

High Income Style



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Couture versus Ready-to-Wear

"What's the difference between couture and ready-to-wear?"

It's a question that's been hitting my inbox a lot of late from women all over the world. They may have been reading high fashion magazines like "W" or "Vogue" or are thinking about upgrading their wardrobes, and are wondering what, exactly, the difference is between these designer categories.

Basically, it boils down to fit - and money.

COUTOUR (koo TOOR) is the French word for "sewing." Couture clothes are those that are fitted and sewn specifically for a client, often requiring several fittings for an exacting fit. The clothes may be specifically designed for the client, such as a one-of-a-kind wedding dress or a one-of-a-kind red carpet ensemble, or they may be part of a designer's couture collection, which are the pieces the designer shows that are available for custom fit.

Typically, couture pieces are made of fine fabrics or feature extensive hand work (like beading or embroidery) that drive up the price to thousands or even tens of thousands PER PIECE. Because of the cost, couture clothing, which once had 35,000 regular customers during its heyday after World War II, has an ever-shrinking regular buying base of about 1,200 people worldwide today.

Couture is also known as made-to-measure or bespoke (British).



Valentino Couture
FirstView.com

HAUTE COUTURE (oht koo TOOR) means "high sewing," and is the term reserved exclusively by those European fashion houses that offer made-to-measure apparel in or around Paris and belong to the *Fédération Française de la Couture* (which began as the *Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture* in 1868 by Charles Frederick Worth). Following strict guidelines regarding number of pieces shown per collection and number of collections shown per year, current members include venerable fashion houses like Balenciaga, Chanel, Hermès, and Valentino.

You can learn more about the *Fédération Française de la Couture* at ModeaParis.com

READY-TO-WEAR, or prêt-à-porter (prêt a poor TAY) is designer apparel that's made ready-to-wear in standard sizes and sold through boutiques, better department stores, mail order, and online. While consumers can have pieces tailored to fit after purchase, customization is not included in the cost of ready-to-wear apparel. Many brand-name designers, like Vera Wang and Carolina Herrera, only show ready-to-wear collections, but still create a handful of couture pieces upon request for influential clients.



Valentino RTW
FirstView.com

So when you read in a fashion magazine or hear on television that designers are showing their ready-to-wear collections, you know that those are the pieces that you'll find in their boutiques or in department stores come the new fashion season. Couture collections are those shown to high-paying clients who either go to the fashion house directly to be fitted, or who order from the designer's "look book" and have pieces made up from the measurements the designer has on file from the client's previous fittings.

If you like to read the society pages to see who's wearing what, you'll notice that socialites who can afford to buy couture often say so. The caption under a photo might read, "Jane Doe in Versace, Susan Smith in Donna Karan, and Tiffany Jones in Givenchy couture." Translation? Jane and Susan bought their gowns ready-to-wear, while Tiffany had hers custom made.

So should YOU indulge in designer labels as your income allows?

It depends.

Yes, designer labels have a certain *cachet* and are associated with an elevated income, and yes, you can look like you have a lot more money than you do by buying your favorite labels at discount designer websites or at overstock retailers like TJ Maxx and Marshall's.

But you have to be careful of the message you're sending.

If you're a receptionist dressing like a jet setter, it will raise eyebrows - particularly your employer's. Your boss may wonder how you're funding your clothing obsession. Are you living in a dive and driving a junk heap? Maxing out your credit cards? Skimming a little off the company coffers (which is how one fashionable thief was caught, showing up to work every day in designer apparel)? Whatever the reason, unless you're very vocal about how you cleverly come by your high-end finds, your luxury image may have your higher-ups questioning your ability to handle money - and stall your career in its tracks.

Similarly, if you have a job with a typically high income (doctor, lawyer, stock broker) but are running around in discount apparel, you'll have people wondering just how bad you are at your job that you're not able to afford nicer things. True, illness, school loans, job losses, and other financial hardships happen, even to people with high incomes. But if you're dressing discount in a designer environment, people will begin to question your ability - and your income will suffer. Call it human nature.

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So how can you dress appropriately for your income WITHOUT raising eyebrows? By keeping the number of labels you wear in line with the amount of your paycheck.

If you have a lower income, one or two pieces by your favorite designer (like a jacket or pair of jeans) would not be out of line - provided you buy them second hand (like on eBay) or at an overstock outlet like Loehmann's or TJ Maxx.

Have a higher income? A status handbag, watch, or pair of shoes will instantly telegraph your position. Even if you don't care about such things, your status-y clients will, and since people talk, you may be surprised by how your business grows by adding a few of these pieces to your wardrobe.

And who knows?



Prada Shoes
Bluefly.com

If you play the game right and meet your goals, you may someday find yourself seriously contemplating whether you should buy a special piece ready-to-wear, or have your favorite designer whip it up just for you from his couture collection...

Want some specific income guidelines on buying designer apparel? Download a copy of [Business Wear Magic](#) to see just what pieces you should be wearing at each level of the corporate ladder. It's information you won't find ANYWHERE else (I know - I've looked!).



Personal Uniforms: The Secret of the Ultra Chic

Coco Chanel. Audrey Hepburn. Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis.

The very names conjure up images of their distinct personal styles, where simple lines, glamorous accessories, and effortless chic reigned supreme. Reporters recorded their every move, and women everywhere scrambled to copy their clothes.

But why?

Why did these women, among a handful of others, set the standard for consummate chic? Was it because they had an avid audience and a cooperative press corps? Waif-like figures and deep, deep pockets? Easy access to haute couture?



Yes and no. While celebrity, fashion, and money have all mixed well for centuries, these women don't have the lock on chic. You probably know someone yourself who is always well dressed yet virtually unknown outside of your town.

No, the biggest reason these women left their mark, I believe, is because they both knew their bodies and understood the power of the personal uniform. They knew what worked for them and wore it well, never straying far from a handful of silhouettes. As the years passed, all they did to update their look was to change colors, textures, or cuts. They didn't blindly follow the latest trends; they only incorporated those that were among their best looks.

This thought came to me as I was reading a trade journal article about fashion at the Golden Globes. There were the usual blurbs about the good, the bad, and the ugly, but there was also a lot of room devoted to the fact that Reese Witherspoon's vintage white and gold Chanel dress had made the rounds at the Golden Globes before - on Kirsten Dunst, in 2003. The writer scolded Reese and her stylist for not doing their homework.

Now frankly, this kind of misguided obsession is one of the reasons fashion and glamour are in the sorry states they're in these days. Everyone is so wrapped up following designers and who-wore-what-when that few have the knowledge and confidence to step out and make their own style statement. Not in the "Let's see if I can top the worst dressed list with this outfit," kind of way, like Mariah Carey or Johnny Depp did that night (Johnny, please! We love you! Comb your hair and put on a proper tux so we can swoon!), but in the "I know clothes and I know what works for me" way of Coco, Audrey, and Jacqueline.

These women knew their bodies, knew what worked for them, and had the confidence to wear it well. They didn't follow fashion; they lead it.

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Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel grew up in an orphanage and was determined to make something of herself. She had a flair for fashion and opened a shop in Paris around 1913 with money given to her by a paramour. Unable to afford haute couture fabrics and disliking the frilly styles of the time that did nothing for her boyish frame, Chanel began adapting menswear into women's wear in the 1920's, using men's trousers, shirts, and military uniforms as her templates, and men's sportswear fabrics for her own. She then contradicted the mannish looks with very feminine accessories, like big hair bows, silk flower lapel pins, and chunky, shiny jewelry.



Coco Chanel

Audrey Hepburn also had a boyish, H-framed body that did not work well with the tiny waist and wide skirts so popular in the 1950's. She opted for lean lines that forced attention to her face, where her cutting edge hairstyles, heavy brows, and unique necklines kept fashion followers worshipping at her feet.



Audrey Hepburn

The 1950's hourglass silhouette didn't do it for Jacqueline Kennedy either, because she had the small shoulders, small breasts, long waist, and wide hips typical of the A-framed body. So instead of trying to emphasize her waist, she opted for A-line skirts and sleeveless sheathes that skimmed her body and forced attention to her head, neck, and shoulders. Beautifully coiffed hair and eye-catching necklaces kept her face in focus.



Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis

In looking over the overly-styled starlets at the Golden Globes, it's obvious that such knowledge and confidence is in short supply today. While there are a few celebrities who consistently dress well for public appearances and red carpet events (and have garnered fashion and cosmetic endorsement deals as a result), you'd be hard-pressed to find one that has a definable style, much less one that subscribes to the concept of personal uniforms. The closest, perhaps, are Oprah Winfrey, who has exercised her way into an svelte figure that she now shows off with form-fitting clothes and killer belts, and Tina Turner, who, even in her sixties, has a great pair of legs and isn't afraid to use them.

So what, exactly, is a personal uniform?

It's a collection of basic pieces that fit you well, highlight your assets, and make you feel great whenever you wear them - whether you had an hour to dress or five minutes to get out the door. These are the clothes and accessories that work in harmony with your body to make you feel taller, slimmer, bustier, hipper, or whatever, and that consistently bring you compliments. Once you've established what those elements are for you, work current versions into your wardrobe each season so that your look is always evolving yet consistent.

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Now some people think this is limiting, wearing the same silhouettes over and over. In fact, just the opposite is true. While others are struggling to follow the crowd and make the latest "of the moment" look work for them, those who know their best looks are wearing them, looking great, and further refining their distinctive style. It's like the difference between taking a few tennis lessons, a few golf lessons, a few swim lessons, and a few gymnastics lessons, never getting proficient in any of them, versus devoting oneself exclusively to the study of ballet. When you do one thing for a long time, you hone your skills through constant study. When you do a smattering of things, you never advance very far.

The same is true with fashion. When you start with the latest trends without a second thought to your own body, you never advance beyond beginner. When you start with your own body and evaluate trends based on how they work for you, you master the art of dressing yourself.

And so it was with Coco, Audrey, and Jacqueline. They never assumed the latest trends were right for them. They knew their bodies, learned what shapes worked best for them, and then wore updated variations of the same looks over and over for the rest of their lives.

You can do the same. Once you determine your best silhouettes, create a personal uniform based on your own best looks, and wear it consistently, adapting it each season. It no time at all, you'll [become the fashion leader of your set](#).



Should Your Clothes Be Custom Made?

Ready-to-wear apparel is great. You can walk in a store, try it on, and if it fits your body and budget, you can take it home right then. It sure beats the heck out of taking the time to make it yourself or hiring someone to custom-make something, right?

Maybe, maybe not.

If clothes shopping for you is an ongoing exercise in frustration because of your too-long legs, an odd fabric allergy, size-defiant proportions or whatever, maybe it's time to pass the mall and head to a custom clothier instead. For not only will you get to choose your own fabrics and trims, you'll also get clothes that fit correctly regardless of whatever figure challenge you present.

Now I know what you may be thinking: "That's too expensive."

But chances are, it's not. If you add up the cost of buying clothes and paying to have them altered, or buying a special size by mail order and paying to have it shipped, or even burning time and gas to run all over town looking for something that fits, you may find that you'll spend less time and money having something custom made. I encourage you to do the math.

Now if you still think that custom apparel is a bit extravagant, consider this: men's ready-to-wear clothing has been around for nearly two hundred years - since before the sewing machine came along in the 1850's -- but women's ready-to-wear has only been widely available since the 1920's. Why? Because back when women wore corsets, manufacturers had trouble creating clothes that fit! It wasn't until the loose-fitting straight silhouettes became popular in the 20's that manufacturers could profit from selling women's ready-to-wear clothes. So what did women do before that? They either sewed their own clothes or had them custom made.



1922 Coat dress
by Patou

See how this comes full circle?

So who should consider having her clothes custom made? I suggest you try a custom clothier if you:

- Routinely have to have your clothes altered to fit correctly.
- Have trouble getting certain types of garments to fit, like tops, skirts, or slacks.
- Have special requirements, like fabric allergies, medical issues (wheelchair bound, arthritis/can't fasten buttons), or post-surgical needs.
- Need a special occasion ensemble, gown, or costume.
- Want beautifully made, one-of-a-kind clothes.

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The best place to find a custom clothier near you is through associations like:

- **The Custom Tailors and Designers Association of America**
<http://www.ctda.com/newsite/Find-a-Tailor.html>
- **The Professional Association of Custom Clothiers**
<http://www.paccprofessionals.org/clothiers/clothiersMain.html>

Or you can try various custom clothing sites online where you input your measurements and they customize their selections for you. Popular sites include:

- **Baron Boutique**
<http://www.baronboutique.com>

Classic silk suits, coats, and dresses from Nepal.

- **Dockers**
<http://www.dockers.com> (USA)
<http://www.dockers.co.uk> (UK)

Get custom-fitted pants and shorts from this favorite casual pant maker. Available in misses, petite, and plus sizes.

- **Lands' End**
<http://www.landsend.com> (USA)
<http://www.landsend.co.uk> (UK)

Custom order jeans, chinos, blouses, and outerwear from this venerable mail order house.

- **Nick's Collections**
<http://www.nickscollections.com>

Get skirts, suits, dresses, and more from this popular Hong Kong tailor.

- **Ravis Tailor**
<http://www.ravistailor.com>

Get beautiful custom classics from this 3rd generation Thai clothier.



RavisTailor.com

Getting properly fitting clothes shouldn't be stressful, even if your body defies standard ready-to-wear sizing. If you don't sew, find a clothier that can customize clothes for you. Not only will it be money well spent, you'll look great THE FIRST TIME.

And wouldn't that be a nice change of pace?

Executive Training: Your Fast Track To Success?

Should you consider executive training?

It's a question that's been hitting my inbox a lot of late, mostly from women who have read and implemented the information in my [image ebooks](#) and now find that their polished appearance has gained them access to groups of people who are polished in appearance, manners, and culture. While these women are enjoying the attention and respect of these circles, some are feeling a little unsure of themselves in the cultural areas and are wondering if executive training is worth the time and expense.



My answer?

Absolutely!

Executive training, also known as executive finishing school, teaches people how to dine, drink, converse, correspond, and behave appropriately in various cultures and situations. From learning which fork to use to what gifts to give when, executive training offers polish to those "diamonds in the rough" so they can shine brilliantly wherever they go.

But it's not just for executives. Sales people, entrepreneurs, politicians, rock stars, and athletes - anyone who feels awkward in social situations can benefit from executive training. So can you. Did you know that Sean Connery underwent similar training in order to play James Bond? He did - with great success.

But training can be expensive and time consuming, depending on what skills you seek. Here are your options:

Swiss Finishing Schools

The legendary [Swiss finishing schools](#) offer the most complete, well-rounded cultural education available. You'll learn how to dress properly, run a household, entertain, observe protocol, employ staff, converse in multiple languages, organize large events, and use public relations to your advantage. You'll also study architecture, interior design, antiques, music, theater, and art, with frequent field trips around Switzerland and to surrounding countries. By the time you leave, you'll not only be able to set up and run a large household (some of which, like embassies or centuries-old estates, are the size of small corporations) you'll also know how to entertain for various business or social or functions, hostessing five or five thousand with equal finesse. Royals, aristocrats, diplomats, and wealthy business

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owners have been sending their daughters to Switzerland since the 1950's to partake of this crème de la crème training.



[Institut Villa Pierrefeu](#), Switzerland

Length of study: 3-9 months

Location: Switzerland

Cost: Approximately US \$50,000

Executive Training

Executive training consultations, classes, and seminars are offered by various people and organizations around the world and present an abbreviated version of the Swiss finishing school: they take out the home management and fine arts lessons and focus on personal appearance, etiquette, fine dining, and protocol. Classes can last a day, a weekend, a week, or meet weekly for six or eight weeks, depending on the trainer.

You can find [image](#) and [etiquette consultants](#) locally, nationally, or internationally, depending on where you live. Just go to your favorite search engine and type in "executive training + your state (or country)" and begin your due diligence search. Check curriculum, training, and testimonials. There are plenty of good programs out there, so you should be able to find one suited to your needs.

Length of study: Varies; can be days or weeks

Location: Varies

Cost: Approximately US\$450-\$15,000 depending on program length and content

Do-It-Yourself

You can also undertake your own executive-style training by reading books and attending classes that pertain to your areas of interest. Take makeup classes, read [wardrobe management books](#), attend a wine tasting or [take a wine class](#), try your hand at French cooking, take a flower arranging class, go to the ballet, opera, and theater, and visit museums to learn about different artists and periods. Take [speaking](#) and acting classes to feel comfortable in front of large groups. You can work at your own pace and as your budget allows, taking more time in areas that interest you more, less in areas that don't.

Length of study: Varies; can last a lifetime

Location: At home, libraries, museums, theaters, etc.

Cost: 0 - thousands, depending on your interests

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Yes, doing it yourself is the least expensive, but it's also the most time consuming, as it may take you years to learn everything. When you turn to professionals and structured programs, you're paying for the shortcut. So don't discount it if you're in a hurry to learn.

Whichever approach you choose, DO invest in yourself by learning [how to dress](#), speak, and behave in various situations. You'll not only have more confidence in yourself, you'll also garner the respect and confidence of others, which almost always leads to more opportunities.

