



PHOTOS: DON HEALY/Leader-Post

# THE ART OF ALTERATIONS

Masters working in a limited field

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LEADER-POST

It's a dying art. Professionally altering garments takes patience, attention to detail and the ability to create on the fly. It involves much more than merely taking up or letting down a hem. It can involve a total transformation — something that takes time and a keen eye.

In today's world of disposable fashions, finding someone with the expertise to alter quality garments can prove challenging. Some higher-end shops and design studios have a full-time, in-house tailor or seamstress. Each tackles an array of specialized adjustments. Here are some of Regina's masters, who are preserving the art of alterations:

**VICTOR SILVA**  
Works for Colin Perkwitsch at Colin O'Brian Man's Shoppe  
Specializes in tailoring men's apparel

"Victor is the king of tailoring in Saskatchewan," insists Perkwitsch. "Tailoring is really a lost art ... I have never worked with a tailor of his calibre."

"When you're selling very expensive garments, the tailoring has to be the same calibre."

Trained as a master tailor in Portugal, 71-year-old Silva started working when he was only 11. He started working for Colin O'Brian when the store opened in 1996, and has been the exclusive in-store tailor for the past six years, altering only garments purchased at the store.

Silva was trained to develop his own patterns, so he can make a suit from scratch — a skill that comes in handy when doing major alterations.

But there are limits to what can be done.

Men's garments can be altered to accommodate a weight gain or loss of 15 to 20 pounds, Perkwitsch said. More than that and the integrity of the garment is lost. "You could do it, but it just doesn't look right."

To alter a garment at the waist, "more than three inches is just too much," he said.

Silva does everything from shortening sleeves on shirts and jackets to taking in suits, lowering collars and even recutting jackets.

Athletic guys with muscular chests and small waists can prove challenging to fit, so they need off-the-rack garments altered. The same is true for very rotund individuals. And men with deformities tend to need garments altered.

"If something is not alterable to where we are comfortable, we will custom order a garment," Perkwitsch said. "For those tougher to fit, we may need to go with a made-to-measure garment."



Seamstress, Dianne Pockett, left, with Linda Paul, right, owner of Thee Lingerie Shoppe in Regina which specializes in altering the women's intimate apparel it sells.

**DIANNE POCKETT**  
Works for Linda Paul at Thee Lingerie Shoppe  
Specializes in altering women's intimate apparel and swimwear, but can alter or sew pretty much anything

"No two people are the same," says Paul matter-of-factly.

So getting a bra to fit properly may require some alterations — whether that involves adding a pocket to hold a prosthetic form for someone who's had a mastectomy, altering straps or taking in the band around the rib cage.

"It's not often that we make bras bigger," Pockett points out. "But I take bras in quite often."

"To the best of our ability, we match up the bra to the woman," Paul says. "It's as close as you can come to a customized bra."

Swimwear may need to be redesigned, explains Pockett, "turning it from a halter to a regular style to give more support, so the customer feels more comfortable."

Laundry mishaps may lead to undergarments requiring Pockett's reconstruction skills. An underwire may need to be replaced, for example. Or if someone has lost weight, a bra may need to be taken in.

But it only makes sense to alter a bra if it's new or "in really good shape," Paul and Pockett both emphasize.

"If it's lost its elastic, it's not doing you any justice," Pockett says. "If it's more than two years old, it's time for a new bra."

A friendly reminder that all pre-owned undergarments should be washed before having them altered. And shops like Paul's only do alterations on garments they sell.

Pockett started sewing at her grandmother's knee when she was in Grade 2. "I used to make clothes for my Barbies."

Then she started adapting patterns.

Pockett studied fashion technique and design at Sheridan College in Oakville, Ont. For about the past 20 years, she has been sewing for Regina-based Helen Anne Designs in her "spare time."

While she welcomes a challenge, Pockett is quick to point out that "there's a limit to what we can do."

Some people want undergarments to work miracles. Sorry! Even perfectly fitting undergarments altered by a master seamstress can't make you go down three dress sizes!

"We can only do so much here," Pockett says with a chuckle.

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Victor Silva, who is referred to as "the king of tailoring in Saskatchewan" and his wife, Aurelina Silva, who is also a skilled tailor work at Colin O'Brian Man's Shoppe located at 1825 Hamilton St.

# Alterations

## Changes should be limited

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### LARISA GAL

**Works for Dean Renwick Design Studio  
Does alterations on both men's and women's garments**

"You name it, we do it — mending, hemming, taking things in, remaking a whole garment and turning it into something new, tailoring things," Renwick says.

Whether it's menswear or womenswear, pants can be hemmed, sleeves can be shortened or a garment can be taken in.

So when does it make sense to invest in alterations and when doesn't it?

If it's your favourite garment that is now too big, have it altered, Renwick recommends. Or if you got a great deal on a quality garment, such as a \$300 jacket on sale for \$150, it's worth investing \$70 or \$80 to have it altered.

"People alter better-quality clothes, not the more disposable clothes."

Quality garment or not, there's only so much that can be altered.

"I only like to go down one to 1½ sizes, or you're changing the look of the garment," Renwick says.

For a garment that needs to be made bigger, panels can be added. But it takes a professional eye and skill to transform a garment properly. Otherwise, the alteration may not look right.

Prices for alterations depend on the complexity of the task, he explains. For example, a straight hem costs \$15 to \$20, shortening sleeves is \$35 to \$45, and taking in a lined suit jacket runs about \$55 to \$75.

Alterations on wedding gowns and grad dresses are common. They're done at an hourly rate "because they are a lot of work." At Renwick's design studio, the rate is \$30 an hour.

"Alterations need to be done properly," Renwick says. "It's a skill."

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*DON HEALY/Leader-Post*  
Sewstress Larisa Gal works on an item at Dean Renwick

Seamstress Laysa Bai works on an item at Dean Renwick  
Design Studio in Regina.