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Meet the Man Who Dresses Your Hotel Staff

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You probably don't think twice about how your bellhop or your front-desk clerk looks, as long as they schlep your bags and check you in quickly. But as we found out when we got our [very own Fashion 26 concierge uniform](#), a lot of effort goes into making hotel employees look good. Just ask Alan Steinger.

His company, [Top Hat Imagewear](#), outfits hundreds of hotel workers around the world, and as the owner and head designer, Steinger is the brains of the operation. Since he has the weight of the hotel world's human style on his shoulders, we wanted to find out what makes him tick. Here's what we found out between being measured and pinned for our own hotel uniform fitting.



One of Steinger's favorite hotel uniforms.

Some hotel uniforms are part of a master plan

“During the initial conversation we learn if the hotel is driving the bus or if they’d like us to drive the bus,” says Steinger. “With a new build, sometimes we work with the architect or with the interior designer. Sometimes it’s the owner, and most often the management team.”

All those boutique hotels aren’t as unique as they think they are

“They typically want to look like they dressed their employees at Barneys. Then they just change around the colors. A lot of hotels ask us to think out of the box but at the end of the day they usually go with a safe color, whether it’s charcoal or espresso.”

Inspiration can come from the movies, the runway... or the owner’s closet

“When we did the St. Regis Bora Bora, they wanted the uniforms to reflect the movie *Casablanca*. Often, an owner may love a particular jacket he has in his own repertoire and might ask us to be inspired by that jacket and carry that over into what we present.” When Steinger has more freedom to create what he likes, he turns to his archives of ideas. “If it’s an iconic property I’m going to look at how people dressed in the 40s, 50s or whatever, and update that. If it’s a boutique market, I go to top European websites and stores and flavor my design with what those designers are showing, whether it’s skinny pants or short blazers.”

Maybe hotels should crank the air conditioning ...

Comfort is key, says Steinger, and Top Hat’s biggest challenge seems to be temperature. “Whether it’s a southern climate or even in the northern properties, everybody seems to run hot,” he says. “So we have to work with fabrics and construction that breathe, and are not overly warm to wear.”

“Local” and “Green” are trends in hotel uniforms, too

“One of the primary things we’re proud of is that we produce right here in New York,” says Steinger of his Long Island-based factory. “In this day and age most clothing is imported, so I think it’s important that we make in the U.S. We’re also very attuned to green, eco-friendly practices. If a client wants to go natural we’re prepared to make our garment using natural fibers and stay away from anything synthetic.”

The hotels that make the man that makes the uniforms ...

Steinger travels a lot—and well. “I love the [Plaza Athénée](#) in Paris,” he says. “We’ve been doing the New York City

[Athenee](#) uniforms for many years. Both hotels are to die for. On the boutique side, I love the [Only & Only Palmilla](#) in Los Cabos and La Samanna in St. Martin.”

Asking him about his favorite uniforms is akin to asking him to pick a favorite child. “I love everything that I’m working on at the moment. The new stuff gets me excited. But I also love what we did for the “new” [Plaza](#). Even more so when I saw Mariah Carey dressed up as the doorman wearing our uniform in one of her recent music videos.”

When not in uniform ...

“I’m a clothing junkie,” says Steinger. “I lean towards European designers such as Prada and Armani. I also wear a lot of stuff that we make ourselves. I don’t like to wear any one thing all the time. I put myself together, if you will. I mix it up.”

For more on Top Hat’s wide range of uniform styles, visit their [website](#). And now, next time you admire your concierge’s tie, you’ll have a good idea where it came from.

[*Images: Courtesy Top Hat*]