

7 considerations before choosing a true quality cleaner



So you're looking for a new "quality" dry cleaner. You've done your homework. And you've narrowed down your choice to two or three candidates.

Before you walk through any of their doors, it's important to keep 7 things in mind....

1. There are no "secrets" or "secret processes" in garment care

While knowledge, expertise, skill and time is critical to delivering true quality cleaning, there are no "secrets" or "secret processes" in garment care. And any cleaner who implies that there are should be viewed with a healthy dose of skepticism. And then challenged.

You see, **cleaners hate disclosure.**

So they provide little or no information. Often citing "trade secrets" or "proprietary processes" as an excuse for not providing clients and potential clients with detailed information about the "ins" and "outs" and "hows" and "whys" of their processes.

Consider this description of their dry cleaning, pressing and inspection process from the website of an Arizona cleaner:



Dry Cleaning

You'd expect any place with "Cleaners" in their name to do a decent job in Dry Cleaning, wouldn't you?

If we didn't know better, so would we.

We wouldn't use a cleaner who doesn't distill their cleaning solutions, hand inspect and hand spot-clean each garment.

You shouldn't either.

This abbreviated description of their processes is the equivalent to opening the quick start guide that comes with every new car today and finding that the guide consists of a single paragraph: Inert the key in the ignition, turn the key, place the car in gear and step on the gas.

At RAVE FabriCARE, we've always been curious as to why so few cleaners are willing to disclose detailed information about their processes. Either verbally, or better still, in writing.

We'd suggest that there's only one reason:

they simply don't want you to know.

Because, if you did, you'd be better positioned to evaluate the relative quality of the product they **say** they deliver.

You'd realize that their product doesn't meet their verbal assurances, the hype in their glitzy promotional materials or the bluster of their public relations professionals.

You'd figure out that their "exceptional", "exquisite" and "award winning" cleaning — minus the fancy

packaging — is no different from the “bang and hang” cleaning offered by any other above average cleaner across the street or across town.

And, you’d understand that you may not be getting the quality you thought you were paying for.

Fabricare specialists or true quality cleaners, on the other hand, **have nothing to hide**.

Quite the contrary.

They believe that the more you understand about their processes the better.

So they distribute position papers, white papers and ebooks. They provide content heavy websites. They conduct educational seminars. They want you to learn as much as possible — or as much as you ever want to know — about their processes.

All that *before* you turn over your fine garments to them.

2. Talk is cheap. Execution is time consuming and challenging.

It’s been said that talk is cheap because the supply far exceeds the demand.

There’s a huge difference between a cleaner **talking** about the “ins” and “outs” and “hows” and “whys” of their processes and a cleaner actually **executing** all those detailed process tasks. Every day. On every garment they handle.

Sure, there are cleaners who **claim** to perform at a high level. They repeat those claims in their promotional materials and on their websites. And their public relations agency reinforces those claims.

So it must be true!

Right? Wrong!

Dig a little deeper and you’ll probably find that their delivered product — minus the fancy packaging — is probably just average.

At best.

3. Educating the client and answering questions is the price paid for your custom

If a fabricare specialist or true quality cleaner didn’t provide you with detailed information about their knowledge, expertise and skills, their stain removal, cleaning and restoration processes, or their specialized equipment, technologies and facilities, you’d have no reason to entrust your fine garments to them. Or to any other cleaner for that matter.

Detailed information about the “ins” and “outs” and “hows” and “whys” of a cleaner’s processes and craftsmanship is the service equivalent of the extended test drive. After all, you wouldn’t buy a new vehicle without first “kicking the tires” would you?

So why would you entrust your fine garments to a cleaner without first asking the probing questions?

Truth is, detailed information about processes and craftsmanship is the exact opposite of the tired, meaningless cliches you’re accustomed to hearing from almost every cleaner. Cliches such as:

- “we meet or exceed the industry’s highest standards”
- “we focus on the details”
- “we provide great cleaning, fabulous service and quick turnaround”
- “we work hard to earn compliments from our customers every day”
- “we treat your every day wear as if they were fine couture pieces”
- “we give your garments the care that only we can provide”
- “our packaging is the talk of the town”.

We could go on and on. But we won’t.
You get the drift.

You’ll also notice that, consistent with these meaningless platitudes, their testimonials tend to focus on the friendliness of their staff and the broadness of the smiles of their associates.

Not a whisper about their processes or craftsmanship.

4. True quality is the combination of hundreds of details

There are over 26,000 cleaners in the USA. And every single one will tell you that they “focus on the details.”

Your intuition and experience should tell you that the vast majority of these claims are, at best, nothing more than puffery.

So couple your intuition and experience with this thought: **true quality cleaning is not about a few details. It's about hundreds of details.**

And, specifically, **it's the combination of those hundreds of details** (coupled with time) that produces true quality.

It's the difference between a bespoke suit from Rubinacci and a knockoff from Shanghai Custom Tailors.

Here's another key point: how can a cleaner ever claim that he “focuses on the details” when his entire operation is geared to same or next day service? How can a cleaner claim that he “focuses on the details” when your garments are in by 9:00 and out by 5:00; or picked up on day 1 and delivered on day 3?

Go figure!

5. True quality cannot be delivered in a day or two (or even three)

Your cleaner tells you that they “meet or exceed the highest industry standards” (even if they have no idea what those standards are and they're not in writing). That they “focus on the details” (even if they have no idea what those details are and they're not in writing). And that they have “detailed quality standards” (even if they can't identify those standards and they're not in writing).

Then they tell you that they routinely offer same and next day in-store service and 3 day pickup and delivery service?

How do you spell CONTRADICTION?

A fabricare specialist or true quality cleaner doesn't offer same or next day in-store service or

3 day pickup and delivery service. Not as a matter of routine. Not unless it's an emergency and the client is well-known to them.

And here's why...

Every major city has numerous “cleaners”. And almost every single one would be delighted to accommodate your request for same or next day service. And every single one who offers pickup and delivery service will be delighted to pickup your cleaning on day 1 and deliver on day 3.

That's because their entire modus operandi is geared to getting your garments into a machine, onto a press and into a bag. ASAP.

At ordinary cleaners, same or next day in-store service and 3 day pick up and delivery service is standard operating procedure.

Fact is, they're so proud of their same or next day in-store service and their 3 day pickup and delivery service that they constantly promote it — right next to their claim that their “exceptional”, “exquisite” and “award winning” dry cleaning and shirt laundry service is a direct result of their “attention to detail”!

Truth is, **you can't have it both ways**: true quality in garment care is simply not compatible with speed.

Period. End of story. No ifs, ands or butts.

On the other hand, a fabricare specialist or true quality cleaner takes an entirely different approach to garment care.

They focus all their resources on consistently producing the finest in garment care. There are no compromises. No shortcuts. No ordinary cleaning. No “bang and hang” work. No same or next day service work. No pickup-on-day-1-and-deliver-on-day-3 service work.

Fact is, same or next day in-store service and 3 day pickup and delivery service is the **very antithesis of true quality cleaning**.

When you provide same or next day in-store service or 3 day pickup and delivery service, it really doesn't matter if you think that Attolini is a brand of microwave pizza, if you believe that Oxxford is a community college in California, if you've been told that Lagerfeld is a new micro beer, and if you're convinced that Hermes is a contagious social disease.

In a hectic world of same day and next day in-store service and 3 day pickup and delivery service, you can take comfort in the fact that **a fabricare specialist or true quality cleaner takes the time to do it right.**

Because when it comes to caring for your fine garments, faster isn't better.

Never has been. Never will be.

6. True quality is not inexpensive

Fabricare specialists or true quality cleaners are not "value priced" or "competitively priced". There are no volume discounts, coupons, specials and loyalty programs.

Their prices are set at a level which affords them the opportunity to concentrate solely on the quality of their work.

By contrast, the focus of the vast majority of ordinary cleaners can be summed up in two words: **quantity and speed.**

Essentially, this means pushing more and more garments (quantity) faster and faster (speed) through their "production system." They're in by 11:00 and out by 5:00; picked up on day 1 and delivered on day 3.

At ordinary cleaners, **production efficiency is the holy grail of their entire operation.**

(By the way, cleaners that glue bar codes onto your fine garments as if they were uniform rental garments exhibit this production mentality).

Of course, **no ordinary cleaner will admit that they focus on quantity and speed.**

Every cleaner will tell you that they produce "top quality at a competitive price" or "exceptional quality at a fair price".

But given their consistently lower price structure, it's clear that the long-term economic viability of their business depends on quantity and speed. Not on the quality of their work.

Which is fine if you're manufacturing standardized widgets. But absolute heresy when you've been entrusted with the custom cleaning and hand finishing of a client's fine garments.

Why heresy?

Because garment care at the bespoke, made-to-measure, designer, high-fashion, specialty and couture level involves lots and lots of technically skilled labor. Coupled with expensive, specialized equipment.

So if you encounter low to moderate prices at this level of garment care, you can be absolutely assured they're cutting costs by cutting corners. In every facet of their operation — from cleaning and hand finishing to inspection and packaging.

When it comes to fine cleaning, it's important to know **WHAT YOU'RE PAYING.**

But it's even more important to know **WHAT YOU'RE PAYING FOR** — knowledge, expertise and skills; stain removal, cleaning and restoration processes; hand ironing; and specialized equipment, technologies and facilities.

At a fabricare specialist or true quality cleaner **setting prices is the easy part.** Consistently delivering on their commitment to extraordinary care — every item, every order — **now that's the complicated part.**

And that's the difference between a fabricare specialist or true quality cleaner and an ordinary, bang and hang cleaner.

7. Myths, misrepresentations and distortions are common

There are over 26,000 cleaners in the USA. And they all believe that they are above average and that they produce "top quality work".

Obviously, they **can't all** be above average and **very few** to produce "top quality work."

But that doesn't stop them from claiming that they are. So they're forced to misrepresent and distort the information they provide about the quality of the product they produce in general, and the processes they employ to produce that product in particular.

Take dry cleaning for example

They claim that they:

- pre-spot every garment **when in fact**, they no-spot or post-spot.
- clean your garments in a gentle dry cleaning solvent or fluid **when, in fact**, it's relatively aggressive and dye-stripping.
- don't inject moisture, sizing or fragrance into their dry cleaning solvent, **when, in fact**, 85% of dry cleaners do.
- dry clean your cottons and linens as you requested **when, in fact**, they're washed or wet cleaned.
- hand iron your garments **when, in fact**, they're steamed out on a steamer, machine pressed and then "squirted" with steam from a hand iron in an attempt to conceal the evidence of machine pressing.
- conduct detailed inspections of your garments – inside and out, top to bottom – **when, in fact**, they just get a cursory look over (maybe, if you're really lucky).
- move your garments around their plant – gently by hand – **when, in fact**, they're shuttled around on a roller-coaster-like automated system.
- utilize the finest packaging materials **when, in fact**, those materials – although they may look pretty – are not technically aligned with and supportive of your garments over the short or long term.
- operate an "environmentally friendly" dry clean operation **when, in fact**, they're regulated at the federal, state and local level.

The list is endless.

We could go on and on but we won't.

We'll leave that up to you to discover by questioning your dry cleaner.

Now consider shirt laundry

They claim that they:

- don't abrade your collars and cuffs by scrubbing them with hard-bristled brushes **when, in fact**, they do.
- don't wash your whites, creams and pastels in hot water **when, in fact**, they do.
- don't use harsh, caustic, industrial grade detergents **when, in fact**, they do.
- don't add fabric-destroying bleaches **when, in fact**, most do.
- don't starch your shirts with cheap synthetic glue that coats your shirt's fibers **when, in fact**, most do.
- don't bang 'em out on pressing machines at a rate of 40 to 50 an hour (or more) **when, in fact**, they do.
- hand iron your shirts **when, in fact**, they're machine pressed and "touched up".
- don't return your laundered shirts with puckered seams, wrinkled underarms, wrinkled upper back pleats, wrinkled sleeve pleats, wrinkled front plackets, wrinkled sleeve plackets, and wrinkled cuff/sleeve and sleeve/body joins **when, in fact**, they do.
- don't crease the sleeves of your shirts **when, in fact**, the overwhelming majority of shirt laundries do.

The list is endless.

Again, we could go on and on. But we won't.

We'll leave that up to you to discover by questioning your shirt laundry.

The takeaway

Remember that fine garments are valuable assets as well as beautiful works of art.

To keep those garments looking, feeling and smelling great and lasting much, much longer, you'll need to locate a skilled cleaner. And to successfully do that, you'll need to ask questions. Insist on straight, jargon-free answers. And invest some time assessing the "truthfulness" of those responses.



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RAVE FabriCARE, based in Scottsdale, Arizona, cares for fine garments, household textiles and accessories and serves clients in the USA and Canada and in other selected countries throughout the world. Stu is the author of various Position Papers, White Papers and Ebooks on these subjects, all of which are available from [ravefabricare/downloads/free-stuff](https://ravefabricare.com/downloads/free-stuff). He is an evangelist for true quality cleaning and is a contributor to and editor of True Quality Cleaning, RAVE FabriCARE's blog.



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