

## BUSINESS

# Casual look gaining a foothold at Fisher+Baker

Fisher+Baker menswear offers guys classic, sophisticated lines that are deceptively rugged — and attracting customers

By John Ewoldt (<http://www.startribune.com/john-ewoldt/10644811/>) Star Tribune |

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Several years ago, Greg Horvitz felt life was pulling him in too many directions.

So the detail-obsessed guy who was crafting furniture pivoted to designing clothing instead.

“I needed a jacket to take me from walking the dog, rushing to client meetings and going out to dinner with my wife because I didn’t have time to change clothes,” he said.

He started with a Birmingham CPO jacket that was rugged enough for the wood shop and dressy enough to function as a blazer. “When I travel, it’s the only [jacket] I wear,” he said. “It’s got a wool face with a really high-tech membrane from Switzerland underneath that keeps you warm on a cool day and cool on a warm day.”

If it isn’t readily apparent, Horvitz is the outdoorsy kind of guy who makes difficult things look simple. Even after a 5-mile bike ride into work each day, his Kent short-sleeve polo doesn’t need to be wrung out after he gets into the office.

His company, Fisher+Baker, named after two of Horvitz’ favorite pursuits, is still small. Sales in 2017 were less than \$1 million, but the number of retailers carrying his line in the U.S. and Japan will grow to about 50 by the end of the year. The number of different pieces, now at 27, will grow to 36 by next year. “The goal is not to have 500 pieces,” he said. “We want to grow within means that makes sense.”

With guidance from marketing guru Mike Arbeiter, a former Rollerblade executive and Dayton’s buyer, Horvitz expanded his creative vision to include what retailers and consumers want. “Mike hammers the point that we need market feedback on products we create,” he said. “I can’t be so myopic and let my ego drive the product.”

Joel Santerre, manager and buyer at Trail Mark outdoor specialty boutique in the Galleria in Edina, said the guys at Fisher+Baker asked him to be on their advisory soundboard. When he saw a parka that will be offered this fall with a faux fur collar, he told Horvitz that fur-trimmed parkas did not sell well this past winter, even with the Super Bowl in town. “But Greg had a workaround. Their hood with the fur trim is removable,” Santerre said.

Erick DeLeon, store manager and lead men’s buyer at Martin Patrick 3 in Minneapolis, is also on the advisory board. He loved the fake fur trim. “The parka is one of my favorite pieces for winter 2018-19,” he said.

Beth Perro-Jarvis, co-founder of the market and brand research firm Ginger Minneapolis, said that Fisher+Baker is well-suited for the business casual trend. “Everything is becoming more and more casual, and hipster men want an upscale-outdoorsy look,” she said. “Everyone wants new technical features that make their clothing more comfortable and durable.”

Behind classic, simple lines lies high-tech design. For instance, the Manitou Parka has a media pocket that’s insulated and placed on the outside of the jacket so it doesn’t have to be unzipped to retrieve a digital gadget. The Greenwich Anorak uses Ventile, a densely woven cotton developed for Royal Air Force pilots during World War II. The Everyday Cashmere short-sleeve crew offers softness with Drirelease moisture wicking and machine washability.

High-tech simplicity comes at a lofty price. The short-sleeve cashmere blend crew costs \$88, the Kent short-sleeve polo \$118, a Chelsea Trench \$548 and the Manitou Parka \$898.



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New for fall is the faux-fur-collared Manitou Parka with an exterior media pocket and a clean, durable design. It retails for \$898.

Horvitz, 36, who describes his line as timeless, purposeful and functional, said that his pieces are made to last. He refers to the cost as “PPW,” or price per wear. “It’s for the everyday guy who can afford it who wants to look good,” he said. “I grew up in Florida and I’d see these guys totally pitted out in suits. Now we have the technology to prevent that, but it isn’t cheap.”

His company backs up its quality claims with a warranty that’s rare in the industry — lifetime for outerwear and one year for shirts and accessories.

While all of Fisher+Baker’s pieces are designed in Minneapolis, everything is manufactured in China with fabrics from various European countries. The company tried making the cashmere crew and other pieces in a San Francisco factory, but it wasn’t happy with the quality or the amount of waste. “We lost our intellectual capital to produce technical garments in the U.S.,” Arbeiter said. “No one wants to learn how to technically sew this curve when they’re making \$15 an hour.”

Potential buyers who think any garment made in China should cost less haven’t noticed rising labor prices there. Arbeiter goes to China twice a year to walk the sewing floors and see how people are treated. “China is not cheap labor anymore. The price isn’t significantly different, but the quality [of labor] is significantly better,” he said.

Bill Damberg, owner of Brightwater men’s boutique in Excelsior, said a lot of his customers are initially attracted to Fisher+Baker’s clean aesthetic. “When they find out its technical aspect, it’s a big bonus,” he said.

Fisher+Baker products are available locally at Brightwater in Excelsior, Martin Patrick 3 in Minneapolis, Sun & Slope in Wayzata, Trail Mark in Edina and at [fisherandbaker.com](https://fisherandbaker.com/) (<https://fisherandbaker.com/>).

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