

Suit Man

Custom clothier Jonathan Smith makes Horry County a hub for men's fashion.

Think fashion capitals. Paris or New York come to mind, but never Horry County. Until now.

Jonathan Smith, creator of cutting-edge menswear, lives and works on a farm near the town of Nichols. It's an unlikely place for a style maker, but after living in places bigger and noisier, Jonathan and wife Mary are glad to be back home. And the apparel that stems from Jonathan's farmstead office sets the fashion world on fire.

Tailor to the All-stars

It's the perfect setup for a self-styled country boy and sports fan who dresses the well-heeled and the well-known

under his label called Bespoke Carolina. (Bespoke is a British term for "custom-made.") "I fly to most of my clients anyway," Jonathan explains.

A majority of those 500-plus clients are professional athletes, whose beefy biceps and towering statures defy the norm. "These guys can't just walk into a store and find clothes that fit," he explains. "And they can afford to have their clothes made." Most Bespoke Carolina suits run \$800 to \$1,800.

After stints with retailers and a national company, Jonathan struck out on his own in the 1990s. His big break came when Atlanta football star Deion Sanders got Jonathan's number from

Jonathan Smith designs stylish men's fashions such as this sensational tuxedo down on his Horry County farm.

an oversize man whose stylish threads caught his eye.

Good Word of Mouth

Deion spread the word, and Jonathan soon became known as “Suit Man” to athletes and coaches. “It snowballed,” says Jonathan. “I’d go to measure one guy in the locker room, and before I knew it, I’d be working with the whole team.”

Robert Parish played for the Charlotte Hornets when he hooked up with Jonathan. “I haven’t been able to buy off-the-rack since before high school,” says the 7’1” former center. “Jonathan keeps me looking good. He’s not afraid to say, ‘That’s not in style anymore.’”

Jonathan’s clients value his sense of style, but they rave about his attention to detail. Former Cleveland Cavaliers coach Paul Silas relies on Jonathan to organize his wardrobe. “He keeps records and makes sure I don’t buy suits that look like what I already have,” Paul says.

Superstars aren’t the only ones stepping out in Jonathan’s suits. David Gooden, a Myrtle Beach communications executive, is among many Grand Strand businessmen who look



NASCAR legend Richard Petty wows Talladega fans in a Bespoke Carolina suit.



left: Jonathan dresses big men such as former NBA coach Paul Silas with Hall of Fame style. **above:** Jonathan carefully coordinates accessories with suits ready for delivery to sports-celebrity clients.

to Jonathan for fashion. “The key is that he knows how to measure,” notes David. “Jonathan knows the fabrics, so it always comes out right.”

Suiting Up Made Easy

It’s no secret that most men don’t like to shop. So Jonathan’s clients—and their wives—appreciate his outfitting savvy.

Lynda Petty, wife of NASCAR superstar Richard Petty, notes how Jonathan makes style easy. “He pulled some beautiful outfits together one day, and all I could think was, ‘How will I remember what goes with what?’” she recalls. “So he numbered everything for us. It took extra time, but he’s like that.”

“Jonathan is a great guy who

makes great clothes,” says financial advisor Danny Fontana. “I’m horrible with clothes, but with Jonathan I don’t have to do anything.”

Getting it right is what Jonathan is about. “You get one shot,” he says. “If you don’t come through with integrity, reliability, and, of course, the ability to fit a suit, you don’t get a second shot.”

Jonathan credits Mary—who manages the books and the orders—for giving him time to provide the service his customers count on. “I do the things he hates to do,” she says with a smile. “But it makes us a great team.”

KATIE MCELVEEN

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Tips for a Well-Dressed Gent

Follow these guidelines from “Suit Man” Jonathan Smith to look your dapper best.

- A white cotton or linen pocket square gives a suit a splash of panache. Fold it with a straight edge or with corners up.
- French cuffs and stylish cuff links show you care about your image.
- Dirty or scuffed shoes ruin a great outfit. Keep footwear nice with regular polishing.
- Neckwear has no purpose other than to look good, so wear a tie that expresses your individuality.
- Small knots in ties are dated. Instead, opt for a full Windsor or whatever knot your dad taught you.
- A suit looks better longer if you have it dry-cleaned only when it’s truly dirty. If it’s just wrinkled, have it pressed instead.

E-mail your fashion questions to Jonathan at bespoke@sccoast.net.