boss at International Plaza, where he became wardrobe consultant to Tampa Bay Buccaneer cornerback Ronde Barber (see page 70 for our interview with Barber). The two became fast friends, and Barber remains one of his best clients. Kahn has even attended photo shoots with Barber to ensure that every piece of the football star's attire is perfectly in place. Through word of mouth, Kahn has also created clothing for Barber's teammate, Jermaine Phillips and Tampa Bay Rays manager Joe Maddon (see Maddon page 62).

"I love dressing professional athletes," says Kahn. "They're flamboyant but tasteful; I can get really creative."

He also enjoys helping businessmen and women evaluate their closets to see what pieces, colors and patterns they might be missing for a complete professional wardrobe.

Two custom suits are paired with tailored dress shirts and XMI Platinum ties.



He even creates custom pajamas for his children from leftover fabric.

Kahn glances at a picture frame on his desk. Inside is a photo of his three children, ages 10, 6 and 3, cheering at a Bucs game. A look of pride reflects in his eyes as he talks about his family.

"They're great kids; and we're (he and wife, Deborah) always complimented on how they look," he says. "Deborah dresses them. She's a visionary—she can foresee what's going to be hot."

Deborah works at Cole Haan at International Plaza and has her own accessories line. The fashion forward couple shares an appreciation for well-made clothes and rich fabrics.

"There's nothing like experiencing custom clothing—the way it fits, like an outer skin. Every time a box (from one of my manufacturers in the U.S. or Italy) is delivered to the shop it feels like my birthday. But I'm the one giving the gift."

From football players and newscasters to school-age kids and business professionals, there is a type of fabric and suit for everyone, says Kahn, and he enjoys creating them all, whether he's special ordering wool made from the rare vicuña animal (a member of the camel family) for a sport jacket, or designing costumes for a krew of pirates.

"I remember the first time I made Raheem

Morris (defensive coordinator for the Buccaneers) a suit, he put it on and said he wasn't taking it off—that it fit so well he was going to sleep in it that night," Kahn says with a huge grin. "I told him that I do custom pajamas too." ■

#### AT A GLANCE

##### DAVID KAHN

Bespoke & Co. creates custom clothing for men and women. Consultations can be done on or off-site.

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