

# OFF THE CUFF

The word 'bespoke' evokes images of style, tradition and refinement, of handmade clothing created from the finest fabrics, by the most skilled of craftsmen, for the most discerning of gentlemen. Cindy-Lou Dale meets such a tailor in Mumbai.



As India has liberalised, the population has become increasingly brand conscious. Though ready-to-wear and designer clothing have become increasingly popular in India, tailors are still to be found. Like Bellissimo's, a bespoke tailor with a showroom on Mumbai's Colaba Causeway.

Here the process kicks off with a detailed consultation with tailor, Feroz Alam, discussing style of cuffs and collars, fabric options and finishes. Your tailor needs to create a garment that follows your exact measurements creating a fit that hangs well on your frame, shadowing your body's every contour. Your posture, even your stance, will be factored into the cut of your suit.

The level of detail is remarkable. Other than colour, cloth and style, overall design distinctions are carefully considered – the lining, the stitching finish, placement and number of pockets, buttoning, sleeve detail, double or single pleats, inside or outside breast pockets, will they be inside or outside, slanted trouser pockets, belt hoops, mitred angle button. There are myriads of intricate details which go into the final piece.

One of the greatest plus points of custom tailoring is the professional advice passed on, which includes accentuating your physical attributes and minimising your unbecoming bits.

After the pattern has been cut at their cutting room in Colaba Market, a little den of traditional tailoring, it is chalked



out on your chosen fabric and is then cut by hand, leaving a little extra cloth at the seams to allow for future fluctuations in girth, thus enabling alterations. Then the garment is set upon by an assortment of expert craftspeople who work in tangent with the cutter. Each responsible for the hand rendering of their specific item. The cutter supervises all facets involved in the production, tweaking the design at various phases through its creation.

All finishes are completed by hand including edge stitching, padding of lapels, individual buttonholes and application of buttons. All linings are felled by hand, with linen being used to reinforce pockets and gorge, sleeves are stitched in place by hand and shoulder pads and canvases are hand-cut and shaped.

A suit could take up to six hours to make, resulting in a perfect fit and highly individual garment made to your personal and exacting requirements. Suit prices start at Rs10,000.

Says Feroz Alam: "There are no short cuts in our process and no compromise when it comes to fit, quality and craft. We custom make Sherwani's, Jama's, Kurta's, as well as modern-day shirts and business suites for every body type – which are available in an array of fabric combinations and detail. From classic designer suits to wedding suit or an everyday blazer, we'll create something edgy, be that a brightly coloured lining, satin lapels on your dinner jacket or a personal monogram on your shirt pocket. We don't do ill-fitting off-the-rack garments," he sniffs.

If ever anyone had tailoring in his blood, it's Feroz. His hands are dexterous and steady, his face deceptively stern until it breaks into one of his >>

» frequent easy smiles. I ask him whether he can guess my measurements. His eyes scan my torso and then rattles off the numbers – 38-26-38. He checks his numbers against the measurements – they’re all exactly right.

“My father used to be a tailor, so too was my grandfather. My great-grandfather stitched for the Britishers and learnt cutting from a British man,” he confides, as we sip Masala Chai in the comfortable, mirrored fitting room at the back of the shop. He then tells of the VIPs he has historically dressed – cricket players from South Africa – Graeme Smith, Shaun Pollock, AB De Villiers; cricket players from New Zealand – Corey Anderson, Tim Southee, Ross Taylor; Bollywood actor, Akshay Kumar; Ferrari’s former CEO Luca Cordero di Montezemolo.

He points out block-printed Jaipuri cottons and south Indian silks then unrolls an elaborate Benares brocade, woven with a gold thread, over a glass-topped table. On top of this he unrolls a pale pink silk crepe embroidered with a washed cotton thread – kantha embroidery, he tells me, an endangered skill too time-consuming and expensive to survive in the poor rural communities where it originated.

“In the ‘80s, when ready-made clothes came into India and was booming, 2,000 tailors closed down.” He explains that tailoring has gravitated toward two poles – the modest neighbourhood tailors who survive on alterations and simple work in low-income areas, and luxury tailors like his father and grandfather.

“The craftsmen will survive,” he says. He considers this statement for a while then adds. “We are craftsmen.”

Should you be strapped for time and are unable to get to Bellissimo’s showroom, they will arrange for Feroz and his assistant to meet you at your hotel, where he will take the necessary measurements and talk you through the fabric swatches and finishes. <sup>AC</sup>

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Written and photographed by Cindy-Lou Dale



Bespoke tailoring is no longer a luxury but more a tradition – the old way of doing things.

If you’re vertical challenged, avoid trousers with low waists or turn-ups and make sure they don’t puddle around your shoes. Choose solid fabrics. Vertical stripes help if they’re not too far apart. The most flattering shape for a jacket is short and nipped in high at the waist.

Should you be slender, select bulky fabrics and opt for full cut trousers, with turn-ups. Order a double-breasted jacket with a ticket pocket and wear your pockets square. Avoid narrow lapels and narrow stripes.

If you’re on the heavy side, go for the easy fit, solid two-button, single-breasted suit with your trousers sitting on our natural waistline with forward pleats and above all, avoid vents in your jacket. A three-piece suit will accentuate your vertical line and your shirts should have long, angular collars – be sure to order the collar large enough to be comfortable as you don’t want anything to look pinched.

**S Bellissimo Boutique**  
**Bespoke Tailoring**  
23B Cusrow Baug, Colaba Causeway,  
Mumbai-39  
Ph +91-22-841483 M+91 98-  
67028238 – ask for Sajid Shaikh  
[s.bellissimo@gmail.com](mailto:s.bellissimo@gmail.com)  
[www.sbellissimo.com](http://www.sbellissimo.com)

