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At Work: Real Estate Broker Joel Isaacs Eschews the Tie

The founder of Isaacs and Company works with many key international luxury brands.

By [Jean E. Palmieri](#) on August 28, 2017



Joel Isaacs
Masato Onoda/WWD

Looking for a prime spot to plant a flag in New York City’s crowded retail space? One of those on the list to call is Joel Isaacs.

Founder of Isaacs and Company, the real estate executive is a key broker for luxury brands seeking a foothold in Manhattan. His first client was **Prada**, for which he worked exclusively for more than a decade, and he has since expanded to represent Miu Miu, Jil Sander, Helmut Lang, Herno, G-Star and others.

On a hot summer day walking around SoHo, where he placed Balenciaga and others into their retail spaces, Isaacs sports a navy blazer, white jeans and sneakers, the look that has become his trademark since establishing his firm in 1991.

WWD: Tell us about your background.

Joel Isaacs: In the 1980s, I graduated college and went into commercial real estate. I started doing general office leasing and decided to focus on an industry as opposed to geography and I chose the fashion industry. For the first several years, I was doing office and showroom leasing, initially for men’s wear companies in the Plaza district, and I worked with a lot of European companies. Then I expanded to the Garment District and the women’s wear arena. Then one of my clients asked me to find him a store on Madison Avenue and I got the retail bug for better or worse.

WWD: When did you start your own firm?

J.I.: I went on my own when I was 30. The way we get our business is cold calling — that’s the bread and butter. I cold-called **Prada** for probably two or three years with no luck and one day I called Italy and I was told they just hired a new manager for the U.S. market and he had just moved to New York and was living in a hotel. I got him on the phone and arranged to meet with him the next day. I worked with them exclusively for 16 years and have maintained my relationship with them for the last seven.

WWD: But you’re now working with other brands.

J.I.: Yes, we did the two Balenciaga stores and the Versace store in SoHo. Actually, in SoHo, we’ve done the majority of the luxury deals, from Saint Laurent and Stella McCartney to Celine and Moschino.

WWD: How do you dress now as compared with when you worked for a big firm?
J.I.: When I worked for a big firm, everybody wore a suit and tie. That was the Eighties, but even to this day at the large firms, brokers probably wear a suit and tie, but at smaller firms like ours, people dress as they wish. I personally like a suit with no tie up to four days a week and Fridays I like to be casual. But I typically dress for my meetings and whomever I’m meeting that day. I remember when I was working with G-Star and someone made a comment that I was coming to our meetings in a suit and they were all wearing T-shirts and jeans. I started dressing more casually for those meetings after that.

WWD: How would you describe your style?
J.I.: I’d say it’s classic with a twist. Right now I’m wearing a Neil Barrett jacket, a Maison Kitsune shirt, Uniqlo jeans and Margiela sneakers.

WWD: You obviously don’t have a problem mixing high and low.
J.I.: No. Men have evolved and I think that they’re enjoying getting dressed now more than they ever did — whether it’s classic or casual. One of my favorite things to buy is sneakers. They’re a way to give you that twist. We recently did a deal for ATM Tony Melillo on Bleecker Street, and I bought a pair of blush suede sneakers, and every time I wear them, I get compliments.

WWD: So are you a closet sneakerhead?
J.I.: I wouldn’t call myself a sneakerhead but I like sneakers. If I’m not wearing a suit and a shirt with no tie, then I’m usually wearing jeans, a polo and sneakers.

WWD: Considering the price of designer sneakers these days, do you spend more on your clothes for work or play?
J.I.: I still spend more on business. I tend to buy Barneys private label shirts for work and they’re probably \$245, and then a suit will cost you.

WWD: What are your favorite designers?
J.I.: Prada is always going to be near and dear to my heart. I think their men’s wear is great. I like Lanvin, Dries van Noten, Margiela, but I’m also wearing Uniqlo — it’s so great for basics. I love ATM polo shirts, and Want les Essentiels makes great bags. My outerwear of choice is Herno; we did their store on Greene Street.

WWD: If you’re meeting someone new would you wear a suit?
J.I.: Generally, yes, but if they’re in the fashion industry, no tie. Hermes is an important client and we did their Meatpacking District and Financial District deals, and generally I wear a suit when I go to their meetings, sometimes with an Hermes tie.

WWD: Do you buy everything you wear?
J.I.: When I was young in the business, one of the perks is that I would be able to do a personal order and sometimes clients would give me things. But typically not today and I don’t ask, because it’s business. But I’m happy to buy something. Every time I do a deal and the store opens, I go in and buy something.

WWD: Do you follow fashion trends or is it more about setting your own personal style?
J.I.: I follow fashion trends just to know what’s going on and to find out what brands might be developing and are hot and expanding. But it doesn’t necessarily impact the way I dress. I see pants are getting wider again but I don’t think I’m going back to four pleats.

WWD: Do you have a favorite purchase that you’ve made in the last couple of months?
J.I.: Yes, those pink sneakers.