



YVONNE BERG / NATIONAL POST

Lou Brown of Short Man by Brown's says shorter men face enough adversity in life — they deserve clothing that looks good and fits properly.

Clothing retailer sticks up for the little guy

Short Man by Brown's offers suits for the strong, diminutive type

BY SUSANNE HILLER

"Short men tend to be Napoleonic," proclaims 72-year-old Lou Brown, oozing confidence in his Hugo Boss suit.

"They tend to think they have a strike against them. So they work harder to get ahead. Some of the most powerful men are short, like Napoleon, Charlie Chaplin, even Mel Lastman."

Mr. Brown should know. He himself is all of 5 feet 7 inches tall. He understands the plight of the short man. That's why he started Short Man by Brown's, a middle to upscale clothing store for men under 5 foot 8, more than 20 years ago.

In a world where bigger is often thought of as better, the silver-haired Mr. Brown says it just adds

insult to injury when short men are forced to buy clothing that doesn't fit properly. In regular sizes, pockets are often just beyond reach, sleeves end at fingertips and pants are too long. Some men even have to resort to buying clothes in the boys' department.

"I saw a niche and I grabbed it," says Mr. Brown, his chunky gold bracelet and diamond ring gleaming as he waves his small hands around. "Short men leave here feeling better about themselves. They feel they can take anything on. We solve the short man's problems for him. We can't make him taller, but we can make him look as good as he can."

It's not immediately apparent that the store on 1975 Avenue Rd. (there is a second location on 545 Queen St. W.) is designed especially for the vertically challenged. But look a little closer — it's a short man's haven.

The doors are not very high. The ceiling has been lowered. The counters and shelves are easily accessible.

"If a tall guy comes in, we say, 'Sorry, we discriminate here,'"

says Mr. Brown. "We only serve short people. Everyone gets a big laugh out of it. On Saturdays, everyone knows each other. It's a club atmosphere."

And, of course, Mr. Brown only hires short staff. "We want the short guy to be comfortable. A tall guy can't relate to a short guy. He doesn't know how a short guy feels."

The store sells everything from jeans to suits. Brand names include Hugo Boss, Arnold Brant and Tommy Hilfiger. Stock is divided into short, extra short (5 foot 1 to 5 foot 4) and stout short. Currently, there are lots of trendy sweaters in wool, boucle and cashmere in fall colours such as burgundy, purple and camel. Dress shirts in cotton and silk come in solids and patterns with sleeves as short as 30 inches.

The clothing has not just been shortened: The elbows, shirt pockets and trouser pockets have all been raised. There are even short pajamas. "It's usually a nightmare for a short guy to find pajamas," says Mr. Brown, pointing out a blue cotton pair by Guy

Laroche. "Look, the sleeves won't go down to his knuckles."

Short Man by Brown's has just introduced a new line of short socks and short shoes. Shoes range from sizes 5 to 8 in wide — short men tend to have wide feet. As for socks, it's not just about height, Mr. Brown says, but the length of the foot; the heel on these mini-socks is exactly where it is supposed to be.

Mr. Brown's clients include jockey Sandy Hawley, former mayor David Crombie and comedian Rick Moranis.

"Don't wear high turtlenecks — it makes you look shorter. Don't wear wide belts — they cut you off. Don't wear flared pants, don't wear stripes," he recites.

Mr. Brown has always been in the clothing business. However, it wasn't until 1978 that he thought about clothing tailored specifically for the short man.

Trading in favours, he convinced manufacturers to cut patterns for men under 5 foot 8. The concept was so successful, he soon opened his second store.

So what does he make of the theory that tall men always get more girls?

"They get more divorces, too," shoots back Mr. Brown, who is happily married. "Short men are better family men. They don't run around. They are good listeners and leaders. They make up for height with personalities."

"Tall men, well, they can be boring."

National Post