

Man's Zoot Suit

United States, 1940–42

Wool plain weave and twill

Purchased with funds provided

by Ellen A. Michelson

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Flamboyant in style and exaggerated in proportion, zoot suits were born from swing and dance halls frequented by urban youths in the 1930s and early 1940s. The effect was of great movement, extreme dandyism, and cultural expression for jazz enthusiasts and African-American, Latino, Jewish, and immigrant communities. Although a distinctively American fad, the zoot suit had its origins in 1930s-era London, where the silhouette for menswear was the “English drape.” This new cut—heralded by arbiters of menswear as one of the greatest innovations in tailoring—featured a jacket with wide shoulders, large armholes, and trim hips, and was worn with full, lightly draping trousers with front pleats. As the English drape grew popular throughout Europe and America, jazz enthusiasts not only embraced this fresh style of suit, but inflated it.

The jacket of this zoot suit has a strong, overtly broad shoulderline accomplished with three inches of padding at each side, a fitted waist, a long length, and wide, pegged sleeves inset with gores in a contrasting striped fabric to further exaggerate their fullness. The oversized free-hanging bag pockets, stitched only along the top



edges, flew away from the body as the wearer danced. The pegged trousers were worn high on the torso and closed with a 17-inch zipper fly. For maximum fullness at the knee, the fabric at the waist of the trousers was deeply pleated to allow the pant leg to billow out before tapering with curved darts into a narrow cuff. Such ensembles were often accessorized with a wide-brimmed, narrow-crowned hat, a bow tie, or a shortened belly-warmer tie (if a tie was worn at all), and a long watch chain.

NOTES:

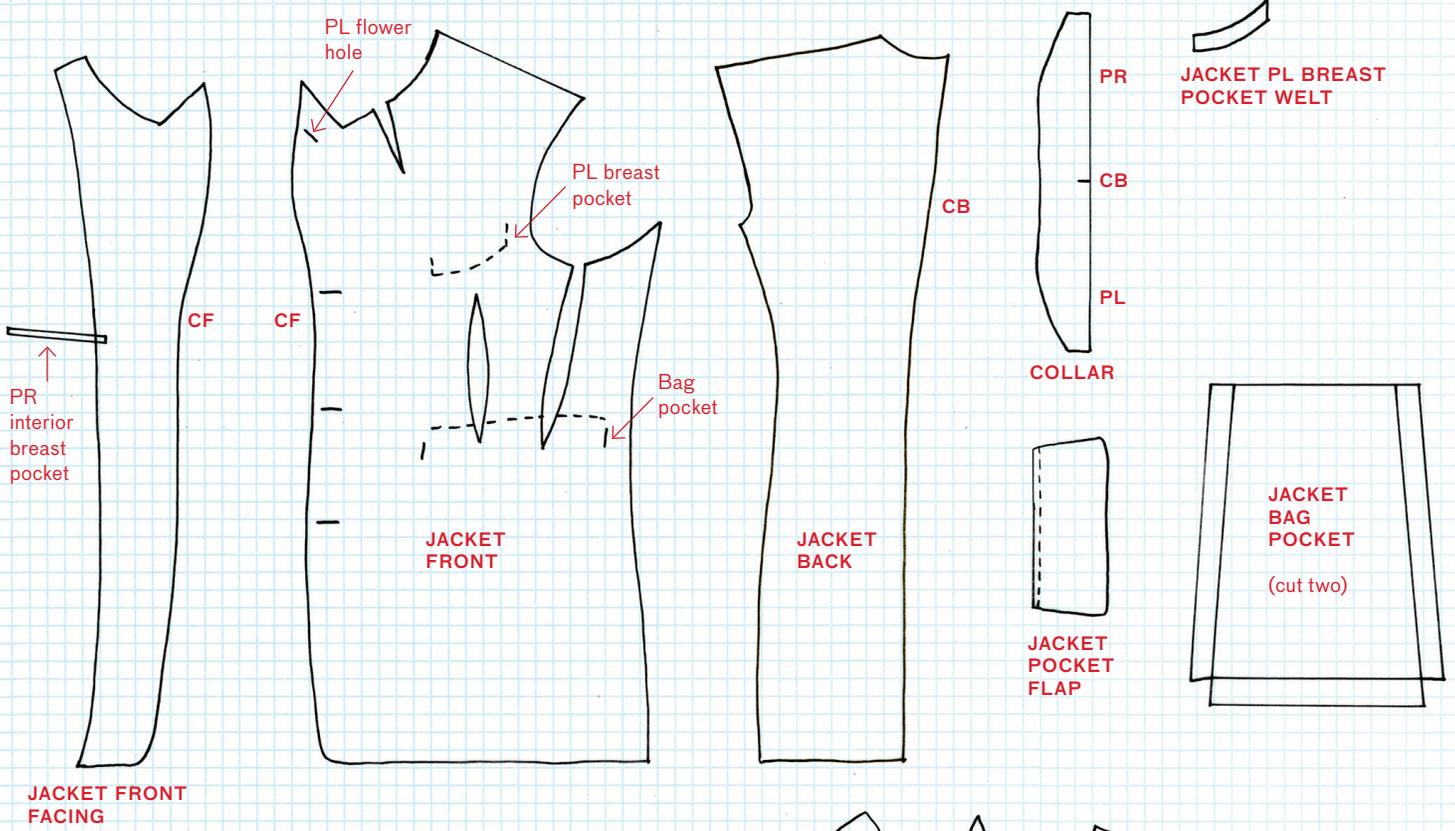
1. Fabric grain follows vertical lines of graph paper.
2. Pattern pieces are drawn without seam allowance.
3. The center-front single-breasted jacket closes with three $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch plastic buttons and three $1\frac{1}{4}$ -inch-long buttonholes; the original buttons are missing.
4. The collar is underlined with grey wool felt, and is secured with a straight stitch along the neckline and fine whip-stitches around the edges. The center-front opening and lapels are faced; a 1-inch-long flower hole is at the proper left lapel.
5. The broad shoulderline is emphasized with an approximately 2-inch thick, 13-inch long, and 3-inch wide (at the widest point) crescent-shaped shoulder pad at each side. The four-piece sleeves are slightly gathered at the sleeve head of the



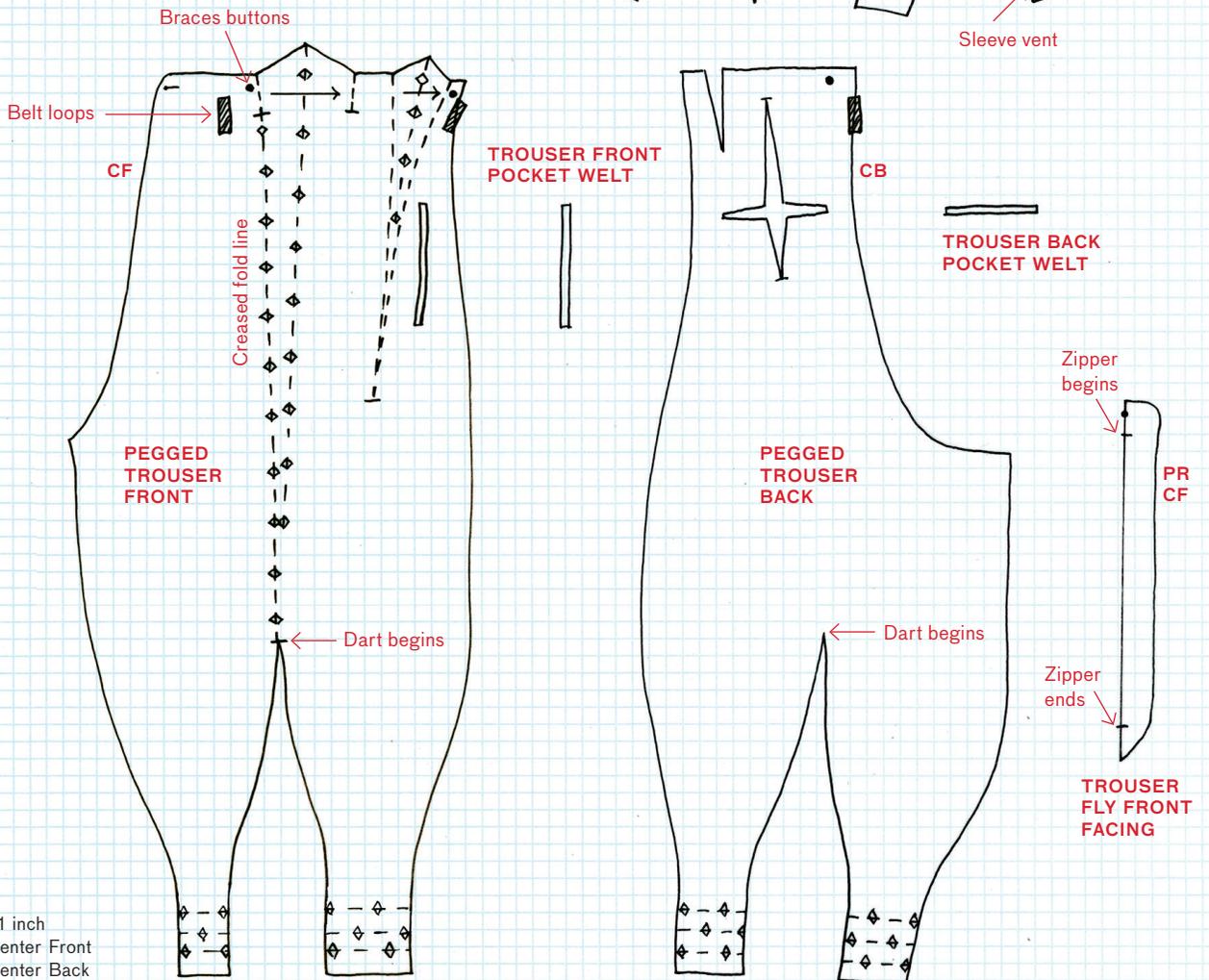
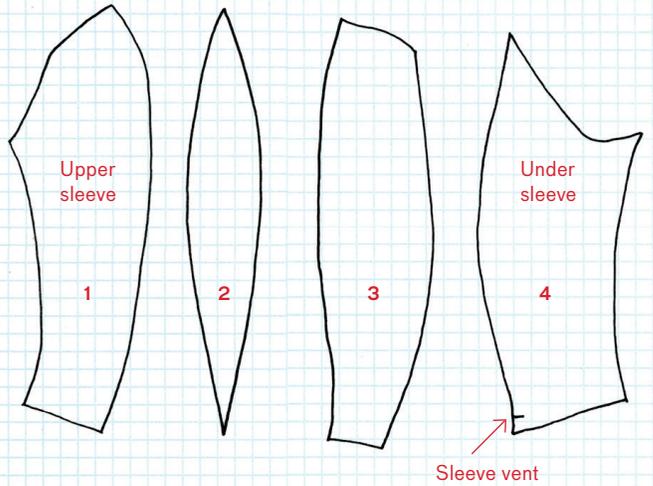
large armholes; the sleeve heads appear to be roped. Sleeve cuffs show signs of alterations to shorten the length; a 1-inch vent at each cuff is adorned with four $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch-diameter buttons; the original buttons are missing.

6. The jacket has one single-welt proper-left breast pocket, an interior single-welt proper-right breast pocket, and bag pockets with flaps at both sides. The bag pockets are secured only along the interior top edge and are unlined; the flaps are lined in dark red rayon plain weave.
7. The body of the jacket, collar, proper left pocket welt, and outer sleeve gore are of beige wool plain weave with red and blue horizontal stripes; the lapel facings, remaining sleeve parts, and bag pockets are of beige wool plain weave with blue vertical stripes. The jacket fronts, sleeves, and upper back from the neckline to 12 inches below are lined in dark red rayon plain weave. All other exposed interior seams are bound with grey ribbon.
8. The center-front trousers of beige wool twill with horizontal blue stripes close with a $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch-diameter plastic button with 1-inch-long buttonhole and a 17-inch-long zipper fly; there is no waistband. Six $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch-diameter suspender buttons and six belt loops allowed the wearer to use either suspenders or a belt to secure the high-waisted trousers.
9. Deep pleats along the side-front waist are creased along the length of each leg into a deep dart at each cuff, creating a deeply pegged pant leg. The waist shows signs of alteration with short hand-whip-stitched darts near the side seams on both the front and back.
10. Slash pockets are at each side-front hip, and single welt pockets are at each upper back. The back pockets are placed over a fish-eye dart.
11. The pant hems are folded under 5 inches from the bottom edge and then folded up halfway to create pant cuffs.

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FOUR-PIECE SLEEVE



Key:

- = 1:1 inch
- CF = Center Front
- CB = Center Back
- PL = Proper Left
- PR = Proper Right
- = Button placement
- — — — — = Fold line
- - - - - = Stitches