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simchahs

Suited For The Occasion

Choices abound in b'nai mitzvah wear, but tradition still sells.

Lauren Geldzahler

Special to the Jewish Times

From the end of August through mid-June, 12- and 13-year-olds in Jewish Baltimore have their weekends booked as solid as Daniel Radcliffe on a publicity tour for his latest Harry Potter film. How should we shop for our bar mitzvah boys and bat mitzvah girls, to prepare them for their time to shine?

For The Young Man

Tradition still rings true to the average bar mitzvah boy's choice of the cleancut suit, with nothing too ostentatious save a splash of color in the shirt or tie.

Gilbert Cohen, of Cohen's Clothiers in Cockeysville, says, "People want top quality and top of the line, because it's a top-of-the-line affair. Prices are higher than they used to be, but type and quality haven't changed for the 39 years that we've offered boys' suits."

Most of the suits at Cohen's are imported from Italy, and they are all wool — some blended with dacron — running from \$159.95 to \$375.

Brooks Brothers at the Inner Harbor only carries 100 percent wool suits, which start at \$500. Sam Winer, a suit specialist at the location and a 50-year veteran of the business, says the price is justified. "It may be a lot of money to spend on a kid. But people are proud, and it's a great occasion, and I hope it instills in the kid that it's important to be well-dressed. When a youngster dresses a little bit better, it makes him feel good about himself."

Mr. Winer said approximately 80 percent of people want a charcoal gray or dark blue suit. Mr. Cohen also talked in percentages on the subject, saying, "The vast majority, about 98 percent of people, want the suit to be dark and dressy — black, dark navy and some charcoal."

Brooks Brothers' top pick is a blue blazer with Cambridge gray pants. "With a white shirt or pale blue shirt, and a tie that has some burgundy

or dark gray or dark blue. Put a white handkerchief in the breast pocket and it really makes a great impression when he's up on the stage in shul," says Mr. Winer.

Suits will vary in terms of pleated versus non-pleated pants, and Mr. Winer recommends the former. "Flat fronts are usually better if you have a small *tuchas*. Pleated pants are a little bit fuller, and kids seem to prefer the pleated," he says.

There are other factors to bear in mind, such as the number of buttons on the blazer. "Primarily, people ask for the three-button suit," says Mr. Cohen. "Some the two-button models, but hardly ever."

There is also the question of cuff links versus barrel cuffs on the shirt sleeves. "I don't recommend cuff links for kids," says Mr. Winer, "because they are a pain in the butt. Ninety-eight percent wear barrel cuffs."

"Some choose a blue shirt, but well over 50 percent of boys will choose white."

"Many pick a tie that's monochromatic," Mr. Cohen continues. "The diagonal striped tie, that's very big," adds Mr. Winer.

"The tie is just something that complements the shirt," says Mr. Cohen. "A white shirt is nicely compatible with a blue tie, red tie or purple tie. Silver and charcoal ties are very dressy on a white shirt and black suit."

And, of course, you need dress shoes for the occasion. Mr. Cohen explains that, "It could be a lace shoe, it could be a slip-on, most are going to be black... The shoe has to look good, it has to be in the right price range, but fit is the primary driving force."

"Black shoes, mostly loafers," says Mr. Winer.

"A shine puts the whole outfit together."

Mr. Cohen says the best time to shop is two to three months in advance,



PHOTO ANDY COOK

but many people wait, because they think, 'My son is 13 years old, he could shoot up and grow 3 inches in a matter of weeks.' Many people wait between 30 and 60 days." Gilbert

Cohen cautions, "A very big factor to consider: The more voices that you have when the selection process is under way, the longer it takes because everyone has their own opinion."

Mr. Winer has seen plenty of characters come in uncomfortably close to their bar mitzvah dates, and even one family who came in on a Saturday morning. But most, he said, come two to three weeks in advance.

For The Young Woman

Rozi Cordish, the 27-year owner of Teens N Up in Stevenson, says bat mitzvah suit styles center on appropriateness in shul, "Conservative, but a little more special, with an accent... The girls don't want to look like their mothers when they go to work."

Eileen Rome, a buyer at Synchronicity in Pikesville, echoes Ms. Cordish's sentiment, saying, "When you're up at the *bimah*, the dress code should be respectful; her shoulders are covered, and not too much leg is showing."

"There are two kinds of kids," says Ms. Cordish. "Some can't be dressy enough, some want basic."

Teens N Up can customize outfits. "Sequins, pearls, rhinestones, I have swatch books for them to choose from — I've got soup to nuts," says Ms. Cordish.

"Colored gemstones are big," says Ms. Rome, "around the neckline or up by the waist. Maybe a little bit of sparkle, flowers, beads or bows."

"The more glitz, the more expensive,"



PHOTO ANDY COOK

Gilbert Cohen shows off a popular boys suit at Cohen's Clothiers in Timonium.

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