

How to Buy Sharp-Looking Suits on eBay for (Almost) Nothing

In the two-decade slide in clothing prices, men's suits stand out as an anomaly. Go to a fancy department store, or a specialty shop in the mall, and price them out. They can run \$1,000-\$3,000. Burberry's wants you to throw down \$2,000. Brooks Brothers has no qualms about asking \$1,300. Ralph Lauren's purple label can run \$3,000 and up.

How can they manage to do this? My theory is that most men are so confused about suits (they don't buy them, or wear them, often) that they too quickly submit to branding, store culture, and snotty salespeople simply because men are afraid that they will otherwise be doing it wrong. They believe that the more they spend, the better the suit will look.

There is also a strong element of intimidation in the store scene. Even I who was in the industry for years feel this in a high-end store. You are looking at a nice suit with a great pattern and cut. Then you inauspiciously look inside the sleeve. Small print says \$4,310. You gulp but try not to show it, because you don't want the beautifully dressed salesperson to think you are cheap. Once the shock is over, other suits on the rack for \$1,995 don't look so bad.

Meanwhile, there is eBay. Last week I picked up two suits, one from Brooks Brothers and one from Ralph Lauren, for \$25 each. They are gorgeous and perfect. One required just \$14 in tailoring, and that's it. Otherwise the fit is flawless. The money I saved is now earning money in the crypto markets.

I've been doing this for years. I don't score every time but most times, the results are great.

Why don't more men do this? Part of the resistance might be aversion to "used" clothes. I've never understood this concern. If you buy something new and wear it once, it is already used. The real focus should be on the suit itself, not whether someone has worn it before. For that matter, I love to buy at old-fashioned [thrift stores](#).

Here's how to get just the suit you need on eBay.

Find out your size in advance.

This means going to a regular men's wear shop and trying them on, with the assistance of a sales person. If you are 6'1" and taller, you will need a Long. If you are 5'8" or shorter, you will need a Short. Otherwise, you need a regular. (I'm exactly 6' and wear a Regular). After that, there is the chest size. The waist of the pants is determined by standard proportions, and can be adjusted with tailoring.

For some reason, when guys try on suits, they typically start flailing around and moving their arms straight out and bending their legs. It's a mystery why they do this! The correct posture is to stand straight and comfortable, arms by your side, looking in the mirror.

Fashions today are calling for suits to be more snug than they used to be. It really shouldn't hang on you like a sack. At the same time, the vent in the back should not open up when standing straight.

Once you find the size that works for you – and it is true that sizes vary depending on cut and make – write it down. That is the size you can search for on eBay. This is your first step in discovering good deals. The site carries both new and used clothing from many different sources. The tricky part is discovering the jewels amidst an amazing amount of junk.

Only look at clothing with natural fabrics, which usually

means 100% wool, or perhaps blended with silk and/or cotton.

This is not because a poly blend suit is a terrible thing. They can look just fine. What the strict focus on all-natural does here is serve as a quality filter. You can have much more confidence about the garment if you can rule out 90% of the bad items. If some item says "luxurious wool feel," you can know for sure it is polyester. Don't go there, no matter what.

Immediately forget anything more than \$300 to \$400.

What you are really going for here is to spend less than \$100. There are plenty of items available. You will notice that some sellers on eBay are trying to fob off on you a \$5,000 suit for \$1,300. They might be correct about this and it is probably a steal. I don't know. But this is not what you are going for. If you are prepared to spend that kind of money, eBay might not be the best place for you in any case. Plus, from experience, I can promise you that if you are careful, you can slice two zeros off that \$5,000 item.

The make of the suit matters.

You can filter out vast amounts of items based on the make of the suit alone. I would suggest avoiding anything from Jos. A Bank, not because all their clothing is terrible but the quality is so unstable that you cannot know for sure. It is very likely to be trash, to be perfectly frank.

Brands and designers you are looking for: Calvin Klein, Burberrys, Ralph Lauren, Brooks Brothers, Hugo Boss, Canali, Hickey Freeman, Kenneth Cole, Hart Schaffner Marx, Hilfiger, and Oxxford. If it is another brand, you can Google it yourself. Each brand has a particular way about it (Freeman and Brooks are going to be roomier than Boss and Lauren) but at some point, you are just going to have to take a chance. And you can always return anything.

Pay attention to lapel size.

The main thing that changes about men's suits (and ties) is the lapel width. They blow up and down through the decades. Today fashion dictates that lapels are narrow. The most obvious giveaway that you are wearing an old suit is for the lapel to be too wide. Because the suits on eBay can be old or new, made anytime between 1970 and today, you should pay careful attention to this.

Don't get anything weird.

For some reason, guys who don't buy many suits seem to be attracted to the most exotic thing out there, maybe because they saw it being worn by some cool dude in the movies or in some music video. This is a huge error. The basics are always to be preferred: blue, gray, or black, with or without stripes. Small checks can be fine. Don't go to brown or white or some zoot suit or anything else strange. Such suits do not give the right impression. They come across as egocentric, whereas the real point of a suit is not to make others think you are great but rather that you are complimenting others by dressing up for them.

Return it if it is not right.

Most suits will require some tailoring: sleeves, inseam, a bit taken in around the body, and so on. However, the expenses on alterations can mount very quickly. Spend too much and you defeat the purpose. If it doesn't fit, if it feels weird, if it is not what you are hoping, it's no big deal: just return it and start again.

And keep trying.

Just because the right suit doesn't appear on eBay today, doesn't mean that it won't appear tomorrow. The inventory is constantly changing. This is a treasure hunt. You have to stay after it. Each time you go through the filtering process, you are gaining skills at shopping in this venue.

And remember, your impulse to wear a suit is exactly right. It is, in the end, the only way for a man to be dressed up. Everything else is casual wear. For any occasion where the people and the venue really matter, a suit is the way to go. It just doesn't have to break the bank.

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