

FAREWELL FAST HELLO BESPOKE

I've just spent the last hour humming and hawing in front of my monitor, contemplating leather colour combinations, and asking myself, "pointed or round toe?" before finally clicking the "place order" button on PoppyBarley.com. Once submitted, my design lands in Poppy Barley's Mexico studio, where its artisans will handcraft my shoes. An original shoe last is made for every new order, and the price point is hard to beat. My custom shoes came to \$178.00, not too bad when compared to designer shoes off the rack.



Artisans at work

In six to eight weeks a pair of robin's egg blue flats will arrive at my door. I'll slip into my first pair of perfectly fitted shoes made to my exact foot measurements and custom pickings, like a modern urban Cinderella.

Poppy Barley, Edmonton's much-buzzed-about, made-to-measure footwear company is in its first year of business. In an economy of major clothing chains offering thousands of off-the-rack options at "fast fashion" prices, founders and sisters Kendall and Justine Barber decided there had to be a better way. Poppy Barley was launched with the mission of providing affordable, fitted women's footwear to customers via a user-friendly website. The Barbers recognized women

were facing some major fit issues when finding shoes, specifically boots – a Canadian wardrobe staple. Women with wide calves, high arches, narrow heels, wide feet, etc. were purchasing boots that didn't really fit, because they didn't have a better option. The sisters set out to build a company that fused the traditional art of handmade shoemaking with a modern, efficient online service.

"What makes Poppy Barley unique is we are providing a solution to an actual problem," says Kendall. "The human body is incredibly custom and yet most footwear is mass manufactured to one measurement, which is foot length. We wanted to provide women with the option to design their own footwear, provide their foot and leg measurements, and we could deliver perfectly fitted boots and shoes".



"We knew that technology was becoming available for mass customization to be more prevalent. Without the new technology and tools, even ten years ago, we wouldn't have been able to provide the service we do now. It would have been very expensive and much more challenging."

With these technological advances, custom style is affordable, and the demand for made to measure is on

FASHION.

An increase in made-to-measure choices has Edmonton consumers exiting the malls in search of quality and fit.

By Janis Galloway



the rise. In Edmonton, more custom fashion providers such as Poppy Barley are popping up and those already in business are noticing an increase in clients looking for the bespoke treatment.

for the benefits of fit, quality and uniqueness. "I see couture as a great compliment to ready-to-wear. If you're looking for a unique design, specific fit or just wonderful high quality textiles, you are a couture client."



Designer Kathleen Todoruk

Just down the stairs from the Poppy Barley headquarters in the Mercer Building is Todoruk Designs, the custom design atelier owned by Kathleen Todoruk. For more than 20 years, the designer has worked with clients one-on-one to create custom couture pieces from casual daywear to intricately designed cocktail dresses and gowns. Her clients first focus is a unique garment, with fit equally as important. Todoruk has seen an increase in clientele over the last few years and feels confident the demand will only grow.

"It's difficult for the ready-to-wear world to meet the specific needs of all -- that's where couture comes into play. We all look to invest in custom design in our homes, our food and our music playlists. I've seen a trend in specialization in all facets of our lives."

Todoruk describes her clients as young professionals, retired globetrotters, and "partynistas". They invest in couture pieces

Mike Zouhri, owner of Amedeo Exclusive located in Edmonton City Centre, offers custom designed men's suits, pants, blazers, vests, shirts and more. He believes consumers are becoming more educated about quality and fit and want more for their money. That's what keeps customers coming back to Amedeo and avoiding "off the rack" options.

"Custom garments last longer because they fit better. Better fit means less wear and erosion, hence a longer lasting garment. Also, well fitted clothes simply look better. And then there is style. You can always find your perfect garment with custom because it's made to your specifications".

"As for off the rack garments, well, nobody is a perfect medium or large. Those sizes are made for the masses with the closest approximations to the bell curve they can find. That same mass-production process means off the rack also skips out on quality in ways most people don't check. Check out the non-functional buttons on any off-the-rack suit including high brands - you always get functionality with custom."

As technology allows, trend forecasters believe custom options will become the norm for large chain stores, specifically online. Many web boutiques such as eShakti.com already offer customized options such as hem and sleeve length. Made-to-measure, however is still considered a unique service with startups like Poppy Barley leading the trend in an online platform. I can't wait for my shoes to arrive -- sans prince!