

## Remembering Martin Greenfield, 'The Presidents' Tailor'

By Uwe Westphal | Special To The Journal

*Upon the occasion of the recent death of the Holocaust survivor and legendary tailor to US presidents and celebrities, Martin Greenfield, at age 95, fashion historian Uwe Westphal sat down with filmmaker Rick Minnich to discuss his upcoming film "The Presidents' Tailor", and why Mr. Greenfield's message of tolerance and forgiveness is more vital than ever.*

**UWE WESTPHAL:** Who was Martin Greenfield and how did he get his start as a tailor?

**RICK MINNICH:** Martin Greenfield was born Maxmilian Grünfeld in the Carpathian village of Pavlovo in 1928. It was part of Czechoslovakia at the time, but now belongs to western Ukraine. The young Max lost his entire family in the Holocaust, but miraculously survived the horrors of Auschwitz and Buchenwald and found his way to the US in 1947. Martin learned to sew at Auschwitz when a fellow prisoner showed him how to repair the collar of a Gestapo shirt that he had accidentally torn during his duties in the laundry room.

**UWE WESTPHAL:** That's not exactly the typical path to becoming

a star tailor. How did Martin Greenfield's career in men's fashion begin?

**RICK MINNICH:** By chance, a friend and fellow survivor working at the GGG factory in Brooklyn, who was one of the premiere bespoke menswear manufacturers at the time, helped Max (who had since Americanized his name to Martin Greenfield) get a job as a floor boy there. Martin was eager to learn all 108 steps to making a hand-tailored suit. His boss, Mr. Goldman was impressed and took Martin under his wing. Before long, Martin became a supervisor on the shop floor. Thirty years later, he bought the factory from the Goldman brothers, and renamed it Martin Greenfield Clothiers.

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**ABOVE:** Martin Greenfield standing at the door of the freight elevator at his factory Greenfield Clothiers in Brooklyn, New York. **COURTESY OF RICK MINNICH**

**LEFT:** Master tailor Martin Greenfield measures director Rick Minnich for a suit. **PHOTO BY PETER-HUGO SCHOLZ**

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## Tailor

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**UWE WESTPHAL:** How did Martin Greenfield come to be known as the “Presidents’ Tailor”?

**RICK MINNICH:** Early on in his career, Martin was assigned the task of making suits for Dwight D. Eisenhower, who had liberated Buchenwald, where Martin had been a prisoner. The brash young tailor left notes in the pockets of the jackets he made on how he thought Eisenhower could solve the Suez crisis and other policy matters. Eisenhower was apparently amused and leaked the story to the press.

**UWE WESTPHAL:** Describe your first encounter with Martin Greenfield?

**RICK MINNICH:** When I first set eyes on him at the Greenfield Clothiers factory in Brooklyn seven years ago, I was immediately struck by his dapper appearance and infectious smile. He was always dressed to the hilt in a three-piece suit and was absolutely dashing. I could understand why customers loved to come to the shop to meet him. He was 88 years old at the time and insisted on coming to work every day, even though his sons Jay and Tod were already running the business by that point.

**UWE WESTPHAL:** Greenfield Clothiers is one of the few remaining bespoke menswear manufacturers in the United States today. How do you account for their longevity and success?

**RICK MINNICH:** I’d say the company has survived by going against the grain and being wonderfully old-fashioned with high-quality, custom tailored suits. Martin’s first boss, Mr. Goldman, insisted upon producing “quality with intrinsic value”. Martin took this to heart, and refused to cut corners. He also refused to produce overseas and instead built up enduring relationships with his employees, who are all unionized, and very loyal. The company has never spent money on advertising, nor have they ever opened retail shops. This was a saving grace during Covid, when menswear titans like Brooks Brothers went under. If you want a hand-tailored Greenfield Clothiers suit, you have to make an appointment and go to the factory in Brooklyn to get measured and choose the fabric. They provide personalized service and every piece of clothing is produced by hand on machines that look like they belong in a museum. The entire production is labor-intensive but the suits are surprisingly affordable, largely because the company has managed to keep its overhead low.

**UWE WESTPHAL:** When and where can

The Presidents’ Tailor be seen?

**RICK MINNICH:** We’ll be launching the film at film festivals in Germany and New Zealand in June, and plan to tour JCCs and Jewish Film Festivals across the US and worldwide shortly thereafter.

**UWE WESTPHAL:** What do you hope to achieve with your film?

**RICK MINNICH:** I want to help preserve the memory of this remarkable human being and spread his message of tolerance and forgiveness, which is needed now more than ever, especially with wars raging in the Middle East and Ukraine. Not only was Martin Greenfield a fabulous tailor who left an indelible mark on the world of men’s fashion, he was also a tremendous inspiration to many people who crossed his path, including me. He was a true “Mensch” – a real human being in the best sense of the word. It would be a great honor for me if my film can play some small role in preserving Martin Greenfield’s legacy.

**UWE WESTPHAL:** What do you need to help The Presidents’ Tailor reach the widest possible audience?

**RICK MINNICH:** In the short-term, we need some angels to help finance our marketing and travel expenses for attending film festivals and various screenings. We’re also looking for people to host sneak preview fundraiser events and we’re seeking contacts to JCCs, Jewish Film Festivals and other organizations which might want to show the film. In the long-term, we are looking for underwriters to back our PBS broadcast, which we are planning for 2025. We hope to reach 2-3 million viewers that way. We also have the ambitious goal of getting the film qualified for the Oscars in the Short Documentary Category.

For more information about The Presidents’ Tailor and how you can help preserve Martin Greenfield’s legacy, visit: [www.thepresidentstailor.com](http://www.thepresidentstailor.com) Director Rick Minnich can be contacted at [rick@rickfilms.de](mailto:rick@rickfilms.de)

Rick Minnich is an American independent filmmaker based in Berlin, Germany. His award-winning films include: HEAVEN ON EARTH (2001), HOMEMADE HILLBILLY JAM (2005), FORGETTING DAD (2008, short-listed for the German Oscar ‘Lola’), THE BOMB HUNTERS (2015), THE STRAIT GUYS (2022), THE PRESIDENTS’ TAILOR (2024). Visit him at [www.ourmaninberlin.com](http://www.ourmaninberlin.com).

Uwe Westphal lives in London and Berlin. He is a journalist, and contributor for the Florida Jewish Journal. His latest book is about the history of the Jewish fashion industry in Berlin. Contact: [office-westphal@gmail.com](mailto:office-westphal@gmail.com)



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| \$147,500     | Suffolk F   | 2/1.5, 1st floor, corner, updated kitchen, wood look floor, screened patio w/ pull downs, close to house of worship & clubhouse.  |
| \$275,000     | Wolverton C | 2/2, desirable 2nd floor, updated kitchen, granite, stainless appliances, both bathrooms updated, hurricane impact sliding windows on patio overlooking magnificent lake view, close to house of worship & clubhouse.   |
| \$290,000     | Wolverton C | 2/2, 1st floor, updated kitchen, both bathrooms updated, tile throughout, enclosed patio w/ sliding windows w/ lake view, close to house of worship & clubhouse.  |
| \$299,000     | Yarmouth C  | 2/2, updated kitchen, quartz, brand new stainless appliances which includes full size refrigerator w/ french doors & water dispenser, double sink, wood look floor throughout, newly updated bathrooms, screened patio w/ lake view, close to house of worship & clubhouse. |
| \$275,000     | Yarmouth C  | 2/2, 3rd floor, furnished, tile throughout, updated kitchen, updated master bathroom, both bedrooms have door out to enclosed patio w/ sliding windows over looking lake view, close to house of worship & clubhouse.   |
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