

MARK CHO

The Secret to Looking Trim in Your Suit

STYLE *Hint: It's not a slim-fit cut that creates a silhouette to envy.*

My favorite style trade war story from a bespoke shirt-maker goes something like this: Man walks into the shop, asks for a shirt, likes it slim, OK no problem, let's do it. Comes back, shirt fits perfectly, he says no, it's too loose. OK, let's add some darts, take this and that in. Comes back, shirt fits trim, but still looks good. Man says no, still too loose. OK, repeat. Repeat. Repeat. Finally, the shirt is to his liking (and everyone else is a bit annoyed). He puts it on, buttons it, sits down. Several of the buttons rip off the fabric. Now he thinks it's too tight. Everyone else is a bit amused.

Thankfully, the slim-fit days are in the bin. Many who grew up in the slim-fit era have matured into "size upgraded" bodies and now realize how unflattering and uncomfortable that cut can be.

The secret to a flattering silhouette is to understand that shape is necessary, but shape is not necessarily created just from the body. Not every curve need be revealed; some things are better left unseen. A little extra cloth in the right places makes a world of difference.

The ideal silhouette is broad in the chest and shoulders, lean in the waist, and long in the legs. As a desk jockey, I can tell you that is not my shape. I have terrible posture, a bit of a paunch, and long chicken legs from all the walking I do not do. How do I package this into something acceptable in public? The illusions created from carefully selected clothing carry me most of the way; my generous wit, wisdom, and humility the rest.

Shape is best created by contrast. Broad shoulders make a middle look smaller. Apply this logic to a tailored

jacket while considering visual balance. Err on the side of broader shoulders and a fuller chest to visually reduce the jacket's waist. The waist just needs to be narrower than the shoulders; that differential creates the illusion of a lean mid-section. How closely fitted the jacket waist is to your actual stomach is less of an issue, and a looser jacket waist is a comfortable benefit.

A frequent request I hear is to narrow the sleeves on a jacket or a shirt. The reason given is inevitably: "gun show." If the idea is to make your biceps look larger, why go for a smaller sleeve? Visually, that minimizes the size of your arms. A too-tight sleeve may even hamper all the action poses you take during said show. I'm not advocating kimono sleeves at the next board meeting but rather a healthy proportion between chest, shoulders, and sleeves.

Nothing pleases the eye as much as long, gently tapered leg lines descending from the jacket, and the leg line is one of the trickiest things to perfect. A

little taper is just right; too much will make either your feet or your waist look huge, or both. If your stomach isn't too substantial, a higher rise works to make the trouser legs look longer. People often point to the cloth behind the thigh as "excess," but consider that when walking or sitting, your thighs and seat need a little extra material or the trousers will become restrictive and uncomfortable. The biggest problem with slim trousers is the onus is on you to be trim. Even a little excess around the middle is going to show when wearing skinny jeans.

Your clothing's silhouette is not easy to nail; it takes understanding of your body shape and a good sense for proportion, both of which can easily be developed over time with the right mix of anxiety and logic. Think balance, comfort, and dignity. Not button-popping, midriff-squeezing tubes of clothing.

Mark Cho is the cofounder of menswear emporium the Armoury and co-owner of Drake's in New York.

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