

## Tip Top turns back clock with new line

Grafton 1853 collection consists of nine pieces with a luxurious twist

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Looming over the foot of Bathurst St., the Tip Top Tailors sign on Lake Shore Blvd. is seen by 400,000 commuters every day.

Though it stands on what is now a condo building, the sign was originally installed to indicate the factory and office base of one of Canada's oldest retailers.

These days, the retailer is the newest one on the block to reach back to its roots and play the heritage card. History is dusty no more as brands of all stripes — think Hudson Bay Company and Burberry — sell their

Tip Top considers its Grafton 1853 suit "the only suit you need."



R. OLSEN/TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO

Tip Top Tailors has been dressing Canadian men for more than a century.

past to build on the future. Tip Top is doing just that with its Grafton 1853 collection, named after its founder and founding year.

Tip Top, which has 102 mostly mall-based stores across the country, was founded in 1909, but the company — through various mergers and acquisitions — including Jack Fraser stores and Mr. Big and Tall — actually dates back to 1853. The made-to-measure millinery, gentlemen's apparel and dry goods shop was founded by Irish immigrant James Grafton. It was originally called Gregson & Grafton.

Retailers are clinging to the heritage retail craze during these uncertain economic times since it seems nothing is more comforting than a label that has withstood the tests of other hard times. Tip Top is using Grafton 1853 as the name for its new luxury collection, which includes nine essential pieces.

The Grafton collection is about problem solving, says Rob Cannon, the vice-president of marketing and merchandising for Grafton Fraser, the Tip Top parent brand.

These pieces cost about 10 per cent more than the regular merchandise due to finer fabrications. And much of it is made in Canada or Italy rather than the Pacific overseas, he says.

"This line was built around the

perfect shirt (\$69.50)," Cannon says. "No iron, 100 per cent cotton, seams that don't twist or pucker, unbreakable buttons, extra length for tucking. Practical luxuries."

"There is also a suit (\$425.50), really the only suit you need," he adds. "If you travel a lot, and our customer travels, you just hang it overnight and the wrinkles drop out. The armholes are cut with some stretch so you can move comfortably. You can sit comfortably."

The Tip Top customer is the "moderate Canadian," says Cannon, neither high nor low end. A large proportion of the clientele are women who are shopping for men.

The goal of this collection — similar to Donna Karan's Five Easy Pieces phenomena of the 1980s — is to curate a base wardrobe for men on which they can build. "This is timeless stuff, classics that will last year over year as you add to it," he says.

Cannon points to modern twists, such as the cashmere shirt with a contrast collar and a leather zipper pull ("so much more fun than a boring cashmere V-neck") for \$149.50 as well as the perfect "layering T-shirt" for \$29.50.

The emphasis of this collection is on dressy clothes, and since Tip Top Tailors dresses scores of Canadian men expect this modern garments program to help clean up the dregs of casual Fridays across the country.