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*From the Baltimore Sun*

## Well suited

### A Pikesville clothier joins other retailers in creating a line of menswear with the customer in mind

By Tanika White  
Sun reporter

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Edward Steinberg's customers talk to him when they come in to his men's clothing shop in Pikesville.

They might say, "This sweater is great, but I wish it had a little more room." Or maybe, "I would buy this jacket, but I'm really looking for something with pockets."

Until recently, Steinberg, president and owner of J.S. Edwards, could only shrug his shoulders or nod in agreement. Now he can do something about it.

This year, Steinberg and a group of 40 other menswear retailers around the country created their own label of men's clothing, made with customers' needs in mind.

The label, Judson Wade, is a sophisticated mix of sports coats, sweaters, shirts, ties and slacks that Steinberg and his peers developed using other brands' designs as templates.

"We might tweak the fabric on it, or we might add a zipper, or we might say, 'I think that sweater needs pockets,'" says Steinberg. "These are subtle things that we feel we've taken from great designers and marketed them altogether into one new product."

Steinberg says this is the first time such a grass-roots collaboration has taken place among retailers.

"This is a label that is created by us, with a certain image, based on the sophistication, the taste level and the experience of us in the industry. I've been in this business for 23 years. I thought, 'Why can't I create a line?'"

What Steinberg and the other Judson Wade retailers are doing is a smart idea, says Tom Holownia, principal and brand strategist at Blended Thinking, a marketing and brand consulting firm in the San Francisco Bay area.

"It's like a co-op almost," says Holownia. "I think it's a great idea from a brand development perspective. I actually think it's a brilliant idea. They're pooling their collective resources so they can compete and differentiate from some of the well-known department stores who have their own labels already - labels that are already very similar to the designer labels anyway."

Steinberg says owners of local shops know what customers want.

"As retailers, we pick up on things that manufacturers - not so much true designers but manufacturers - just don't," he says. "We tried to put the line together thinking how our customers would."

For example, more men are layering clothing than ever before, Steinberg says. They may want to wear a collared shirt under a mock turtleneck and zip-up sweater, and then top it off with a light sports coat. But when they go to shop for these items at department stores or upscale specialty stores, they may run into a few snags: The sweaters - often European cut - may be too snug. The zipper on the sweater may be too short, preventing the collared shirt underneath from showing properly. And it might be a challenge finding a jacket in a color that complements the ensemble.

Not to mention the hefty price tag for all those layers.

The Judson Wade brand takes those kinds of concerns into account, says Steinberg.

Judson Wade pieces are often coordinated - this jacket here can be paired with these two shirts there, this sweater and these three ties, for example. The fit is often a bit more generous than many other brands. And in some cases, zippers have been lengthened, linings have been pepped up with bold colors, pockets have been added and more.

"It all harmonizes together," says Jack Shniderman, president of Robert Vance Ltd., a menswear store in Chicago suburbs that is a part of the Judson Wade brand. "Our customers - customers who are shopping in the specialty venue - have expectations of superior product. They want high taste levels that will serve them well if they purchase it and as they wear it. It's our job to be the customers' advocate to make sure they get what they're expecting."

The retailers - who know each other from merchandisers' meetings throughout the years - gather as a committee twice a year to discuss what designs and details will work best for their customers. They then pick out fabrics. After that, a designer the committee hired helps to sketch designs, which are taken to manufacturers who produce and ship the clothes to stores.

The retailers use 15 to 20 manufacturers - most of them in the United States and many the same ones major brands use.

They base the Judson Wade look on other labels and designers to ensure style. And slight changes in details help keep prices less expensive, Steinberg says. Shirts sell from about \$95 to \$150. Sweaters are \$125 to \$250. Pants are priced between \$100 and \$150.

A light-blue mock-neck sweater in cashmere by popular menswear label Raffi, for example, sells at J.S. Edwards for \$347.50. A similar Judson Wade sweater, in an easier-to-match color - brown - mixes cashmere and silk wool and sells for \$137.50.

Branding expert Holownia, who hasn't seen the line, wonders whether the Judson Wade label might be at risk of offending the retailers' bigger-named suppliers - if the clothes are based on their original designs and don't differ enough.

But they are not knockoffs, Steinberg says. Rather, they're "reinterpretations."

"We're not trying to duplicate what Burberry's doing. We're not trying to do what Etro is doing," Steinberg says. "We're trying to be unique, putting the customers' needs into the process. But we're not designers."

He may not be a designer, but Steinberg has had his hand in menswear for the past 40 years. After graduating from Forest Park High School, Steinberg started working at 18 as a stock boy at Young's - a now-defunct local menswear shop. By the time he left 17 years later to open J.S. Edwards with his wife, Diane, Steinberg had been promoted to vice president of the eight-store chain.

That experience helps make Steinberg one of the premier go-to shop owners in Baltimore when it comes to menswear. Big names such as Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr., Les Matthews, chief of orthopedics at Union Memorial Hospital, and Steve Geppi, publisher of Baltimore magazine, swear by Steinberg's fashion sense.

"I've lived all over the country, and I've shopped all over the country," says Stanley F. Battle, president of [Coppin State University](#). "Eddie is the best, flat out hands down."

Customers seem to like the Judson Wade label, Steinberg says. The fall collection is nearly sold out, and the retailers went back to the drawing board this month to create the spring line.

Shniderman, of Robert Vance Ltd., says the line should be in more than 100 stores by next year.

Pikesville audiologist Roy Bordenick - who recently bought a pullover sweater and matching shirt from the Judson Wade collection - says he is impressed with the clothes' quality, price and "American" feel.

"I liked that fact that it was color-coordinated so that I didn't have to worry about looking for a sweater that matched this shirt," says Bordenick. "And the fit was very comfortable. Today, so much of the stuff is made overseas, and it may not be for an American build. It might be made for a much thinner build. With me, I don't like what you call 'fitted.' This, you can move around in, and you don't feel constricted."

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## Must-haves

Here are five things men want in their clothes, according to Edward Steinberg:

- **Comfort:** "Women don't care if their feet hurt as long as they look good. Guys aren't going to do that."
- **Functionality:** "They really want clothes they can get use out of. ... They're not going to buy a shirt they can only wear with one pair of pants."
- **Pockets:** "Guys love pockets on things. They don't carry purses, so they need places to put things."

- Help: "A lot of guys, they're not sure how to put things together. ... They want us to help them put outfits together."
- Women's approval: "Guys really want to know, 'Will my wife like this?' ... Men love compliments just like women do."

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