

Suit yourself — just the way you want to

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NEWTON — Before he was traded to the Minnesota Timberwolves last month, Ricky Davis was known for two things in the Boston Celtics locker room: his soaring slam dunks and his stylish suits.

Davis doesn't settle for the traditional two-handed jam, and he won't be caught wearing just any threads, either.

Pro Shop The 6-foot-7-inch guard, who estimates his closet is stuffed with more than 30 suits prefers custom-made apparel.

"I look for great quality, great material, and a great price," explained Davis, as he was being fitted for a sleek three-buttoned Canali suit during a recent visit to Newton clothing store Mr. Sid with then-Celtics teammate Kendrick Perkins.

"You can find [off-the-rack] suits in my size, but I've never bought one," Davis said as he checked the tan suit jacket in a three-way mirror. "Custom-made suits fit better."

More and more men are coming to the same conclusion.

Stuart Segel, owner of Mr. Sid, said the custom suit business has expanded rapidly in recent years. He estimates that 12 percent of his business now comes from the sale of custom-tailored and special-order clothing, up 5 percent from last year alone. Paul Becker, an executive board member of Custom Tailors and Designers Association of America, a New Jersey trade group, estimates that custom suits have become more popular and now account for 20 to 25 percent of suit sales nationally.

Said Segel: "It's one of the fastest growing segments of the whole menswear business."

Mr. Sid sells top-of-the-line Brioni suits that can cost as much as \$10,000, but Segel stresses that with an increasing number of labels and retailers offering custom-fit programs, men no longer have to pay excessive prices. A custom-tailored suit from Mr. Sid starts at \$895, and aver-



EVAN RICHMAN/GLOBE STAFF

Celtics center Kendrick Perkins is measured for a suit by tailor Ralph Alonzi. Former teammate Ricky Davis, right, has been getting his suits custom-made since he was drafted into the NBA in 1998.

ages about \$1,500, he said.

There are two ways to purchase a custom suit, and both take time: Expect the whole thing to take 4 to 6 weeks.

The traditional way is to have a tailor handcraft a suit from scratch. Davis, who has been purchasing custom suits from the same tailor since he was selected in the 1998 NBA draft, prefers this option because it allows him to design his own suits, leaving him with a unique wardrobe.

"I'll see a picture in GQ that I like, or I'll get some swatches of fabric that I like,

and I'll send it to my tailor and have him make it up for me," he said. "He can tailor it to my size, and I don't even have to be there."

The other way is to buy a custom suit through a label's made-to-measure program. Customers at Mr. Sid, for example, can leaf through a catalog from Italian designer Ermenegildo Zegna and craft a suit from a dizzying array of materials, patterns, and styles. Once a choice is made, a tailor takes 15-20 measurements, which are sent to the Zegna factory in Switzerland, where the suit is made to

specification.

Segel says that with popular men's stores like Brooks Brothers expanding their special-order offerings, custom suits are no longer limited to the closets of well-heeled bankers and NBA stars.

"Men are realizing that they can get excellent value," he said. "Now the average guy who's a 40 regular can have his suits custom-tailored, too."

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The details

■ **Choose the right tailor:** If you're buying a custom suit, ask to see examples of a tailor's work beforehand. If you're getting a suit through a designer's made-to-measure program, try to get a feel for the tailor's level of experience with the label.

■ **It's in the details:** Beyond material and color, consider: double-breasted suit jacket, or one with two or three buttons? Padding in the shoulders? If so, how much? Flat-front pants or pleated? It can get complicated, so do your research and spend time discussing options with your tailor.

■ **Accessories:** Custom-made clothing extends far beyond suits into overcoats, shoes, and even ties. Barry Segel says custom-made dress shirts are becoming popular among men in hard-to-fit sizes and for the fashion-conscious looking to add an individual touch to wardrobes.

■ **Shop Around:** Ricky Davis may receive an NBA paycheck, but he still searches for a bargain. Quality custom suits are now available from boutiques and department stores for under \$1,000.

SOURCES: Stuart Segel, Barry Segel, Paul Becker, and Ricky Davis

Do you want a double-breasted jacket?

What type of material and color do you want?

Pleats or flat-front pants?

The accessories are important, too.

