THE CORK

AN ENGLISH CUT PUBLICATION — ISSUE ONE

EWEN BREMNER
FROM T2 TRAINSPOTTING

ISSUE ONE

AN ENGLISH CUT PUBLICATION

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Contents

WELCOME

Welcome to *The Cork*, issue one. Now, I know many of you will be thinking: "Isn't this issue two?" Well, kind of, but we started with zero, as this is a new medium for us and, like with anything new, we wanted to see how it looks, feels and whether it really represented us. We're expanding and we need to involve more people — which will obviously make things more interesting than if everything was written by this old tailoring scribe. I'm the first to say that nothing is ever really perfect, but I can say we'll always try to bring you our very best. So I hope you'll enjoy what we've created in the following pages, and I encourage you to read on.

Looking back, 2016 was quite a year for us: we launched The Cork and also opened two new English Cut stores. One on Chiltern Street, W1, in London and a small boutique in the Mandarin Oriental hotel on Boylston Street, in the heart of Boston, Massachusetts. In our stores we offer our bespoke tailoring by appointment and our new made-to-measure service. You'll also find some ready-to-wear suits and jackets, and lovely accessories made here in England.

Inside this edition there are a couple of articles that I hope you'll enjoy, as they're very personal to me. One is an interview with myself and my longtime friend and head coat-maker, Paul Griffiths. It charts how we met and tells of our adventures in bespoke tailoring. It was shot at our lovely local restaurant, Hardy's, just around the corner from our London shop. In this feature, we're portrayed as two calm, steady old hands of the trade. However, don't be fooled by the pictures of these two apparently serene-looking individuals. They hide the fact that, after nearly 30 years of creating beautiful clothing together, sparks have flown and even the odd pair of tailor's shears. Don't worry, you'll always get this with the cutter and tailor relationship: "*Oh, these artists can be so sensitive* ... " But, with all these peaks and valleys, we must have had fun, because, as they say, the years have flown by.

It's easy to live in our world where we enjoy our work and smart people dress smart. But I forget, probably on purpose, that we're considered to be a part of that billion-dollar machine called *fashion*. This is very evident when you read Teo's fascinating article on page 58. The demise of the suit has always been debated, but, interestingly enough, nearly all men's fashion runways have a nod or pay homage to the tailored suit. It's as if tailoring *needs* to be in collections to give them credibility, and it just won't go away. Why? Well, put simply, men look better in them and, in most cases, they *feel* better in them too.

With fashion out of the way, there's also a great feature on one of my favourite pubs, just off the Row, called The Burlington Arms. A fine place filled with lovely memories from when I was a young apprentice where—some may say —I spent too many evenings trying to woo my female counterparts. Fast-forward 25 years and I'm in there again with a couple of chaps modelling part of our collection. Who'd have thought it? Duncan and Andrew look about as "English" as you get, enjoying one of our favourite pastimes. It was a lot of fun that day—even though it started at 4.30am and ended at noon when the punters arrived for their lunchtime livener. Needless to say, the models and I agreed it would be rude not to join in. After all, authenticity is what we're all about.

EDITOR'S LETTER

It was the Boston-born writer Ralph Waldo Emerson who once said, "Life is a journey, not a destination." He was, of course, right on so many levels: if we just settled with our current life situation, there would be no reason to progress—and how boring would that be? Motivation is based on moving forward, stagnation is creativity's worst enemy. We must constantly strive for more knowledge—that's the fuel of life. But Emerson was also right in a more concrete way: we constantly move around, we go places. One day you live in A, and next day in B. And once there, you also have multiple addresses; the more the older you get. Sure, some you stay at for a substantial time, but at some point you will move. That's one of the facts of life.

Look at the life of English Cut. Founder Tom Mahon was born in Cumbria, but moved to London wanting to "build a career", one that could satisfy his ambition to fully learn the bespoke trade. He ended up at Anderson & Sheppard, where he eventually wound up going from apprentice to head cutter. There he met Griff, his current chief coat-maker, who you'll discover more about on page 24. In 1995, Tom decided to leave Anderson & Sheppard and set up his own outfit, English Cut. While maintaining a London address where he could see his loyal customers, he decided to move back up to the hills of Cumbria, in a village five miles from Carlisle, where he had grown up.

After a while, realising he needed expert help to meet demand, Tom lured Griff up to Cumbria. Who knows how he did it, but Griff left Anderson & Sheppard, moved up north and joined Tom's sartorial band of brothers. English Cut, as we know it today, was born. And for many years, that's how it went. New customers, more staff. Worldwide trips to see global customers. New York, Boston and San Francisco: all had their chance to experience Tom and Griff's bespoke tailoring. Though still a fairly small outfit from Cumbria, English Cut managed to spread their sartorial gospel to all four corners of the world.

But change had to come, and it did. As often is the case, it involved a journey. Ralph Waldo Emerson would have been proud. Today, English Cut is present in Boston, albeit in a small concession at the reputable Boston Mandarin Oriental (see page 118 for an insight into the daily adventures of concierge Jennifer Boucher), and there's also a standalone store in London. Late last year, Tom and Griff returned from Cumbria to Chiltern Street in Marylebone to bring back the English Cut experience to the capital. I can't remember who said it—maybe you heard it here first—but life is a journey, not a destination.

David Hellqvist

Illustrations Rachel Gannon

Design for Life

Having designed interiors for the likes of Burberry and Selfridges, Philip Handford and his Campaign agency were the natural fit for English Cut when it came to launching their first standalone store

ALYN GRIFFITHS

A visit to a top tailor remains one of the most personal and intimate experiences available to a customer. The process of picking out a great suit or shirt benefits from having an expert to guide you through the various fabric options, while proper measuring is essential to ensure optimal fit. At a time when the retail industry is undergoing an unprecedented revolution, with online purchases steadily replacing in-store sales, the tailor is one of the few places it's still essential to visit for a satisfactory pre- and post-purchase experience.

When English Cut decided to establish its first dedicated store on Marylebone's Chiltern Street in London, it was determined to preserve the heritage of the tailoring experience by creating a space with a welcoming and premium feel. To oversee the store's development, founder Tom Mahon approached retail-design specialist Philip Handford, whose Shoreditch-based agency Campaign has produced innovative retail solutions for some of world's leading fashion brands, including Phillip Lim, Burberry and Alfred Dunhill.

According to Handford, the designer-client relationship got off to a positive start, with several early meetings continuing at the local pub. "The classic thing when you go to see a tailor on Savile Row is that they take you to the pub for a pint and a Scotch egg," says the designer, who was also impressed early on by Mahon's vision for the company. "I just fell in love with the way Tom spoke about the brand," adds Handford, "and I was excited by the premium nature of the business. I could see there was an opportunity to create an amazing level of customer service around a great product."

Handford founded Campaign in 2008, after spending several years working with

Burberry chief creative officer Christopher Bailey on a store ethos and design language applied across its global concessions. His experiences designing retail environments, ranging from flagship stores to pop-ups, have instilled in him a strong belief that intelligently designed bricks-and-mortar stores remain valuable to some consumers: “It’s still an important part of people’s lives to have somewhere they can go to play with the product, even if they don’t necessarily buy something that time around.”

Campaign’s projects seek to translate Handford’s enthusiasm for installation art into spaces that deliver memorable and engaging experiences. Previous examples have included a 2,600 sq m menswear department store in the Chinese city of Wuxi, featuring a dramatic three-storey atrium lined with brass archways, and a carefully curated gallery-like interior for the Selfridges Designer Studio in London, where artist-designed follies provide unique spaces for displaying products. When working with independent brands, the studio attempts to pinpoint what makes a company unique and encapsulate these characteristics in a physical space.

Back in London, Campaign—in close collaboration with English Cut’s creative team—developed a design for the Chiltern Street store intended to make the customer feel instantly at ease and confident that they are in expert hands. The store’s visual language takes the ideas of tradition and craftsmanship that are key to English Cut’s identity as its starting point and introduces quirky modern details to represent the brand’s inherent sense of humour.

From the street, the shopfront presents an understated and timeless grey facade, with hardware and signage picked out in brass. At the time of opening, the large shop window accommodated an elegantly attired tailor’s bust and a simple display of frames containing products suspended from the ceiling. The display’s openness ensures the view into the store is maintained, making it feel accessible and allowing passers-by to see what’s going on inside.

The main shop floor has a light and warm feel, thanks to the timber chevron flooring and wooden panelling of the display wall. Dark timber-veneer joinery, a black-painted metal balustrade and brass accents provide a contrast to the predominantly light palette. At the rear of the space, warm metallic panels form a screen for the fitting room, while a statement lighting fixture adds an element of modern glamour. References to heritage are achieved through clever details like the addition of simple beading to recreate the look of a classic panelled ceiling.

The staircase descends to a slightly larger VIP area in the basement, where more premium fixtures and comfortable furniture create a lounge-like feel. “We were looking at increasing the dwell-time of the customer in this area,” says Handford, “so we upped the level of comfort to ensure a more luxurious experience is possible down there.”

At the centre of the room is a marble-topped display table, while a fitting area containing a triptych mirror at the rear is enveloped by a velvet curtain suspended from a brass rail. The front of the space accommodates a work table illuminated by a skylight, on which samples stored in the adjacent fabric library can be presented. This underground den is carefully styled to invoke the sort of relaxed atmosphere that facilitates dialogue and trust between the customer and the tailor or salesperson. “The room is designed to empower that expert,” adds Handford, “providing space to lay out fabrics and good lighting, as well as a convivial feel.”

The store’s overall design offers the ideal backdrop for the experience of commissioning bespoke tailoring. It provides the space, tools and ambience the tailor needs to guide the customer through the process, and ensures every moment is spent in a comfortable and attractive environment.

While many other retailers desperately search for ways to keep customers coming back for another bricks-and-mortar experience, Handford remains confident that shopping online is no match for the experience of visiting English Cut’s new home and engaging firsthand with their expert staff. “English Cut will be safe because of the level of service they’re offering and because people need to come and play with the product,” he concludes. “There’s a real reason for them to go to this store.”

The Eisler Files

Ex CIA agent and award-winning author Barry Eisler writes two successful thriller series in between wearing English Cut suits. Here, he talks to *The Cork* about his fictional heroes and gives out advice to budding writers

DAVID HELLQVIST

Most authors write based purely on their imagination. Nothing wrong with that, but if you have actual real-life experience, surely that is a better source? San Francisco-based writer Barry Eisler is a case in point. As a former CIA agent in the Directorate of Operations (until 2015, called the National Clandestine Service), Eisler picked up enough knowledge to last him a lifetime. Since 2002, he's been self-publishing books based around two separate characters: antihero John Rain, a half-Japanese, half-American former soldier turned freelance assassin, and another novel series about black-ops soldier Ben Treven. On the side, Eisler is also a certified dandy, hence him owning four English Cut suits. We caught up with him to discuss his books and what it feels likes to wear a bespoke suit …

Are you busy writing a book now?
I just turned in the manuscript for *Zero Sum*, a story about secret assassin John Rain set in Tokyo in 1982. In the course of getting close to his government-minister target, young Rain has a love affair with an older Italian woman, Maria Grazia, who gives him life lessons in a variety of areas, including clothes.

How long does it normally take to complete?
It used to be about one a year, but for the last several I'm at one every eight months or so. San Francisco has great coffee!

When do you get those ideas?
Often in the shower, or at other random moments. My theory is that those great ideas bubble up from the unconscious much like dreams and, like dreams, fragment quickly upon encountering our normal waking consciousness. The only way to remember a dream well is to write it down immediately, and it's the same with sudden, inspired ideas.

Where does John Rain come from?
As I spent three years in the CIA, I got into a variety of martial arts. And then I moved to Tokyo to train in judo. I think all the other stuff must have been building up in my mind like dry tinder, waiting for the spark that life in Tokyo came to provide. Because while I was taking the train to work one morning, a vivid image came to me of two men following another man down Dogenzaka street in Shibuya. I still don't know where the image came from, but I started thinking about it. Who are these men? Why are they following that other guy? Then answers started to come: they're assassins. They're going to kill him. But these answers just led to more questions: why are they going to kill him? What did he do? Who do they work for? It felt like a story, so I started writing, and that was the birth of John Rain and *Rain Fall*.

Your previous work with the CIA and as a lawyer must come in handy for inspiration and material to draw from?
No doubt training in small arms, long arms, hand-to-hand, improvised explosive devices, small-water craft, air drops to friendly forces, surveillance, counter-surveillance, counter-terrorism, agent recruitment and management, interrogation and elicitation techniques is good background. As for being a lawyer, that came in handy, too, when creating Alex Treven, the lawyer protagonist of *Fault Line* … and of course in reviewing publication and film-rights contracts!

Got any advice for budding writers?
Believe in yourself. You'll probably encounter a lot of rejections before you find success, and if you don't believe in yourself, those rejections can stop you. Don't let them. Keep writing. No one is born published.

What are the top three things you love about being a fiction writer?
Flexible schedule, travelling to amazing places researching various aspects of a new story and finally, love 'em or hate 'em, no one can write my books but me!

When and how did you hear of English Cut?
I was thinking about buying a bespoke suit and naturally did a bit of online research. I liked Tom's philosophy and his lineage: beautiful silhouettes that were paradoxically structured and relaxed-looking.

How many do you have?
Four suits. Two basic: one navy, one black. And two a little more bold: an olive, worsted with a wine-coloured windowpane, and a gorgeous, old-school charcoal flannel chalk stripe that's like something out of the 1940s.

What, according to you, is the point of difference with an English Cut suit compared to others?
I can't count how many times people have complimented me on my clothes when I'm wearing one of Tom's suits. And while it's cool that people who really know clothes might recognise the subtle points that make an English Cut suit look so great, for most people it's less conscious than that—you just look great, without any obvious reason.

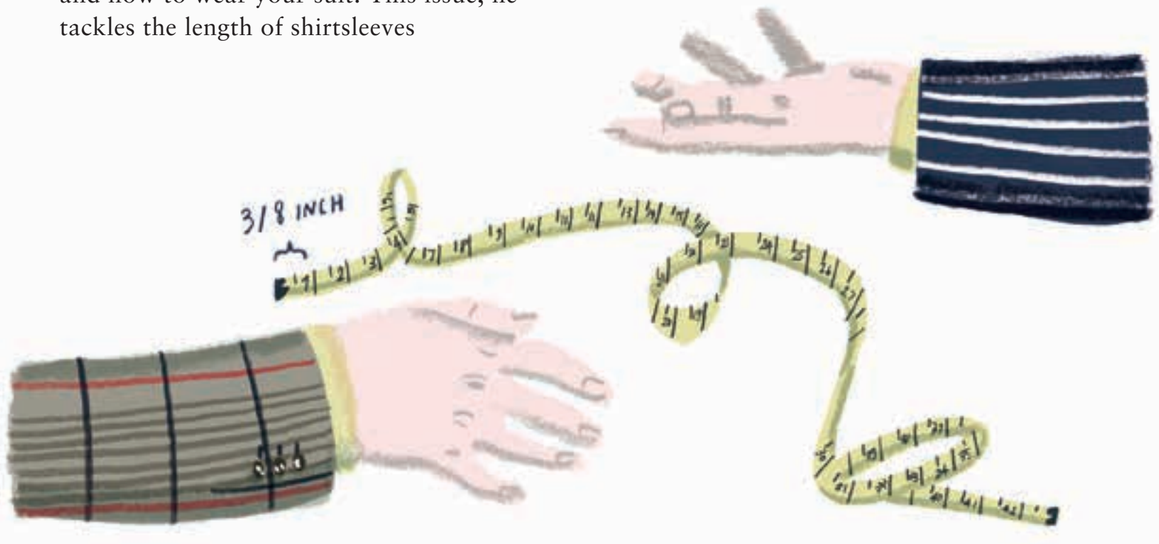
And it's not only how the clothes look, it's also how they feel. The jackets obviously have some structure, for example, but they don't feel structured. I know this will sound strange, but they feel so soft and natural it's like pulling on a bathrobe. And then you look in the mirror, and you look like a diplomat— though without any obvious reason why. Relaxed, confident, effortless. I wouldn't go so far as to argue the clothes make the man, but man, they don't hurt, either.

Can you describe the feeling that bespoke suits gives you, compared to off the peg?
In some ways it's the inverse of what I said about my novels above. A novel is written exclusively by me; an English Cut suit is made exclusively for me! And both are a reflection of something unique in my taste, my perspective and my way of engaging with the world.

Photographs Shawn Brackbill, *Illustration* Rachel Gannon

Rules of Tailoring

Tom Mahon on the ins and outs of tailoring and how to wear your suit. This issue, he tackles the length of shirtsleeves



The relationship between your coat sleeves and your shirtsleeves is not an exact science. Some people like to see more cuff, and others prefer to see less … but this is generally how we look at them as a cutter: if you wave your hands in the air, the sleeves are going to look short, so our starting point is always standing casually with your arms relaxed, naturally falling down by your sides. Now the old rule, when standing normally, is that the shirt should fall on to the top of the hand so it covers the wrist; most shirtmakers will agree with this. It's very hard to give an exact measurement, but what we aim for is about 3/8 to half an inch of shirtsleeves showing when you're standing normally. But, as mentioned, this is not an exact science. Some like a lot of cuff showing, especially on evening wear; less cuff on show is often preferred on tweeds and more casual coats. Another fact we have to take into consideration is to think about the fabric of the coat. They all wear differently, so if you have linen or cotton for example, they'll crease a lot more, which after regular wear will shorten the sleeve and show more cuff.

Photograph Lizzie Mayson

Mannequin Mode

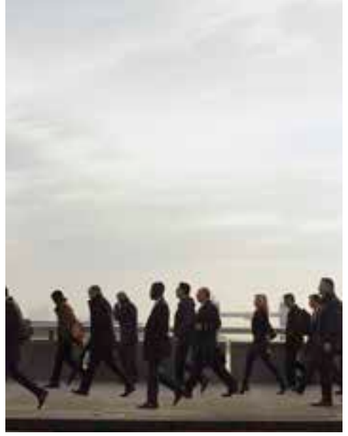
In-house stylist Karl Matthews puts together a look using English Cut garments and pieces from his own wardrobe, creating a hybrid of traditional tailoring and casual accessories

English Cut styling is all about using versatile garments from your existing wardrobe. That way you create options: it's not just about one look, you want to be able to cross-breed clothes to create new ways of wearing your English Cut suits. Here, for example, we've taken the waistcoat from another three-piece suit and mixed it with other garments. It's brown Donegal wool, but the fabric has flashes of colour running through it, which makes it easier to match other materials and colours. In this instance, I've added a shirt from my own wardrobe. It's a light and thin denim shirt, but the button-down details make it suitable for a more formal look like this. I matched that with my own colourful pocket squares to get a contrast in there … I don't often wear loud colours, but it's nice to bring life to the look with a contrast colour. The jacket is part of a suit, but it can be taken apart and worn with jeans or another casual bottom. Made out of a medium-grey flannel from Hardy Minnis, it makes for a comfortable fit. Like with denim, the more you wear the garment, the softer it gets; it gets more and more comfortable as it moulds to your body. The jacket is a two-button notch lapel – an absolute no-brainer, it's so versatile as it works with most looks in this neutral colour. Finally, the tie is a chocolate-brown silk knit with sky-blue dots from Augustus Hare … and now you're good to go out!

Suiting the Commuters

Public transport is on the rise, which is good for the environment but tough luck for rush hour commuters. Here's how to get through it …

DAVID HELLQVIST



A few years ago, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) carried out a survey on how people in Britain travel to and from work. According to the census, which is organised by ONS once a decade, London had the highest proportion of workers commuting by public transport. Almost 50% (49.9%) of Londoners use this collective way of travelling, rather than walking, cycling or driving. Of that 49.9%, the majority (22.6%) used light railway, 14% travelled on a bus or coach, and 13.3% took the train. Overall, the amount of people using public transport had increased over the previous 10 years, whether they lived in London or any other part of the UK.

So there you have it, commuting on public transport is a growing trend. But that doesn't make it pleasant! It's hot in the summer and crowded in the winter, as people wear big and bulky coats. Complaining about having to go on the rush-hour tube is probably one of the top five most popular conversation topics among over-heated Londoners stressing to get to work after dropping off the kids or trying to make it home to start dinner.

So you should at least try and get something out of it by enjoying the colourful characters and styles around you. One of the best commuting experiences is, arguably, to travel to and from the City in London. Here, more than anywhere else, you can take away something positive—namely people-watching—from an inherently negative environment. The area is full of dandyish workers heading to an office, be it in the Shard or the Gherkin. Often they'll be dressed accordingly, in a suit or other formal attire. Alone or in a herd—as these photographs for personal project *Urbis* by Mark Sanders show—there's a uniform aesthetic, a sense of belonging.

Photographs Mark Sanders

FOOD MAP

New York City

Two generations of property moguls list NYC's hottest eateries: Howard Lorber is the CEO of Vector Group and estate brokers Douglas Elliman; his son, Michael, is a SVP at Douglas Elliman and a star of Bravo TV's *Million Dollar Listing New York*

HL: At 1pm, you can usually find me at Harry Cipriani. I've been eating there regularly for over 25 years; I prefer it for lunch. Even though they're known for their homemade pasta, I stick to fish. It's a nice combination of NYC business types and the European jet set. It doesn't hurt that I live in the building as well! My table is the first one when you walk into the restaurant on the right.

THE SHERRY-NETHERLAND, 781 5TH AVE, NY 10022

HL: Legendary restaurateur Marc Packer recently opened up another Avra in the old Rouge Tomate space on East 60th Street. Of course, I even remember when it was the original Copacabana location. I love it for dinner: great Greek food and the best fish I have ever had. The only problem is that as soon as you sit down, they bring over pitta and their delicious Greek spreads that I can't get enough of.

14 EAST 60TH ST, NY 10022

HL: When I want to venture downtown during the workweek, I usually head to The Polo Bar for dinner. I love saying that it's downtown, because, to me, 55th Street is downtown. It still seems like the hottest spot in NYC, even though it's been open for over a year now. I can honestly say that I eat there once a week, and there is always some celebrity hiding among the wood panelling, plaid pillows and horse paintings. Ralph's famous corned beef sandwich is truly amazing, but I usually go for the chicken paillard if I'm trying to be healthy.

1 EAST 55TH ST, NY 10022

ML: Of late my favourite lunch spot has been Le Bilboquet. I'm a sucker for their Cajun chicken and French fries. The staff is so amazing, and the menu has something for everyone. The casual dining atmosphere is very popular among ladies who lunch and very well-dressed Europeans.

20 EAST 60TH ST, NY 10022

ML: Sant Ambroeus on Madison Avenue is probably my favourite dinner spot at the moment. Their Italian food is perfect any time of the year. The only problem is that you have to walk past their homemade gelato to get to your table!

1000 MADISON AVE, NY 10021

ML: My favourite neighbourhood go-to place Le Charlot – it's just a block from my apartment. They have the best steak frites in the city, and a great French feel in the heart of the Upper East side. When the weather is nice, it's such a treat to sit outside on East 69th Street.

19 EAST 69TH ST, NY 10021

Illustration Rachel Gannon

A Tailor's Tale

Tom Mahon picks an item from the English Cut archives and lets us in on its secret. This coat used to belong to Prince Charles and today hangs proudly in English Cut's Boston store

Prince Charles's jacket was cut in the early 1990s whilst I was at Anderson & Sheppard. The story goes that HRH visited his mother and hung his jacket over the back of a chair. And as corgis do, they decided to have a good chew at the corner of his double-breasted coat. Not the first sartorial tragedy involving either pets or children. It was returned to the workshop where Paul "Griff" Griffiths, the then-apprentice to Pat Davey [coat-maker at Anderson & Sheppard] had to carefully unpick and separate the damaged forepart of the coat. Then a basic replica was cut that was copied exactly to fit the rest of the coat and match the opposite side perfectly. Making is hard enough, but this requires great, almost forgery-like, skills. Eventually, the job was done, and no one could tell the difference, except Paul and his mentor, Pat. A sweet detail of that time is that Paul would always keep a little snip of cloth from any suits that were being made and send them to his doting mother. She would then scour the press and media to match up the sample with any images of suits that HRH was wearing. Then, of course, on finding a match she'd declare to friends, family and anyone who'd listen, "My son made that!" Paul kept the old forepart as a souvenir, and that's why we have it at the Mandarin Oriental hotel in Boston.

Photograph Mike Casey

Writing Is a Gift

Mont Blanc collaborate with UNICEF on a limited-edition collection of pens with blue sapphire details and an alphabet-inspired design

DAVID HELLQVIST

There are, by definition, quite a few things that separate man from animals, but one of the more defining traits is our ability to communicate through writing. Ever since paper and pen were invented, we've been able to write down thoughts and messages. And as there's not much that can be done to refine the paper stock, we early on focused our energy on making exquisite pens. It's in that tradition that Montblanc, the German luxury manufacturer of leather goods, watches and jewellery, work hard to produce beautiful writing instruments.

But Montblanc aren't just dedicated to their chosen art form, they also believe writing is a precious gift that has the power to change the world. As such, they have a long-standing relationship with UNICEF and continue to support the organisation's literacy and education programmes. The latest Montblanc x UNICEF collection is based on the iconic Meisterstück pen and inspired by the Rosetta Stone, one of the most significant objects in the history of the written word.

When discovered in 1799, the stone became key to unlocking the meaning of hieroglyphics and understanding the culture of ancient Egyptian civilisation. With its multilingual inscriptions, this artefact was also one of the first signs of international understanding and cooperation. As such, the Montblanc pens feature handwritten characters that represent the first letters children learn to write at school in six different languages from around the world.

The Montblanc x UNICEF Meisterstück pens are available now at montblanc.com

in good

WORDS

JAMIE MILLAR

PHOTOGRAPHS

PHILIP SINDEN

COMPANY

English Cut founder Tom Mahon and his co-director, Paul Griffiths, sit down for a meal to discuss their professional and personal journey from London to Cumbria—and back

A Cumbrian and a cockney respectively, cutter Tom Mahon and tailor Paul Griffiths might initially strike you as an odd couple. Longer than many marriages, their 26-year professional relationship started at venerated Savile Row firm Anderson & Sheppard. Then, when Mahon returned to Cumbria and set up English Cut, he gradually wooed "Griff", now co-director and head coat-maker, to the north; a mark not just of their compatibility, but of their interdependence. "I always try to cut the best I can, but if I can't get it made well, it's not going to happen," says Mahon. "Likewise, Griff can sew absolute works of art, but if they're not fitted properly it doesn't make any difference. So whether we get on or not, we're stuck with each other." We sat down with the pair at Hardy's Brasserie, around the corner from the English Cut store on Chiltern Street, to find out about the journey they've been on together …

When did you first meet?

TOM Summer 1990. I trained at S Redmayne in Cumbria, and I joined Anderson & Sheppard as an undercutter to head cutter Dennis Hallbery.

GRIFF I started a four-year apprenticeship at Anderson's in 1987, so I'd have been on my last year in 1990. We were all scared of his boss.

So were you the go-between, Tom?

T You know something … In those days, cutters did not mix with tailors.

G Correct, they didn't mix at all.

T I walked upstairs one day to where the tailors worked and said generally to the room, "Where do you fellas go for a pint?" They all looked nervously at each other, and eventually one of them went, "Err, we'll be in The Burlington Arms." They all thought I was a spy.

G We couldn't talk about the cutters then, could we?

What's the distinction between a cutter and a tailor?

T In layman's terms, I'm the architect, he's the builder. I deal with front of house, the design and the drafting. And Griff does all the craftwork: the sewing.

G The important bit, haha!

T I was the only sociable cutter there. The others rarely went upstairs.

G They'd come up to bring a job to you. But if the intercom went, and they called your name, you'd panic. You didn't want to go downstairs.

T It sounds really Dickensian. And some things about it were quite hard. But I really liked it. There was no messing around.

If cutters and tailors never mixed, how did you get to know each other?

G It calmed down a bit in the end, didn't it?

T Yes, it did. And there was a change in that the cutting room moved upstairs. Although it didn't make any odds to me, because I always went for a pint with the tailors and eventually they realised, "Oh, he's all right."

G I started going in the cutting room and then playing chess as well.

T We used to have a chess club at lunchtime. We were all addicted.

Was it about that time you started talking about moving up north, Tom?

T I always knew I was going to leave; I really enjoyed the life down here, but as it went on I thought, "If we do something good, people will come to us." But we never had any plans of doing anything together.

G I was a typical southerner then: "I ain't going up north!"

T A lot of tailors work remotely. At first Griff worked for us in London, and the only delay it caused was one night's transport on a courier. We'd send him five or six jobs on a Monday evening, and he'd have them Tuesday morning. So he didn't need to move.

What prompted you to eventually relocate?

G Seven years, a couple of visits and having my oldest boy.

T He came up, and I took him for a sail on Ullswater lake. The sun was shining, and I remember him standing on the shore and saying, "It's not bad up north."

G The first few months after I moved, I was still working mainly for Anderson's and I was wondering how it was all going to go. The next minute, I got a job for Liam Neeson. Then I got two jackets to make for Anda Rowland, who owned Anderson's.

T If you're good at something, you can live where you want. The best tailors don't always work on Savile Row—they'll often work in a shed at the bottom of the garden.

Why did you want to go into tailoring?

G I'm a big Spurs fan. When I was about nine years old, everyone did sewing at school. I sewed this Spurs shield and I got the highest commendation. Then, when I went to secondary school, I wasn't into metalwork or woodwork, so I thought, "I'll do fashion and fabrics." I was the first boy to do it, but I wasn't a mug: it was me and all girls, haha!

Do you miss anything about London?

G Not a lot, to be honest with you. It's just so peaceful up there.

T It's a nice way of life. It's great for the children.

You've always maintained a presence in London, but now you've opened a store on Chiltern Street ...

T Some people—even some of our colleagues—thought we should get a place on Savile Row. But we don't need a street to give us authority, and the people who feel that way possibly need examine their priorities. Sadly, you can purchase garments there that have no connection at all with the Row.

G They're not even making on Savile Row. That's the funny thing.

T A client dragged me to the Firehouse. I came out and thought, "This is a nice street, with a nice vibe." I've been in the trade for 33 years, which is long enough. But if I'd been in the trade for 50 or 60 years, I think this is what Savile Row would have been like then.

G Yeah, definitely. I was just going to say that.

How would you describe your relationship after 26 years?

G Very good. He does what I tell him to do ...

T Haha! Personality-wise, we get on and we do totally different roles. So far it's worked out pretty well.

Has the launch of made-to-measure (MTM) changed your roles much?

G No, in that I'm still making the bespoke jackets up north. But with MTM, going out to the factory in Japan and showing them exactly how we wanted it was a bit of a game-changer.

T There's an awful lot of rubbish out there with MTM. And you know why? It's because they've never involved a proper cutter and a proper tailor. You just go to the nearest factory, strike up a deal and sew your name in it. We went to the factory and said, "This is how our patterns are; let's see your pattern. We want to adjust the drape and take out the shoulder. Can we get it to roll through? Change the pocket shape? Widen the waistband?" I don't think there's a better MTM garment out there.

Did you ever imagine when you sewed that Spurs shield that one day you'd be flying over to Japan ?

G Nah. Not even to New York or San Francisco. Most of the time I wouldn't go: Thomas was the one who would travel. But when we started the MTM, I began travelling more. One of the girls from my sewing class at school moved to New York, so I got to see a lot more of her. Her boy's my godson.

T Everyone always rates the cutter. Tailors are in a protective bubble where they just have to produce a lovely job: they can make suits for a client for 40 years and never even know who he is.

G Yes, I would know his surname … and have a good idea of what his body looks like!

T But the cutter is at the coalface because they have to find the work, deal with the client and stand there while they say, "I heard you were the best cutter in the world—this is rubbish." Luckily, they don't say that.

G That's because us tailors sort it out for them, haha! ◆▶

The *Trainspotting* actor talks about returning to our screens as Spud after a 20-year break, how the cast's wardrobes helped set fashion trends and why they were surprised a film about Scottish drug addicts ended up a box-office success

PHOTOGRAPHS
JON GORRIGAN

STYLING
KARL MATTHEWS

WORDS
JAMIE MILLAR

EB

The Goring isn't one of London's best-known hotels, but it's a damn good one. Just a five-minute walk from the modern developments and pandemonium surrounding London's Victoria station, the location for The Cork photoshoot is an Edwardian world away, a baroque oasis of tranquility and gentility. Family-run, quietly excellent, it's the only hotel to hold a Royal Warrant from the Queen for its hospitality—rated the best in the UK by the readers of the US edition of *Condé Nast Traveller* magazine.

The Goring is looking good for its age, its decor having recently been refreshed as part of a 105-year birthday makeover. The wallpaper in the lobby depicts an English parkland spotted with wild animals that represent members of the Goring family. The gloriously maximalist Royal Suite, meanwhile, is "papered" with green silk originally woven for the first-class dining room of the Titanic. Hanging in the capacious shower is a full-length oil painting of Queen Victoria, protected by specially commissioned airline glass; a smaller picture of Edmund Blackadder and Queenie adorns the more modest "throne room". Boasting more character than you could shake a sceptre at, it's brilliantly eccentric.

With no fewer than 95 acting credits to his name on IMDB, Ewen Bremner's CV could be described in the same way. Over his eclectic career, the 45-year-old has played such disparate roles as drug addicts, army rangers and Salvador Dalí, spanning the entire cinematic spectrum from obscure indie to unavoidable blockbuster. He's been directed by Danny Boyle in *Trainspotting*, Ridley Scott in *Black Hawk Down* and Mike Leigh in *Naked*. He's acted for Woody Allen in not one but two films, *Match Point* and *You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger*, and opposite auteur Werner Herzog in Harmony Korine's *Julien Donkey-Boy*. If you wanted to pigeonhole someone so multifaceted, you might characterise Bremner as a "character actor"—that's to say, a genuinely talented one who isn't sufficiently famous or glamorous to be a leading man in the conventional Hollywood sense. Hence he's cast in movies like *Pearl Harbor*, in his own words, "to make Ben Affleck look good".

Much more handsome, and less manic, than his wild-eyed creations, the equanimous Bremner looks pretty good himself off screen.

"There's nothing that I like more than watching people who are really good at – and care about – what they do. It makes me feel uplifted"

The benefit of a good night's sleep in one of the Goring's slightly less opulent suites, perhaps—or his quietly excellent English Cut bespoke suit, a single-breasted three-piece in navy JJ Minnis flannel. "There's nothing that I like more than watching people who are really good at—and care about—what they do," he explains over a cup of camomile tea in the plush bar and lounge, which is like Christian Grey's Red Room but more comfortable. "It makes me feel uplifted. And I could see that with Tom and Karl [Matthews, English Cut's in-house stylist]. There's a reason that they're still doing what they're doing."

Given his multiple dramatic personae, Bremner is no stranger to costume fittings. But he was entirely unfamiliar with having them for himself until six months ago, when he and the rest of the cast of *T2 Trainspotting* were invited to have a suit made by his native Edinburgh's Stewart Christie (founded in 1700 and royal warrant holder to King George V, an accolade it still qualifies for as a maker of military uniforms). "It had never occurred to me that you would have something made for you," says Bremner. "I've been tailored a lot for work, but not for my own personal life." Although this was only his second time, he's quickly getting used to it: "Certainly you feel very tidy in a suit that's built especially for you."

When not wearing bespoke suits, Bremner describes his habitual habiliment with typical self-deprecation as "grandad style". "I wear a lot of flat caps," he says. "I've also got this overcoat and occasionally I catch sight of myself and think, 'Oh my God, I look like a 60-year-old from the 60s.'" A fairer and more accurate description might be "Peaky Blinder": not razor-sharp, but with a perceptible edge. "I like well-made clothes that have a good aesthetic, but I don't like to feel super done-up," he says. "I like something that I feel I could sleep in—not that I would. I don't like to be too precious about clothes."

It's only relatively recently that Bremner has honed his discerning individual taste. "For most of my life I didn't really understand much about fashion," he says. "I didn't know how to find something that I felt comfortable in, or that was actually my size. So I was quite haphazard." Ironically, the knowledge of what does and doesn't suit him was acquired

"*Rachael Fleming, the* Trainspotting *costume designer, basically invented skinny jeans for men with that film. They didn't exist before that time*"

through outfitting his alter-egos, which is sort of like shopping on behalf of other people. "Every time I start a production, I work with a costume designer on establishing a particular look," he says. "So I think that through much repeated experience, I have become more attuned to how something fits and the message that it's conveying. And I realised that clothes have the potential to say a hell of a lot about somebody."

Clothes don't quite make the man, in Bremner's estimation. "I think that character comes from inside somebody, and is brought out by circumstance," he says. "It might not be clear what somebody's character is until they're in a situation that demands that they stand up for themselves, or fight for something. But character is expressed through the way that people present themselves." What clothes can do is make it clear how a character values themselves: their self-worth or lack thereof. "So I wouldn't start off by thinking, 'How does this person look?'" he says. "I'd think, 'How does this person feel? And if they feel like that, how might they choose to present themselves in the world?'"

Clothes can also make an actor adjust their performance. A good example is *Trainspotting*, the kinetic film adaptation of Irvine Welsh's track marks-and-all novel about destitute Edinburgh junkies. Released in 1996, it gave the careers of Bremner and his cast mates—Ewan McGregor, Robert Carlyle and Jonny Lee Miller—plus director Danny Boyle a shot in the arm that they all got stratospherically high on. And it's probably still the thing that Bremner is most known for, not least because the long-awaited sequel—*T2 Trainspotting*—finally arrived in cinemas at the start of this year, two decades on from the iconic original. If not exactly a household name, he is currently an even more recognisable face than usual thanks to "the reawakening of the *Trainspotting* giant".

Bremner nearly missed that cultural behemoth because of a disagreement about clothes. Trainspotting was set primarily in Leith, the docklands district of Edinburgh that regards itself as a separate city, where Bremner himself grew up. Like similar areas in other cities, Leith is predominantly working-class and crippled by poverty. "I felt that it was important to find something that was faithful to that area and time," he says. "But the costume designer, Rachael Fleming, and Danny were throwing around a lot of references. They weren't trying to make a documentary about Leith. They were trying to make something that drew on all kinds of sources and had real flair, a style of its own."

Bremner was also deeply familiar with the material, having played the main character of Renton in the much darker stage adaptation. It wasn't that he was miffed with being passed over for the film in favour of Ewan McGregor, instead being offered the part of Renton's hapless pal, Spud; it was that he objected to the characters, who were based on actual people, being given a comparatively glossy makeover. "The novel was drawn from a very real world," he says. "In the self-righteousness of my young mind, I felt that these were designer junkies as they'd been translated from the book into the screenplay."

As Bremner would realise though, the outfit changes were by no means frivolous. For starters, they were critical to the breakneck pace of the film, which famously begins with the shoplifting ne'er-do-wells sprinting full pelt down Edinburgh's Princes Street to the tune of Iggy Pop's *Lust for Life*. "It was very important for Danny to find these looks for each of the characters that were so specific that you wouldn't for a second confuse one with the other," says Bremner. "With a lot of movies, you spend the first 20 minutes going, 'Is that the same guy?' Danny wanted the story to fly right out of the traps."

The clothes also suited the style of the film, which blended hyperreality and surreality to striking effect. "The first day of fitting, we tried on lots of stuff, but I was quite resistant," says Bremner. "Then something clicked in me, and I started to see the potential of doing it this way. They were making something with theatrical expression, something more playful than a Mike Leigh who tries to capture reality sincerely, and that gives you something to play with. Spud could be probably more free-flowing than if he'd been more authentically dressed." Indeed, the costumes turned them into what Bremner jokingly calls "superheroes" who populate the "*Trainspotting* universe", like that of comic-book publishers-turned-film-makers Marvel and DC. The "designer junkies" were also trendsetters, as the fashion industry became hooked on heroin chic: "Rachael basically invented skinny jeans for men with that film. They didn't exist before that time."

Designer or not, films about junkies are unsurprisingly toxic at the box office, as cast and crew were acutely aware when making the first *Trainspotting*. And the resulting critical and commercial smash was a tremendously hard act to follow. "We certainly were nervous," says Bremner. "In acting though, everything is a leap into the unknown. I don't know how a scene is going to go, I don't know how the line is going to come out of my mouth, I don't know exactly what the response is going to be. If I'm not taking that leap, then I'm not giving my best work, because I'm holding something back. And if you don't take that leap, nothing happens." Even the insurance policy of the same cast and crew was no guarantee that the sequel wouldn't fall short: "But if we'd gone in with a checklist to tick off, it would have been perfunctory and it wouldn't be hitting people like a ton of bricks—like it is."

Returning to the character of Spud after two decades was like putting on old clothes, says Bremner—metaphorically but also literally: "Some pieces from the original movie made it in—where we could still fit into them." Including Spud's trademark glasses, with lenses yellower than the room overlooking the Goring's lawn. "Somehow I managed to hold on to them until we thought we might be making

"I'm open to the universe ... But I'm not going to be greedy and say I want to be the next James Bond, or Tom Cruise in Mission: Impossible"

another film," he continues. "We found a way to use them that was appropriate." Given how much time had elapsed between the two films though, it was necessarily much more like pulling on new clothes.

"Rachael and her design partner, Steven Noble, really thought long and hard about how to update these guys but retain their individual qualities," says Bremner. "They knew the characters so well and they've got a radical eye. There's a great designer based in Edinburgh called Kestin Hare, who also has a shop in London. He makes these super-cool clothes that are fairly modern but retro at the same time and really well-made. In the poster, I'm wearing this shorts suit with this floral pattern that Rachael found there: that was from their line last summer. I got quite a few things from there for the new film, but she would take them and dye them a terrible colour. She had some specialist down in the basement of the studio with goggles and vats, bubbling these potions, who'd bring them out reborn in completely unthought-of colour schemes."

It wasn't all an act; the cast and crew were of course themselves 20 years older. "It did make us reflect on the passage of time," says Bremner. "I've done about five movies with Ewan, but a couple of those guys I hadn't seen for 20 years. The first time round, we were all in our early to mid-twenties and we just took it for granted. This time around, it felt precious to be in each other's company."

Bremner has been acting since he was 14, having discovered his passion through youth theatres. "I liked being in that company," he says. "Everybody was a few years older than me. Most of them were girls." He got an agent so he could be seen for jobs, but didn't view it seriously as a career until the success of *Trainspotting*. "I knew it was so precarious," he says. "It's so unpredictable whether you're going to work or not this year. And that doesn't mean you're going to work the following year either. It's not about being good or bad at it. You have to be mad enough to still put yourself out there." Auditions can be as cringe-making as Spud's speed-fuelled job interview, but thankfully they get easier with age: "If you're not so lucky, the auditions aren't coming in."

Whatever the scale of the film, Bremner applies himself in the same way, "because it's me that's going to be up there on screen looking like an ass if I don't know what I'm doing." The main difference with the blockbusters is that they're more cobbled together than the indies. "Because they're such juggernauts, if they don't go now, they're not going to go at all, so they generally jump into production without a finished script," he says. "It's really normal on the big films to have a writer or two bringing new pages every morning. Whereas on a low-budget film, they don't have that luxury, so they really sweat over the script before shooting. There's so much money at stake that I thought it would be the other way around. Otherwise, why would you risk all those gazillions of dollars going down the toilet?" It would seem that some Hollywood producers' bathrooms are even more lavish than those in the Goring's royal suite.

Bremner is now a celestial body in the DC universe, albeit not an actual superhero, thanks to his role in *Wonder Woman*, out this June. As is standard with such top-secret projects, non-disclosure agreements dictate that he can't reveal much, beyond the fact that he plays a shell-shocked sniper who returns to the battlefields of world war one to assist Princess Diana (not that one) in her mission. "With unexpected consequences," he laughs.

And beyond that, Bremner is content to stride confidently into the unknown. "I've been really fortunate to have the opportunity to work with people who are really good at what they do," he says. "My only wish is for that to continue. I'm open to the universe as to what form that will take—but I'm not going to be greedy and say I want to be the next James Bond, or Tom Cruise in *Mission: Impossible*. I'm going to let Tom carry on. He can relax. His job's safe from me." ◆▶

Grooming Michael O'Gorman, *Photography assistant* Bruno Baptista
The Goring, 15 Beeston Place, London SW1W 0JW

Three's a Crowd

PHOTOGRAPHY
CHRISTOPHE MEIMOON

STYLING
DAVID LAMB

ART DIRECTION
CHARLOTTE HEAL

Previous page: *Grey suit and tie, both* English Cut, *Shirt* Thom Sweeney, *Shoes* John Lobb, *Socks* Falke

Left: *Charcoal suit and shirt* English Cut, *Shoes* Jimmy Choo, *Pale grey suit and cufflinks* English Cut, *Shoes* John Lobb, *Shirt* Turnbull & Asser

This page: *Tan suit* English Cut, *Shirt* Thomas Pink, *Shoes* Russell & Bromley, *Brown suit, shirt and pocket square all* English Cut, *Shoes* Russell & Bromley

This page: *Striped blazer, shirt, trousers and cufflinks, all* English Cut

Right: *Blue suit* English Cut, *Shirt* Thomas Pink, *Tie* Drake's, *Shoes* Jimmy Choo, *Blue suit and tie* English Cut, *Shirt* Turnbull & Asser

Yellow blazer, shirt, tie and trousers all English Cut, *Seersucker suit* English Cut, *Shirt* Thomas Pink

This page: *Green suit* English Cut, *Shirt* Turnbull & Asser, *Shoes* John Lobb

Right: *Grey suit* English Cut, *Pink blazer and trousers* English Cut, *Shirt* Turnbull & Asser, *Tie* Drake's

Left: *Suit, shirt, tie and cufflinks* English Cut

This page: *Blue suit, tie and pocket square* English Cut, *Shirt* Thomas Pink

Red suit, shirt and cufflinks English Cut, *Tie* Drake's, *Stone suit and tie* English Cut, *Shirt* Thomas Pink

Photo assistants Ed Bourmier and Christophe Schumacher
Styling assistant Keyleen Nguyen
Grooming Isabell Boettcher
Assistant Natsumi Ebiko
Producer Georgia Reeve
Set design Leo Todd
Set assistant Jonny Winter
Models Chris at Models1, James at Supa and Tabitha at Established

AUTUMN WINTER ’17

WORDS
TEO VAN DEN BROEKE

PHOTOGRAPHS
JONATHAN PRYCE DANIEL

Having toured the catwalk shows of London, Milan and Paris, the style director at British *Esquire* gives us a personal insight into the AW17 tailoring trends

Where once a navy two-piece suit was the go-to uniform for white-collar workers the world over, now the rules of the boardroom have changed: major financial institutions JP Morgan and PricewaterhouseCoopers have started encouraging their employees to come to work dressed in more casual attire.

Revolutionary though this collective loosening of ties may sound, it’s been that way in the offices of ultra-modern tech companies since the beginning. Silicon Valley leaders such as Facebooks CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, and Instagram founder Kevin Systrom, for instance, both sport a casual uniform of trainers and open-neck shirts day in, day out.

The changing mood in menswear has been reflected on the runways of London, Paris and Milan. Over the past few seasons, fewer shirt and tie combinations have been shown by even the most traditional designers, with labels favouring a more casual, sports-inspired approach to the clothes they show. One need only look at the brands dominating the pages of glossy fashion magazines right now—Vetements or Gosha Rubchinskiy (both of which specialise in styled luxury sportswear)—to realise that the world of menswear is rapidly moving in a more casual direction.

Even the more traditional retailers have noticed a change. “There’s been an increase in sales of sports jackets and tailored trousers as they’re being teamed with more casual pieces such as jeans and knitwear,” says Fiona Firth, buying director at Mr Porter. “This has had an effect on the relevance of the tie to a man’s wardrobe, as men are frequently wearing open-collared shirts without ties, which coheres to this relaxed style.”

At the beginning of January, I embarked on a tour of Europe’s major fashion capitals in a bid to distil the trends we’ll be wearing next winter, and I’m pleased to report that though things are looking sportier than ever, tailoring (in one form or another) still plays a prominent role in the modern menswear vernacular.

In London, the name on every editor’s lips was Grace Wales Bonner. Known for her immaculately tailored collections, there was a crisp military air to the frock jackets and double-breasted suits she showed. Cut close to the body, it was a look mirrored at that other British stalwart Alexander McQueen. The key here, however, was that no matter how beautifully tailored the suits were, there wasn’t a tie in sight. It was the same at Parisian brand Lanvin, where extraordinary dove-grey suits with origami seams were worn with nothing













"Don't be afraid to experiment with new and unexpected ways of styling your suit. Team a double-breasted two-piece with a shawl collar shirt in a tonal shade"

beneath them – the effect was contemporary in the extreme. At Cerruti, one of the most traditional tailoring brands to show in Paris, collarless shirts cut from the same fabric as the suits they were worn beneath looked easy and understated. Most importantly, however, they looked smart.

In Milan, Alessandro Sartori (the former creative director of Berluti) showed his first collection for Italian tailoring powerhouse Ermenegildo Zegna. Despite the fact that Zegna is arguably the most successful luxury-suit manufacturer in the world, the collection focused primarily on sportswear and heavily textured outerwear. That the dressiest look in the collection (which was shown in an enormous warehouse punctuated with Anselm Kiefer sculptures) consisted of a single-breasted dinner suit worn with a kimono-style shirt and a baseball cap, spoke volumes of the season's laid-back mood. There were track pants with elasticated cuffs worn with classic sports jackets, just as there were oversized coats in teaseled wools and classic suits finished with sporty contrast sleeves.

The other major Milanese tailoring houses embraced softness with similar gusto. At Canali, jackets of silk and cashmere were worn with rollnecks and in some cases nothing but scarves—a sense of elegance maintained by combinations of tonal hues. At Pal Zileri, soft-shouldered, three-piece corduroy suits in shades of jalfrezi and Madras were also worn with rollneck sweaters. There was also an appealing bookishness to the looks presented at both these brands, which felt as elegant as they did careworn.

Which brings me neatly on to perhaps the most prominent trend of the entire menswear merry-go-round. It's rare for one fabric to be used extensively by every label in one season, but for AW17 that fabric is corduroy.

At Hermès, belted corduroy overcoats in shades of pinot noir and smudged graphite had an understated, 70s-esque appeal. At Giorgio Armani, similarly smokey corduroy outer layers slipped down the runway like syrup. At Dior Homme, the look was altogether brighter and more modern, with a cherry-red needle cord suit acting as the sartorial centrepiece of the show.

The grand master of sprezzatura, Brunello Cucinelli, tackled the trend with a typically deft hand. Impossibly light and as soft as goose down, Mr Cucinelli's persimmon-hued jumbo cord suits begged to be worn (almost as much as they begged to be fondled). Unsurprising, then, that—in the words of Mr Cucinelli himself—"you'd have to sell your child to afford one".

The corduroy trend reached its zenith at Prada, where Miuccia sent out studious-looking young men decked out in vintage-cut jumbo cord suits. Resplendent in autumnal shades of maple leaf, ginger, Beaujolais and Vimto, the trousers and jackets were teamed with chunky pony-skin desert boots, patchwork tweed blousons and sweaters finished with chocolate-box watercolour paintings.

If the look you're going for is less librarian and more lounge lizard, then next season's velvet trend is probably for you. From flowing inky-blue trousers at Giorgio Armani and Louis Vuitton, to dark tracksuits at Korean brand Wooyoungmi and sumptuous patterned suits at Etro, the velvet garments on show in London, Paris and Milan felt Dickensian and decadent.

Parisian *bottier* Berluti embraced the velvet trend with aplomb. The first collection from nascent creative director Haider Ackermann—who is as well known for his architectural womenswear as he is for his rakish men's clothes—the tailoring within felt relevant and on point. Dusty-hued, close-cut velvet suits were worn with hefty cowboy boots and oversized overcoats. Shot through with a dose of Gallic insouciance, the tailored items on show might have looked scholastic, but they were cut for business.

So, to summarise, the most important tailoring trends to be aware of for autumn/winter 2017 are as follows: first—by all means wear a suit, but don't be afraid to experiment with new and unexpected ways of styling it. Team a double-breasted two-piece with a shawl collar shirt in a tonal shade, for instance. Or wear your single-breasted suit with a knitted open-neck shirt over a rollneck. Second—be sure to invest in a whole heap of corduroy, preferably in muted, earthy tones. Third—buy yourself a high-quality velvet jacket—it's the easiest route into the trend. Fourth, and finally, if there's anything I've learned on the menswear trail, it's that "tailored" need not equate to "uncomfortable". Just because something is cut to your shape does not mean that it should be constricting. Whether you're wearing casual separates or a fully canvassed three-piece suit, wear tailored clothes cut from comfortable fabrics and you'll reap the rewards. ◆▶

The *GQ* editor and chairman of London Fashion Week Men's is one of the most authoritative figures in British lifestyle media. Over the years, Jones has perfected his personal style defined by sleek tailoring, but—as *The Cork* found out—he's also fiercely protective about London's young and creative fashion scene

WORDS

JAMIE MILLAR

PHOTOGRAPHS

LIZZIE MAYSON

DJ

Being in *GQ* editor Dylan Jones' office can be an intimidating experience—even more so than sitting downstairs with all the female models in the lobby of Vogue House in London's Mayfair. The reverent hush that hangs over the church-like main *GQ* office on the first floor spreads to the Cork crew as they wait for their subject to arrive.

On the wall behind Jones' desk are edited highlights of his 18-year tenure at the helm of the monthly style bible—most obviously, a king-sized cover of the May 2012 issue graced by Prince Harry. Following a recent visit by Alastair Campbell, the former New Labour press secretary turned *GQ*'s chief interviewer, some of the frames bear pink Post-it notes with his scrawled verdict on their respective coolness. A *Daily Mail* front page with David Cameron and Nick Clegg. An *Evening Standard* front page featuring a picture of Boris Johnson—the magazine's one-time car correspondent—with erstwhile wardrobe mistresses Trinny and Susannah at the annual *GQ* Men of the Year awards. A letter on 10 Downing Street-headed paper from Cameron, thanking Jones for his work on the 2008 book *Cameron on Cameron: Conversations with Dylan Jones*, published shortly before the now-Brexited prime minister came to power.

Also chairman of London Fashion Week Men's for 10 seasons, Jones is an "influencer" in a sense that few labelled such merit. His endorsement can make or break aspiring fashion designers and prime ministerial hopefuls alike—or certainly embarrass them with revelations about, say, how much they drink (William "14 pints a day as a teenager" Hague) or fornicate (Nick "no more than 30 women" Clegg over). More than anything though, The Cork's collective nervousness probably stems from the fact that Jones has a keener assessment than most subjects of the quality of photographers, stylists, creative directors and yes, interviewers.

Jones sweeps in and puts the assembled slightly more at ease before removing his overcoat to reveal his English Cut sport coat in a grey herringbone wool/cashmere mix. Unsurprisingly, given his various professional hats, Jones is no stranger to being tailored. "Before London Fashion Week Men's, we usually receive a visitation from some Asian journalists," he says. "They ask questions like, 'What is your style regime?' in the expectation that I will give a really interesting answer. And I say, 'Well, I get up in the morning and I put a navy-blue suit on.'" Which explains why, in this case, he broke from the normcore: "It's really well made. Fantastic cloth."

Jones' reputation proceeds him, but while his stature and appearance—tall, bald, tailored—command respect, he's no totalitarian dictator. Many of his staff at *GQ* have been there almost as long as he has; if he rules with an iron fist, it's ensconced in a bespoke velvet glove. And behind the faintly imposing aspect lies a wickedly funny sense of humour, often at his own expense. "I'm sure that people used to think it was an affectation, but I started having suits made in the early 80s, when I was 24 or 25, because I'm really narrow and skinny—not as skinny as I used to be, unfortunately," he says. "Back then, you couldn't get any suits off the peg to fit you, because they were all very wide, boxy, double-breasted jackets with big shoulder pads. They looked like someone had thrown a bedsheet over a beanpole."

Since then, Jones has accumulated a "disgusting amount" of suits. "Too many," he admits, although he refutes (semi-serious) allegations that his office was extended principally to accommodate them: "No. All

"Journalists ask questions like, 'What is your style regime?' And I say, 'Well, I get up in the morning and I put a navy-blue suit on'"

right, maybe … But the thing is, people with large wardrobes usually have a lot of everything. I just have a lot of suits, and they're all exactly the same: navy-blue." Decision-fatigued high-fliers will often adopt a uniform so that they have one less thing to think about every day—like Barack Obama, who famously told *Vanity Fair* that he only wore navy or grey suits, or Steve Jobs, who had a job lot of identical black turtlenecks by the Japanese designer Issey Miyake. Or, suggests Jones, the Italian architect Gio Ponti: "He had four suits that he used to wear all year round: two for winter, two for summer; one for day, one for night. Brilliant. You just want to put a suit on, go to work and not worry about it."

Irrespective of any professional requirement, Jones wears suits because he likes to, and because they suit him. But his conversion to tailoring was in part a career decision. "I used to edit a magazine called *Arena* and I left that in 1992 to become associate editor on *The Observer*," he says. "I thought, 'If I'm going to work in newspapers, I should start wearing suits.'" Having not yet achieved a sufficiently high stature for Savile Row, his first tailor was Jack Geach in Harrow, who made drape jackets for teddy boys. From there, Jones moved up a division to Chris Ruocco, an ex-boxer in London's Kentish Town who was in the corner of hit artists such as Spandau Ballet and Wham! "One particular pop star used to call up a shop on South Molton Street called Bazaar and get a load of clothes delivered to try: Yohji Yamamoto, Comme des Garçons, things like that," says Jones. "He'd buy one piece to make it worth the shop's while, then he'd send the rest to Ruocco to be copied."

Later, Jones became interwoven with Timothy Everest, one of the driving forces behind the New Bespoke Movement of the mid-90s that injected a bit of fashion designer adrenaline into the flatlining craft. "Then Sarah Brown, who'd just married Gordon, wanted to make him look more elegant, so I recommended Timothy Everest," says Jones. "Tony Blair got so jealous of Gordon's suits that he started having his suits made there." Jones shifted his own allegiance to Richard James, another of the Cool Britannia tailors who made his suits for some time, including for his own wedding.

The other benefit of a uniform is that it removes the need for the kind of potentially disastrous experimentation that Jones used to conduct. "I used to wear awful things: tank tops; shirts with butterfly collars and French cafe scenes; bottle-green, high-waisted pinstripe trousers," he grimaces. "My worst purchase was some platforms. Can you imagine me in platforms? I was 6'1": I didn't need the extra five inches. And they were two-tone beige, sort of like brown and cappuccino. I bought shoe paint and painted them two shades of green. So I had green pinstripe Oxford bags, some sort of green top and these two-tone green platform boots. I mean, disgusting."

Jones' sartorial awakening occurred at the age of 12, when he saw David Bowie on *Top of the Pops*: "Some people wanted to go and see Bowie; some people wanted to dress like him. I wanted his hair." Alas, the unisex hairdressers of the Kent town of Deal, near Dover, were far from cutting-edge. "Of course they'd never heard of Bowie," says Jones. "And when I showed them a picture, they said, 'There's absolutely no way that your hair can look like this because it's floppy, not standy-uppy.' I left looking like Dave Hill from Slade." However, his one successful attempt to glam-rock up his life was a selection of brightly coloured glittery socks.

It's hard to imagine given his conservative, statesmanlike mien—less so if you look at the evidence that he periodically posts on Instagram—but Jones was quite avant-garde in his youth. He studied graphic design, film and photography at London's St Martin's School of Art during the height of the Blitz—the nearby club, that is, with its art student clientele, the breeding ground for cultural movements such as New Romanticism. Jones was focused on becoming a photographer; the only problem was that he was "terrible". "One of my degree projects was a pornographic Action Man series: all these toys having sex with each other," he says. "I've got lots of photographs of all the people involved in the Blitz era, but I wasn't very good. I wish I'd persevered though. I probably would have made a lot more money."

Never intending to go into journalism, much less the "style press", Jones' entry was unorthodox. "I was working on the door of the Gold Coast Club on Meard Street, underneath the Batcave," he says. "A friend of mine called Mark Bayley was taking pictures for *i-D* magazine and needed someone to go and ask the subjects how much they hated Margaret Thatcher and what kind of socks they were wearing. As I had nothing to do that day apart from get up late and watch Channel 4, I went along, typed it up on an old red typewriter and sent it in. Then I found out, because I didn't have a telephone, that Terry Jones—who owned *i-D* at the time—was trying to get in contact with me. He offered me a job and basically 'invented' me by giving me a career."

Jones rose to become editor at *i-D* in 1984 before taking over at *Arena* in 1988 after a stint as contributing editor to *The Face*, which was hugely influential in its heyday, but now—like *Arena*—is sadly defunct. Following his time at *The Observer*, he moved to *The Sunday Times Magazine* in 1993, again as associate editor, before returning to magazines proper in 1996 as group editor of *The Face*, *Arena* and *Arena Homme Plus*; and papers in 1997 as editor-at-large of *The Sunday Times*. When he became editor of *GQ* in 1999, his glossy new environs soon bore the telltale fingermarks of newsprint.

"Andrew Neil had reinvented *The Sunday Times* basically by copying lifestyle magazines," says Jones. "So I thought we should go the other way and copy newspapers. We hired the best writers we could afford: Adrian Gill, Tom Wolfe, Dominic Lawson." Jones' back-of-cigarette-pack pitch for his *GQ* editorship was "AA Gill directs a porn film", which he delivered on: "Adrian wrote this amazing script full of people having sex on and with various types of food. Very funny. Then he went off to California to make the film. By the way, when the tapes came in, they disappeared like *that*."

There was a serious point to all of this. *GQ* already had a reputation as a yuppie handbook, "fantastic for fashion and fancy restaurants". Jones' brainwave was to bolster the style with some substance. "The idea was to bring really good, longform feature writing and intelligent criticism to the magazine, because it wasn't being done elsewhere," he says. Certainly not by the lads' mags that were dominating the "brutal" market. Investing in quality proved a sound strategy, then and now: while *GQ*'s circulation has eroded in line with the wider shift from print to digital, it has remained fairly solid at around 115,000 a month; the likes of *Loaded* and *FHM*, meanwhile, dropped off a cliff from their height of 1 million—and did not survive the fall.

In this brave new world of 24/7 streaming content, quality is more important than ever, says Jones. "Everything's flat," he says. "Most

things are free and available on your phone. If we drop our quality, we won't deserve to survive because there's so much stuff out there." Even in print, exaggeratedly rumoured to be dead on a daily basis. "I've just been in Selfridges and the WHSmith concession is full of magazines," he says. "And if you want to know how to do a bow tie or what watch to buy, you just open up your phone. So why on earth should people buy GQ? You've got to work harder than ever before to make sure that what you do is better than everything else."

Jones has played his part in this content deluge. As well as the Cameron tome, he's penned biographies of Paul Smith and Jim Morrison, plus *iPod Therefore I Am: A Personal Journey Through Music* and *Mr Jones' Rules for the Modern Man*, an etiquette guide that was "particularly popular in Asia and the 'Stans". He wrote three books in 2012 alone: *The Biographical Dictionary of Popular Music, From the Ground Up: U2 360° Tour Official Handbook* and *When Ziggy Played Guitar: David Bowie and Four Minutes That Shook the World*. This September sees the release of *David Bowie: A Life*, a biography assembled from a series of Jones' own interviews with the Starman and 180 of Bowie's "friends, rivals, lovers and collaborators". When asked, in the manner of someone patronising a successful woman, how he makes it all work, Jones—a father of two—says, "I just get up very early. And I don't have hobbies."

Currently on Jones' desk is a copy of his new coffee-table book coming out this spring, *London Sartorial: Men's Style From Street to Bespoke*, which "will hopefully generate some interest in what we do": namely, Jones' patronage of London Fashion Week Men's, which has earned him an OBE. If you didn't know his background, you might imagine that this suit-wearing establishment figure is bemused by some of the more "directional" offerings on the capital's catwalks. But they're the juice that keeps the city's menswear uniquely fresh, the wham-bang yang to tailoring's steadfast yin.

"London is brilliant at tradition and brilliant at rebellion; it's the mixture of the two," he says. "There are amazing brands in Milan, but name me one Italian designer under the age of 50. Even the young designers in New York can't get on the first rung, because the department stores are too scared to stock them. In London you've got an integrated system where the young designers are supported by the industry."

Meanwhile, the "extraordinary allure" of Britain's tailoring heritage to the far east – which Jones confesses he completely underestimated at the outset – has given a huge fillip to London Fashion Week Men's, the energy of which has in turn rejuvenated Savile Row and its ilk. "About 20 years ago, I went to have a coat made and it was like *Night of the Living Dead* – all these old people who looked like they were about to expire," says Jones. "I took it back to be altered 15 years later, and the place was bouncing."

New blood is vital for remaining relevant; Jones employs "very young, very cool people" to ensure his finger remains on the pulse. But his daughters also help to keep his ear to the ground, culturally. "Until recently, the only sanctuary I had for playing music was the car," he says. "Not anymore, because they just go, 'Oh God, it's so embarrassing.' So I listen to what they do, which at the moment is Chance the Rapper, Drake and Frank Ocean." Sure enough, the latest issue at the time of writing includes a feature on Frank Ocean. Perhaps he should increase their pocket money. ◆▶

Half

PHOTOGRAPHY
ROGER RICH

STYLING
DAVID NOLAN

ART DIRECTION
CHARLOTTE HEAL

WORDS
MANSEL FLETCHER

Full

All clothing English Cut


OLD BUR NGTON ST. W.1

Tom Mahon was 19 when he had his first drink in a Savile Row pub. The way he tells it, he's spent nearly as much time over the years standing at the bar of Mayfair hostelry The Burlington Arms as he has at the cutting board where he creates English Cut's bespoke suits (we don't believe him). When, one chilly January afternoon, we meet in his new London local, The Barley Mow in Marylebone, he reassures me between sips of beer that now he hardly drinks during the day. No wonder, given the demands placed on him by a young family and a thriving international tailoring business. Making an exception, given the topic of conversation, Tom enjoys a pint, recalls the culture he encountered when he started on Savile Row in the late 80s, and explains why the pub still has a crucial part to play in the world of 21st-century tailoring.

But let's start at the beginning, with a 19-year-old Tom Mahon visiting London as a representative of his then firm, Redmayne of Wigton, Cumbria. "Redmayne's was invited to the Royal Warrant holders' dinner, which that year was in the Houses of Parliament," remembers Tom. "I came down [to London] on the first train and I went into a few tailors' shops, including what was then Kilgour, French & Stanbury. One of the guys there said, 'Let's go for a pint.' And he took me to the Mason's Arms." Tom learned something about the divisions that exist on Savile Row when he asked why they were going to the Mason's Arms when there was another pub on the other side of the road? His host replied sharply, "Don't go in there. That's where tailors drink." At this point, you need to know that among the trade "tailor" (AKA coat-maker) is the name given to someone who actually stitches the constituent parts of a suit together; while "cutters", like Tom, measure clients, create the unique paper patterns upon which bespoke suits are based, mark the cloth with chalk and cut out the pieces.

However, Tom did not respect this sectarianism, and a tailor's pub, The Burlington Arms (where these photographs were taken), became his favourite, because he joined a close coat-making friend when he drank with his colleagues. How was this shocking break with Savile Row convention received? Tom smiles as he recalls, "The tailors would all look at each other, as if to say, 'What's this cutter up to? I was a bit of an oddity, but do you know what they put it down to? I was from the north of England, so of course I was really weird."

According to Tom, daytime drinking was rare among Savile Row tailors, especially for anyone meeting clients during the day. But by 5pm, it seems the younger members of the trade had built up quite a thirst. "On Monday, you had to go for a drink because it would be rude not to inquire about what sort of weekend your mates had had," explains Tom. "So you went drinking on an empty stomach at five past five. Beer tastes really good then, so you drank too much. Next day we went into work and said, 'Bit of a session last night.' We'd limp on through the day, but in the afternoon we'd start to come round, and then some bright spark says, 'Let's just have two pints and let the rush hour crowd get away.' So you'd get lead down that dark path again." And was this nightly indulgence compulsory? Almost, according to Tom: "I had a friend, who if I said that I'd been drinking all week and didn't want to go out again, used to say, 'Don't be so immature.' Of all the things to say, that's really quite cutting!"

The tailoring scene is no longer like this, as Tom acknowledges: "When I came in to the trade, people were watching *The Sweeney* [a television show about rough, hard-drinking cops] and reading books about hacks on Fleet Street, it was a world of fags and booze. It was expected." And now? "My apprentices don't even drink tea!" he exclaims. Worse yet, "They drink glasses of water! PG Tips [a popular brand of breakfast tea] is too powerful for them! They don't batter themselves like we did. It was a test of your manhood that you could drink beer all night and be at work the next morning and do a good job all day."

However, there was more to the pub than merely the consumption of alcohol, because workers from the different tailoring houses would meet and talk and plan career moves, and the coat-makers in particular took the opportunity to dress up. Tom explains how this represented a change from their work outfits, "The tailors used to work in their

"I had a friend, who if I said that I'd been drinking all week and didn't want to go out again, used to say, 'Don't be so immature'"

"Today, my apprentices don't even drink tea ... Instead they drink glasses of water!"

'sitting drums', looking like down-and-outs with the backside out of their trousers, holes in the knees and patches on their elbows. But when they went out on a Friday, they were immaculate, wearing cashmere overcoats. They tended to be older, so with their cigars going they had that mafioso look." Pubs also played a pivotal role in the romantic life of "The Row"; "We had all these lovely female apprentices," says Tom. "I'd ask to meet them in The Burlington Arms. But if you wanted to impress a girl, you told her you did your drinking in Mulligans, which was an oyster house on Cork Street."

Another aspect of Savile Row life was "private", the name used by tailors for work done for clients outside the auspices of their employer. These transactions were arranged and exchanged in pubs. It's a practice that Tom recently had reason to revisit. "Last year, I had a foreign client who asked to meet me to order some more suits. He knew roughly what he wanted, but I couldn't be in London to meet him. So I rang The Burlington Arms and explained that my client was going to call in for a pint that evening, and I wanted them to show him some fabric. The cloth merchant delivered the patterns to the pub, and my client went in that evening, had a pint and picked a couple of patterns for his suits."

The Burlington may be thriving, but in other ways Savile Row has changed. Mulligans has gone (Tom's now married, so he no longer needs to pretend that he eats oysters). Vigo's, the pub where Tom bade farewell to his old boss, legendary Anderson & Sheppard head cutter Dennis Halberry, is now a shop. And Tom himself, while retaining his affection for The Burlington Arms, has migrated to new watering holes. Just across Chiltern Street from the English Cut shop is The Barley Mow, a London pub with a listed exterior and listed private drinking booths inside. Come the summer, however, and Tom will be on Marylebone High Street: "There's a lovely place called Fischer's, which is wonderful for cold beer and sausages."

When, over a decade ago, Tom's English Cut blog revealed to his readers and customers what really goes on in the tailoring business, he presaged a relaxation of the old formal codes of behaviour that governed the tailor-client relationship. Tom recalls that as a young cutter, "Going for a drink with a client was definitely not on the agenda, until I started my own business and became my own man." Things are now very different. "There's a guy who wrote to me a year ago saying that he was finally in a position to order a couple of suits, but only on the condition that I take him for a pint in The Burlington Arms after his fitting. I think it's nice to go for a drink with the clients, but it's funny that the Americans always think that you mean *literally* one pint."

In different ways, pubs have been important throughout Tom's career. The fact that his clients are as keen to have a drink with him as they are to have one of his suits says a lot about him personally, but also about the particular bond that exists between a man and his tailor. And that's something to which we should all raise a glass. ◆

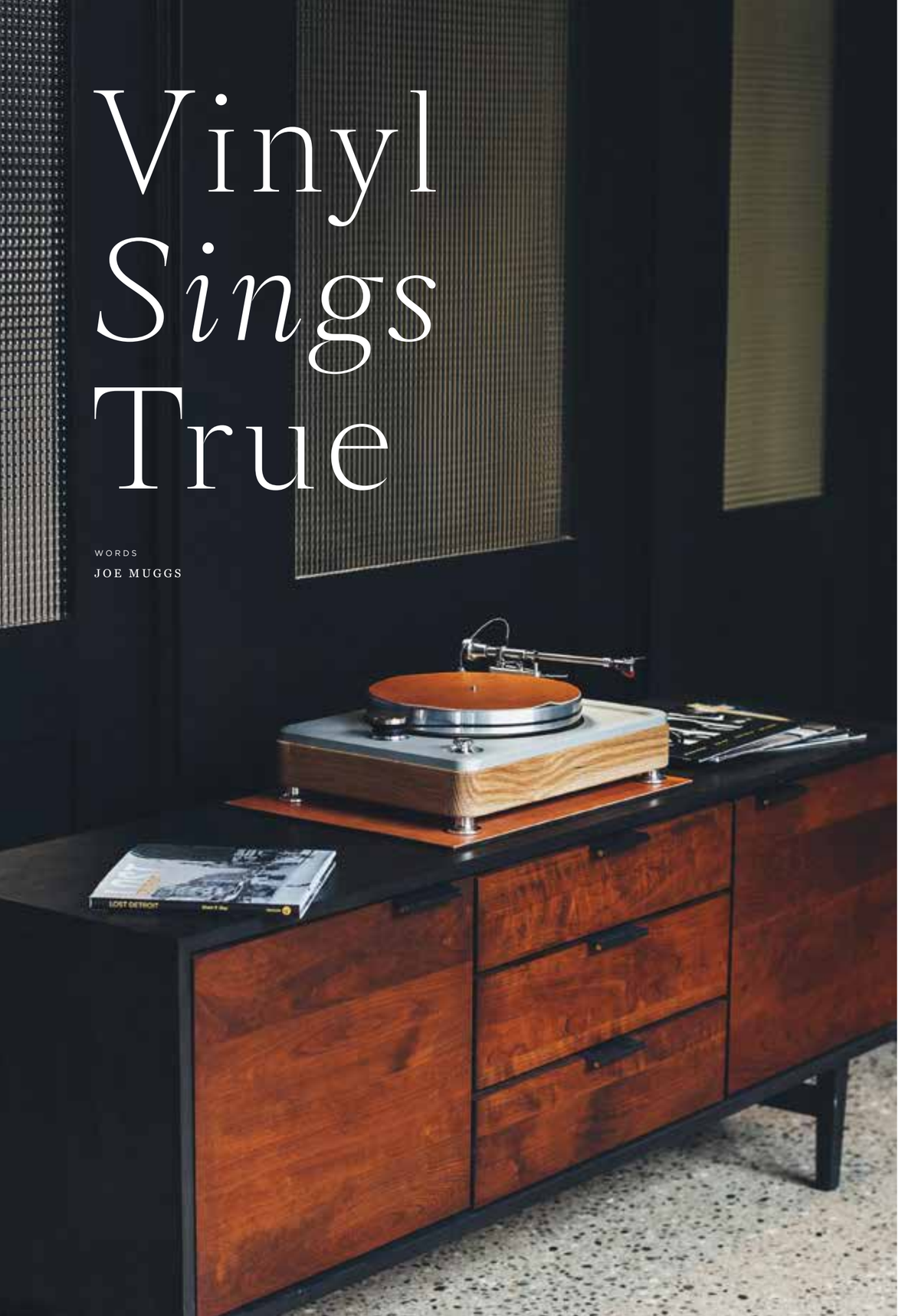
The Burlington Arms, 21 Old Burlington St, London W1S 2JL

"On Monday, you had to go for a drink because it would be rude not to inquire about what sort of weekend your mates had had. So you went drinking on an empty stomach at five past five. Beer tastes really good then, so you drank too much"

Photo assistant James Rees
Digital assistant Matt Foxley
Producer Thanh Ma
Grooming Michael O'Gorman
Models Andrew and Duncan at Models 1

Vinyl *Sings* True

WORDS
JOE MUGGS



For years, music distribution has been all about CDs and, then, digital formats. Technology changed the way we buy and listen to music, and it's an ongoing process. But vinyl is not dead—if anything, it's bigger than ever. More and more people are dusting off their turntables to play old 7" singles and new LP albums

This much we know: vinyl is back. You can scarcely escape it, in fact. Whether you're in the local supermarket, in an upmarket bar or on a fashion shoot, there they are: vinyl records, artfully arranged as signifiers of retroism, of craft, of authenticity, of all those wholesome things that we're all supposed to like in the age of artisanal coffee and upcycled furniture ... but also of something more. The love of vinyl records goes quite a lot deeper than that; their place in people's lives—whether it's a 13-year-old buying their first Adele LP in Tesco or an elderly guy wiping the dust of his beloved copy of Giant Steps for the umpteenth time—is a very special one, the rituals that go with them altering the very nature of our relationship to music. Putting aside all the interminable debates about sound quality and analogue vs digital, records are special.

The "vinyl revival" is, for all its visibility, a niche concern—vinyl releases still sell a tiny fraction of what they did between the 50s and 80s, and with the best will in the world, it will never even be close to being the dominant format again. However, the revival is real and appears sustainable. Bob Stanley, one-third of Saint Etienne and an inveterate archivist of obscure vinyl gems can put a fairly precise date on this. "It's very heartening," he says, "that now there's a record shop, whether new or secondhand, in just about every town in the country. That wasn't true in 2012, when [music writer] Pete Paphides and I did a piece for *The Guardian*, travelling around the few shops left. It was done to coincide with the *Last Shop Standing* film, and the whole premise was that we, the record collectors, were dinosaurs, really. Yet only a couple of years on from that, everything changed!"

Someone who saw the revival coming was Colleen "Cosmo" Murphy. A long-time DJ in New York and London, in 2010 she founded Classic Album Sundays in which a much-loved LP is played to an audience from beginning to end on very high-end turntable and soundsystem, often with a presentation by the artist or someone connected to the record. From her first job in a Massachusetts record store in 1984, she watched CDs take over, presented first as "an overpriced audiophile thing" then as the mass market—but she stuck with vinyl, first as collector, then from 1991 as a dance DJ. "It was the DJs who kept it alive through that next decade," she says; "right up to about 2000 when CDs really came in for DJing, then a decade later it was USBs and digital files. But even so, there were quite a few of us who stuck with vinyl right through!"

It wasn't just the old dance DJs, though. Going into the 21st century, a funny coalition kept buying and producing vinyl. Punks like Henry Rollins from Black Flag never let go, for example. "I think," says Rollins, "the 7" single is still one of the best greeting cards in the world of music. If you are after the real thing, it's vinyl or tape that you want. Punk rock on CD always struck me as strange!" And collectors of other genres from jazz to psychedelia stuck with it too, building loose communities of "crate-diggers". As six-times world snooker champion-turned-champion of weird music Steve Davis puts it: "There's a therapeutic benefit to be had to physical hunting for vinyl that you don't get on the

internet. When you're flicking through the racks, all the cares of the world evaporate. Mainly it's a lone pursuit, but if you are lucky enough to bump into a loved one who is of a similar persuasion in your journey through life, then that is a lovely way to spend a day!"

All of this provided the backdrop for a younger, "digital native" generation to start taking an interest in records. Whether it was the dubstep and grime producers wanting to cut dubplates like their older siblings in the rave scene, new-generation indie and punk fans yearning for 7" singles, hipster-cafe owners installing a turntable as retro chic, or just curious collectors starting to realise the joys of rummaging in charity shops, a buzz built slowly through the 2000s. Finally in the last five years, this has coalesced into the "vinyl revival", with the emblematic LP shelves in American Apparel and Tesco, untold articles and photoshoots, and 52% of vinyl sales now being made to under-30s.

But—and here is where the magic lies—thanks to their very nature, vinyl records have become more than a craze. In an age when everything is available as interchangeable digital files, the act of buying physical recordings, and the machine to play them on, is a commitment and a meaningful one at that. Leigh Dixon, the hi-fi installer for Grahams Hi-Fi and also a respected electronic musician, says of the 19- to 30-year-olds: "This generation have discovered that this as a great way to appreciate their favourite styles of music and artists, to build a collection where each record has a story or memory attached: maybe it was bought at a gig, a gift from a girlfriend, record shopping on holiday, hearing your favourite DJ drop it at a party. And in my experience, I've found that out of nearly all consumables, a record tends to be a lifelong purchase which travels with you through life."

Colleen Murphy concurs. "There's a statistic that got in the headlines recently," she says, "which said 50% of vinyl purchases aren't even played. Now, number one, I think that's actually bullshit—how do you even do that survey? But also, even if kids are buying the record to sit on a shelf, while listening to the download that comes with it, I think they are likely to grow into it, to want to get those records out in the future and enjoy them. I get people at Classic Album Sundays telling me they've been inspired to buy a nice turntable, or that they now aspire to get great hi-fi when they earn more, like they'd aspire to buy a big car. That's great, that's something that will genuinely improve their quality of life!"

But what is the magic of Putting A Record On that makes it something to aspire to? On this, people are almost unanimous. "It requires concentration," says Joe Goddard of Hot Chip, "and is an investment of one's precious time. Therefore it's a true and uncommon pleasure in a world of endless inane distraction. It represents a moment of tranquillity and transcendence, and a genuine escape from myself and from the world." Henry Rollins says it's "the manual process, the lack of convenience, which is inspired by the intent to get the music to come out of the speakers that makes it profound." Bob Stanley cites the same commitment, "especially with singles—I love to sit and play 45s one after the other: you can't do anything else really except listen for two and a half minutes, then put the next one on."

Mark Wood, the marketing manager at Universal Records in charge of new vinyl editions of back catalogue, unsurprisingly emphasises the beauty of the record itself. "Cassettes never looked gorgeous as a collection," he says. "CDs don't really look nice—but a wall of vinyl? I don't know if there's a greater sight known to man than a wall of vinyl." He talks of the package as something that enhances the music and makes it something you're proud to own as a fan—whether that's a Rihanna collection, *Star Wars* picture discs or the pink vinyl 7" of Soft Cell's *Sex Dwarf* he put together ("the single that should have been!"). "Like anything in life," he says, "anything you've got to look after, you value more. Like a nice car or an expensive Vivienne Westwood shirt, you're going to look after that a lot better—you're not going to eat your baked beans on your lap watching *The One Show* with your beautiful Vivienne Westwood shirt on. You're going to take care of it, you're going to wear it to nice places."

Right there is the reason that the vinyl revival will last: because records last, and records that you love and care for last a lifetime. There's plenty of problems with the revival: lack of production capacity squeezing out smaller record labels (Henry Rollins pithily refers to how "mainstream bilge coming out on vinyl seems like a perfect waste of materials"), and sometimes obscene prices for records in both new and re-selling markets. But for so many people across generations now, experiencing the touch of the needle on plastic—"like the start of a film," as Mark Wood says, "an anticipation, like 'this is the start of something'", or, as Steve Davis puts it, "like you have also been part of setting the music in motion"—is the start of a love affair that is likely to last. ◆▶

The Shinola Runwell turntable is available to buy at shinola.com

"In an age when everything is available as interchangeable digital files, the act of buying physical recordings is a commitment, and a meaningful one at that"

PHOTOGRAPHY
PELLE CRÈPIN

SET DESIGN
LIANNA FOWLER

WORDS
ANDY THOMAS

CHAPS

Chapman Bags' managing director, Daniel Chamier, talks about the accessory brand's 'made in Britain' ethos and how he sealed an English cut collaboration over pints in a Cumbrian pub

Over the years, the rolling hills of Cumbria, one of the old industrial heartlands of northern England, have birthed plenty of artisanal creators. Tradition, craftsmanship and authenticity unite these resolutely British enterprises. So it's no wonder that it was here, on the kitchen table of John Chapman's house in Burgh-by-Sands, that production of the first Chapman bags began in 1984. The son of a Nottinghamshire farmer, Chapman had gained his experience as sales director at House of Hardy and Liddesdale Fishing Bag Company. When Barbour bought Liddesdale, they moved all bag operations overseas. Chapman saw a gap in the market for a truly British bag brand. Though he was told by industry colleagues he "would not make a profit for 12 years", Chapman was soon exporting across the world, with demand growing after the bags were seen on everyone from Led Zeppelin's Robert Plant to Princess Anne. By the 1990s, the company had moved its workshop to an old red-brick building on Tannery Road in Carlisle, where Daniel Chamier has revitalised the brand even further since taking it over in 2006.

The former banker came across Chapman Bags when he was looking for a rucksack to take on a safari he was planning: "I wanted a really traditional canvas rucksack and I couldn't find one anywhere," Chamier explains. So what was it about the canvas Chapman bag he found that made it so special? "Well, in the early 2000s it was very difficult to find things that were made in the traditional way in Britain with high-quality materials," he says. "Basically, UK manufacturing had more or less gone and been replaced with stuff that was made in China, with completely different specifications and materials. So to find a British brand like Chapman making bags like that was great."

John Chapman once explained that many of his most successful bags were conceived in the local pub. But behind the self-effacing charm was an astute businessman. "John was a great salesman and, through his time at Liddesdale and House of Hardy, he really knew what he was talking about," says Chamier. "Back in the early 80s, he realised that there were a lot of companies out there who wanted to develop their own British brand, but didn't have the product or means. So he went out to companies like Holland & Holland and said, 'I can make this stuff for you.' And that's how he started."

As Chamier found out more about Chapman, he began to feel a real kinship with the company. "At the time, most of the brands coming up just seemed completely vacuous to me. You would see all these quotes about them being luxury brands and that they were made in Britain — but it was all coming from China," he says. "I really don't like that, I think it's unethical. It promotes the mentality that everything can be bought off a shelf rather than what it actually means to make something in Britain, from understanding the materials, to the skills and craftsmanship that goes into it."

He took over the company in 2006 and has continued to maintain the "made in Britain" ethic. "It's extremely difficult to be a truly British brand, but you can still find the materials if you look hard enough," he says. "It's very important for us to be honest with our customers. We use British manufacturers for everything unless we can't get high enough quality. So the canvas is dyed, laminated and bonded in Dundee or the Midlands; the webbing is also dyed and woven in the UK; and the brass is still cast in London."

Unlike the vast majority of global bag brands who now rely on computer technology, all Chapman models are hand-cut and stitched, just like a Savile Row suit. Talking to Chamier, it soon becomes clear how close he feels to the skilled craftsmen who are part of the Chapman family. But how does he find them in an age where these skills are rapidly dying out? "There are a few people around who have got these skills, but you have to work pretty hard to find them. So we went out to the local college and pursued 16-18-year-olds to come and do an apprenticeship with us."

Chapman is undoubtedly best known for its shooting and fishing bags, such as the Solway and Troutbeck series. Constructed to withstand long winter days on the Yorkshire moors or misty summer mornings on the banks of the Severn river, the emphasis here is on functionality. Adjustable shoulder straps with solid brass fisherman's rings, laminated heavy-duty waterproof cotton canvas with washable lining, hand-knotted net sections, interior slip pocket for fishing licences—it's all about the attention to detail. And like comparable British brands, such as Nigel Cabourn, there is something in the functionality of construction that results in a product that is as elegant as it is practical. "There are a lot of brands out there that specialise in having lots of pockets and features, and this, that and the other. And the thing is you really don't need all that," says Chamier. "We design our bags the other way by thinking what is absolutely necessary. So we try and focus on keeping the design relatively simple and using high-quality materials and letting that speak for itself."

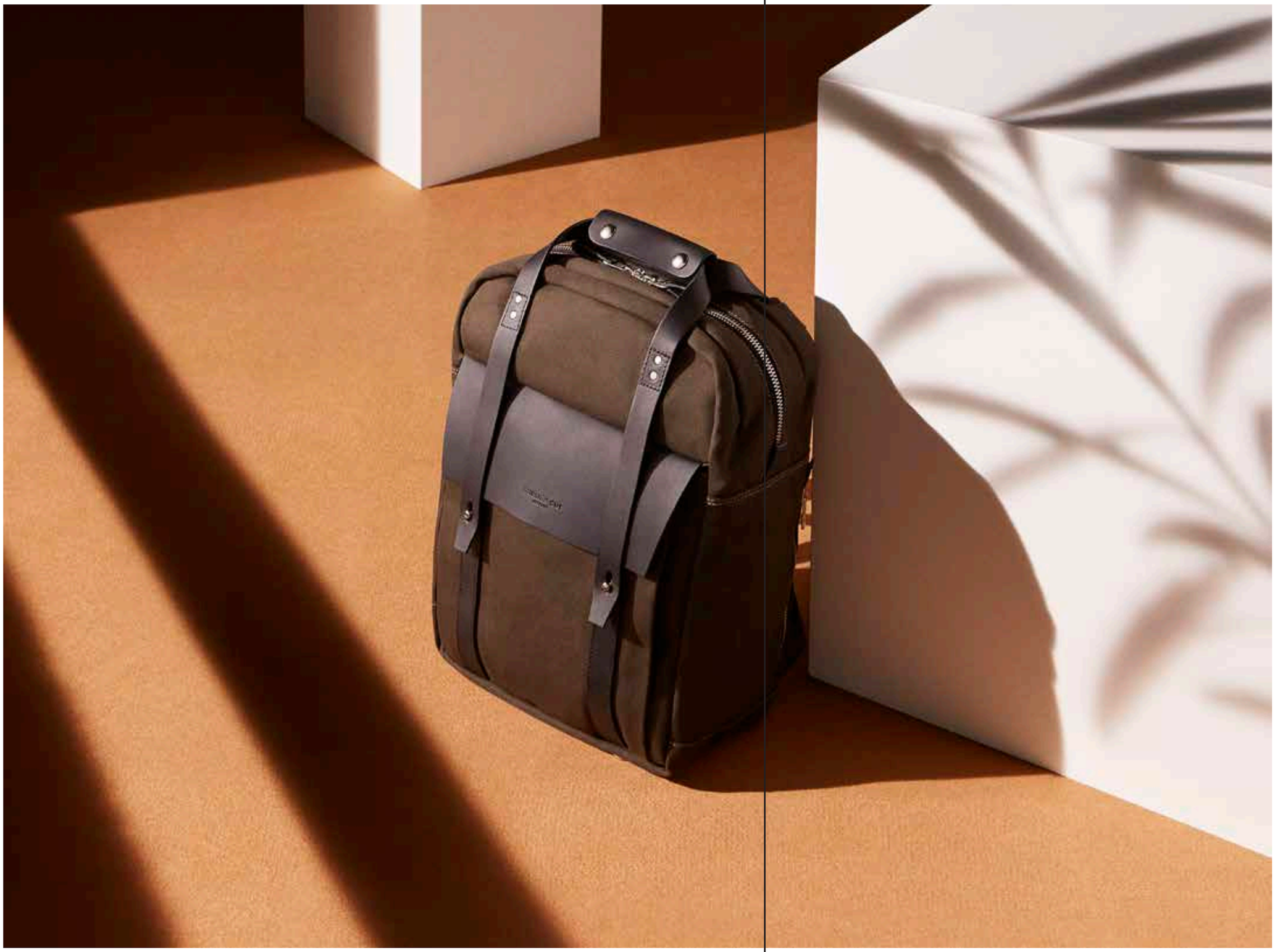
Since Chamier took over the company, he has revitalised the brand while never losing site of its heritage. The first thing he did was to create a new logo: the crossed fishing hooks now every bit as recognisable as Burberry's Equestrian Knight or Pringle's lion. While Chapman is still best known for its fishing and hunting bags, through Chamier's leadership the company continues to develop more contemporary styles. And it's the way these lines mix modernity with heritage that most impresses. From the brushed nickel hardware and scarlet cotton lining of the City of London collection to the weatherproof border tweed used on the Joanna handbags, these new designs have seen the customer profile of Chapman change over the years. "I guess our traditional customer was the fly fisherman or *Countryfile* viewer into shooting," he says. "Although they are still important to us, the newer

customers are somewhat more metropolitan and fashion-conscious."

Collaborations with like-minded British companies have become an essential part of Chapman's vision for a 21st-century heritage brand—be it a bright yellow waterproof game bag made with Brompton Bikes or a refined Oliver Sweeney x Chapman holdall. "We've actually done loads of collaborations, and there is hardly a British men's brand we haven't worked with at some stage—we've done stuff with Paul Smith, Gieves & Hawkes and, of course, our big collaboration with Brompton," says Chamier. "All these collaborations are different: some might be just about making bags for someone, while another could be much more about putting two brands together to create something built around shared values."

It is the British values of what Chamier calls "reliability, quality, community, wit and charm" that Chapman shares with English Cut. As Chamier points out, the two brands have plenty of crossover: "Yes, firstly it's geographic, as they are just around the corner from us here in Cumbria," he explains. "I actually see Tom from English Cut quite often in the local pub, so it was only a matter of time before we worked together." The list goes on. "Also, we are both authentic manufacturers of British clothing and accessories, of course," he says. "As tailors they are of course working at a very bespoke level in that each suit is hand-made to the customer's requirements, but then each of our bags is also hand-made, so there are a lot of similarities there. We also have a bespoke service and are one of the only companies in the UK that do that. So that is an interesting connection with English Cut, and I think that we can learn a lot from each other." As for the creative process behind the collaboration, Chamier found it was a mutually beneficial exercise: "Yes, they looked at a selection of both traditional and modern styles that we do and they've taken some of the materials that they use for suits and combined the two. I'm really looking forward to seeing how they expand their business in bags and luggage, as it's an area they haven't worked in before. So that is really exciting, I think."

Lastly, Chamier also highlights the fact that the two brands are from the border region between Scotland and England, which gives them a similar sense of identity—but what is it about the area that the two companies find so inspiring? "It really is one of the last untamed wildernesses of England," Chamier explains. "There is a very rich history here with things like Hadrian's wall, the north-west frontier of the Roman empire for nearly 300 years. In the 16th century, it was like the wild west here—a real frontier place where different rules applied. And I think you still get a feeling of that when you walk around Carlisle. So, as well as being an area of outstanding natural beauty, it's also got this very strong identity. It was also one of the cradles of the industrial revolution. There is also a really strong tradition for its craftsman, so there is much that binds us to the place!" ◆▶



Available to buy at English Cut,
58 Chiltern Street, London, W1U 7QZ

Having been given his first Breitling watch at the age of 12, George Bamford is on a never-ending quest to take his customisation business, the Bamford Watch Department, to the next level ... one blacked-out Rolex at a time

WORDS

JAMIE MILLAR

PHOTOGRAPHS

LIZZIE MAYSON

GB

The only clue that this five-floor Mayfair townhouse on London's South Audley Street conceals the HQ of Bamford Watch Department is the discreetly blacked-out door, handle and all. After being buzzed into "the hive", as it's known internally, you're briefly trapped in a security airlock, a necessary precaution given the one-of-a-kind timepieces by the likes of Rolex, Patek Phillippe and Audemars Piguet that are being customised therein. And especially when you factor in founder George Bamford's kleptomaniacal design philosophy.

"I call it 'got to want to nick it'," he explains in a well-appointed upstairs room that feels like a cross between a magpie member's club and Sir Paul Smith's office, jam-packed with technicolour memorabilia ranging from vintage Rolex shop signs sourced from Italy, to Japanese toys and personalised jars of the Midlands' finest yeast extract, Marmite. "I show you a watch, and you go, 'I can't live without that ... ' Got to want to nick it."

Not to suggest for a millisecond that any of his eclectic collection was ill-gotten, but that motto applies as much to Bamford's own sartorial choices as his clients': at his English Cut bespoke fitting, he walked out with two more made-to-measure suits. (Just to be clear, he didn't nick them.) "I'm quite jaded in this world," he admits. "So to go in there and say, 'I like the look of that, and the fabric … ' I think English Cut is going to be a new favourite." Not least because the store is off the beaten track of Savile Row: "I walked down Chiltern Street and I went, 'Yeah, I like it here.'" When it comes to shopping trips, it's legitimate to say that George Bamford is someone who constantly seeks alternative routes.

For Bamford, customisation is not just a path to better fit or quality, but an avenue to express your personality—which, in his case, is continually interrogative, maverick, even radical. Take his English Cut suit, which was acquired for the summer and thus called for a lightweight fabric that would normally be concomitantly light in colour. Instead, Bamford plumped for an airy Super 130s wool in more typically wintry grey-and-navy Prince of Wales check. "Why do I have to have a light colour for the summer?" he says. "Why not go for something winter-looking? Why conform? Why not be different? Conforming is boring. When you conform, you've lost your personality. You've lost *you*."

Son of billionaire Lord Anthony Bamford and scion of the JCB construction dynasty, the well-spoken and similarly mannered 36-year-old wears his suits as lightly as his comfortable upbringing. "I'm very much about a relaxed feel: unstructured shoulders," he says. "I don't want to feel like I've got a rod up my arse." His old tailor was the late Brian Russell, an "amazing guy" and a contemporary of Tom's at Anderson & Sheppard, who a few years before his death established his own firm on Sackville Street, just off the Row. Bamford then travelled even further afield to Caraceni in Milan, although his suits are not a characteristically slim Italian fit; their major attribute is that they casually dismiss the at-attention rigidity of the military-influenced British style. Nor is Bamford's daily uniform always suited-and-Chelsea booted; he's only recently converted to head-to-toe tailoring, at his wife's behest. "Most days it's a blazer, jeans and predominantly trainers," he says. "Now, for the last two, three years I've been wearing suits. But I'm going to have them how I want to have them—not how I'm told I should."

"Why conform? Why not be different? Conforming is boring. When you conform, you've lost your personality. You've lost you"

Necessarily anachronistic, the world of mechanical watches is by its nature conservative, as befits an obsolete technology now valued more like art than for any utilitarian value. It's also broadcast rather than conversation: every year at Baselworld or Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie in Geneva, the brands present their new designs as fait accompli to be taken or left. Many are imperceptibly minor tweaks to iconic models that are considered by purists to be practically sacrosanct. With his libertarian why-nots and customer-driven customisation, Bamford is something of an anarchist. Not that he would be so bold as to call himself a revolutionary: "Am I massively changing the watch world? No. But am I letting people have their take? Yes."

The idea for Bamford's "niche little business" presented itself not long after he was gifted a Rolex Daytona—a grail watch for many—for his 21st birthday. For too many: he proudly wore it to a dinner party, only to find that several other guests were sporting the exact same model. Determined to make a watch that nobody else had, he dug around in the JCB research and development department until he unearthed DLC or diamond-like carbon, an anti-friction coating more commonly used to lubricate drill parts. He bought an old, bracelet-less Rolex Submariner and GMT Master, blacked them out and attached fabric Nato straps – green camouflage for him, blue with grey stitching for his father as a thank you for the ubiquitous Daytona (which he still has). Over one summer, he received 25 orders for something he'd never intended to sell.

Bamford's fascination with watches started earlier, when aged 12 he received for Christmas a knackered Breitling Navitimer that his parents picked up for £200. "I always used to take things apart—TVs, anything—and put them back together again," he recalls. "It's how my brain works. The watch took me a lot longer than usual." Enamoured, he wanted to become a watchmaker, even though his first attempt was unpromising: "I took the hands off, broke the glass … There are so many things wrong with that watch now." (Yes, he still has that one, too.) His other love was photography; he took his O-level in the subject early at Ampleforth College in Yorkshire and later worked under John Swannell, Antoine Verglas and Rankin. That led him indirectly to studying design at Parsons in New York, where he also gophered for fashion houses. There, he graduated to a flea-market trader in vintage timepieces, which in some respects he still is: "Except I buy them, but never trade out. So, really, I'm just a hoarder."

While vintage watches are covetable, Bamford realised soon after delivering those first orders—and failing to turn a profit—that old-timers were too unreliable, repairs too frequent and parts too scarce to form the foundation of a solid business. So he turned to modern watches, predominantly Rolex (about 80 to 90%). Bamford the man and Watch Department gravitate towards Rolex because so many of us do: the most powerful watch brand on the planet (64th brand overall, according to Forbes) is also the one to which most buyers aspire sooner or later—as that fateful dinner party proved.

"Rolex has a value around the world," says Bamford. "I once asked a military man what watch he would want on his wrist, and he said a Rolex, because wherever he was, he could trade it to get a taxi or a plane out of a country." The Bamford brand, though, which shares space on the dials of its products with that of the original manufacturer, carries

"Possessions don't make you happy. Your only legacy is your family. I've got three children; my things are theirs to get rid of"

a not-insignificant value of its own: at £12,500, a Bamfordised Rolex Submariner, for example, will set you back roughly double the price of an off-the-shelf one. On holiday in Sardinia a few years ago, Bamford and his father were offered counterfeits of their own wares by an unsuspecting peddler: proof that the name is gaining traction for more than just diggers.

Rolex also has a "perfection" in its designs that Bamford, who also collects classic cars, likens to the glacial evolution of a Porsche: "'What have you done to the new model?' 'Oh, we've changed the lights.' They perfect it, perfect it, perfect it." The canonical status of Rolex explains why in some circles Bamford is regarded with no exaggeration not just as an anarchist, but an "antichrist": the notion of a website that lets you change the colour scheme or compose your own text, as the Bamford Watch Department's does, is positively heretical. To say nothing of adding a cartoon character like Mickey Mouse, Snoopy or Popeye to the dial for very special—and extremely limited—editions.

"I hope I'm not disrespectful," says the unfailingly polite Bamford. "I come with absolute love." He treats watches not just with the reverence that they deserve, but also that they need in order to take a lick of DLC or MGTC (military grade titanium coating) on their intricate components and keep on ticking accurately. Prospective customers will be relieved to hear that, rather than wreak havoc with his tiny screwdriver, Bamford employs three highly skilled in-house watchmakers at the hive and a further three in New York, with a dial facility just outside London and a bezel workshop in Switzerland. He also provides a five-year guarantee to replace the voided manufacturer's warranties.

Car companies are more on board with personalisation than watch brands: Bamford Watch Department was partly inspired by Bentley's extensive Mulliner customisation service (see our Bentley x Mulliner story on page 114), and Ferrari boasts its own personalisation programme. But some marques in both sectors remain understandably reluctant to go all the way down the customisation road. Do so and you place your carefully cultivated reputation as a bastion of good taste at the mercy of your customer's whims, which may or may not align with your brand values, but will nevertheless bear your imprimatur—however ghastly the result.

"You're going to ask me if there's a watch I wouldn't do," says Bamford, pre-empting the question, before pointing to a photo of a pink and green model that is unorthodox even by his standards. "Throughout the whole conversation, I said, 'Please don't do this, it won't work.' And the client said, 'No, I want it.' So we did it." Unexpectedly happy with the result after some initial teething problems, Bamford visited the client's office, where he saw that everything was pink and green from the company's livery down to his two-tone business card. It was a timely reminder that personalisation is profoundly personal: "Do I think sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't work? Fuck yeah. Do I agree 100% with everyone's taste? No. But it's *their* taste. So it always suits them." The Bamford Watch Department site promises, "If you can imagine it, we can create it."

It's axiomatic in business that the customer is always right; Bamford inherited another motto from his father and grandfather: "Our customers can get on without us; we can't get on without them." Bamford Watch Department's 40-odd stockists worldwide don't include the typical watch boutiques, but do include the likes of Dover Street Market in London and Tokyo, which reflects both the unique position of the brand and its founder's attitude to customer service. "It's like car dealers: you go in and they've already got you," he says. "But they don't care. I think fashion concept stores do care because they're trading on their reputation. It's not only watch boutiques where you don't get that caressing and looking-after: it's mass-market luxury shops. You're not feeling special."

Really, watch brands should be thanking Bamford for helping their products remain relevant and covetable. A sneakerhead with a "stupid amount" of trainers who also followed in the customising footsteps of NIKEiD, he collaborates with bleeding-edge Japanese streetwear brands such as Neighbourhood and Mastermind, plus hype-generating multi-hyphenate creatives such as designer-musician-producer Hiroshi Fujiwara and designer-director-marketer Darren "DRx" Romanelli ("a brother from another"). Fellow deconstructor-reconstructors, they "chat, from shoes to clothes to cars".

The Bamford family motto is *jamais content*, which translates as "never satisfied". Testament to that restless spirit is the Bamford Grooming Department, a range of colognes, moisturisers and steel-and-carbon fibre manicure sets. And the Bamford Cycle Department, putting the "spoke" in bespoke performance bikes after Bamford couldn't locate a custom shop that could sate his taste for a frame that didn't have other names splashed all over it. Next he's turning his attention surfeit to accessories such as a precisely engineered watch roll in aluminium and neoprene—inspired by a bicycle pump—that slides smoothly open with a shh: "It makes me smile." He hasn't let his dyslexia stop him from co-writing a crime novel, *A Strange Way to Die*, with his mother-in-law Ros Pearl; his own mother Carole has organically grown the Daylesford brand—named after their Oxfordshire country estate—into an empire.

What *jamais content* doesn't mean is the endless acquisition of rare, expensive stuff, or being dissatisfied with a merely factory-spec Rolex Daytona. "Possessions don't make you happy," says Bamford, who draws more pleasure from discovering than owning. "Your only legacy is your family. I've got three children; my things are theirs to get rid of." With the exception perhaps of his priceless 1968 Rolex Milgauss: "I wore it the day I got engaged, the day I got married, for the birth of each of my children. It holds those parts of my life; it has a soul, a spirit." Sentimental value is the one thing that's impossible to replicate. ◆▶

Grooming Michael O'Gorman

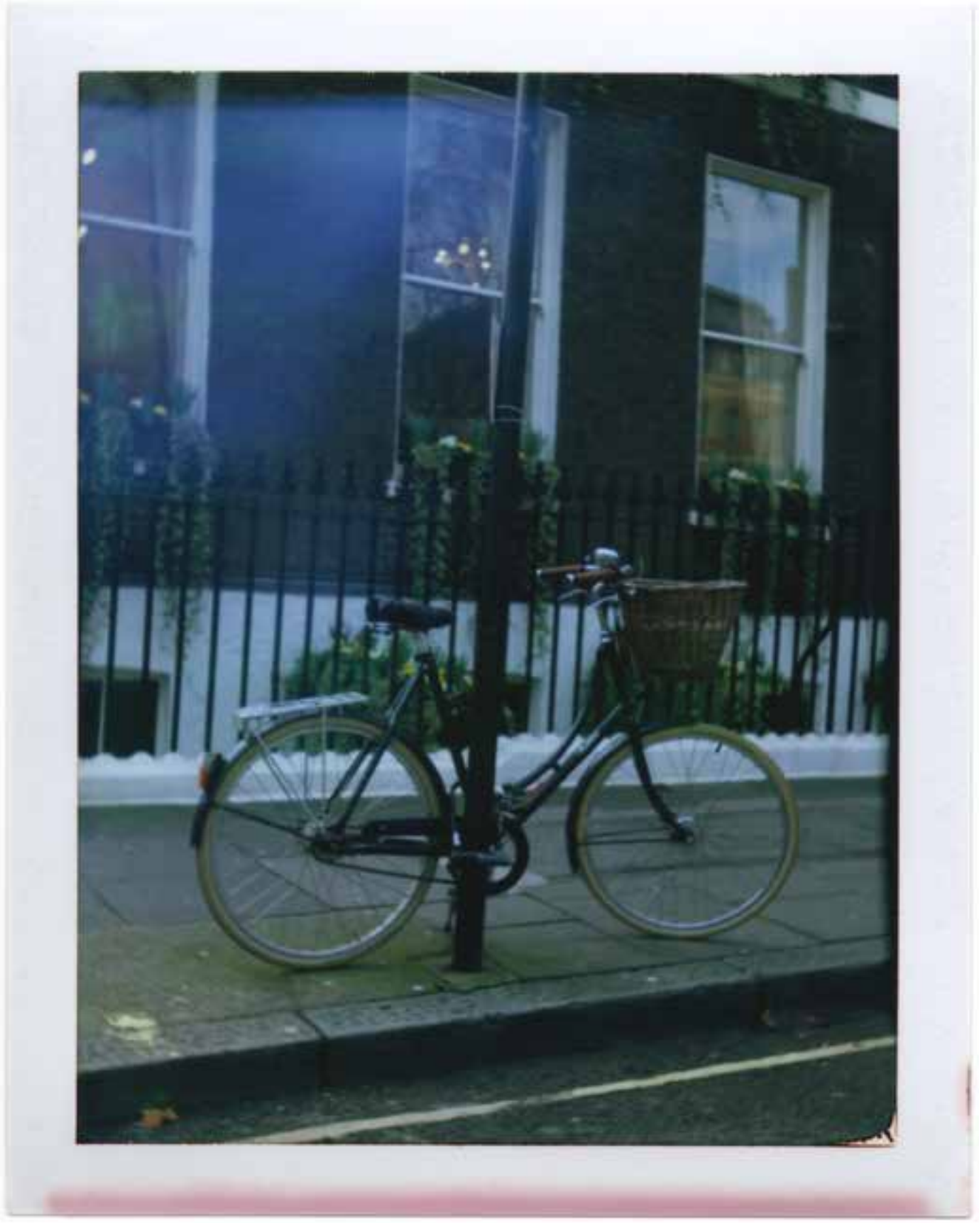
WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS

TOM SKIPP

The *Old* Town

On a sunny spring day we sent Tom Skipp out on to the streets of Marylebone to capture the area's buildings, people and history with his Polaroid Land Camera

Marylebone has a healthy mix of residential and commercial buildings with frontages that haven't made a real jump forward since they were built. It doesn't take a great leap of imagination to be transported back to times under the awnings of ironmongers long since passed

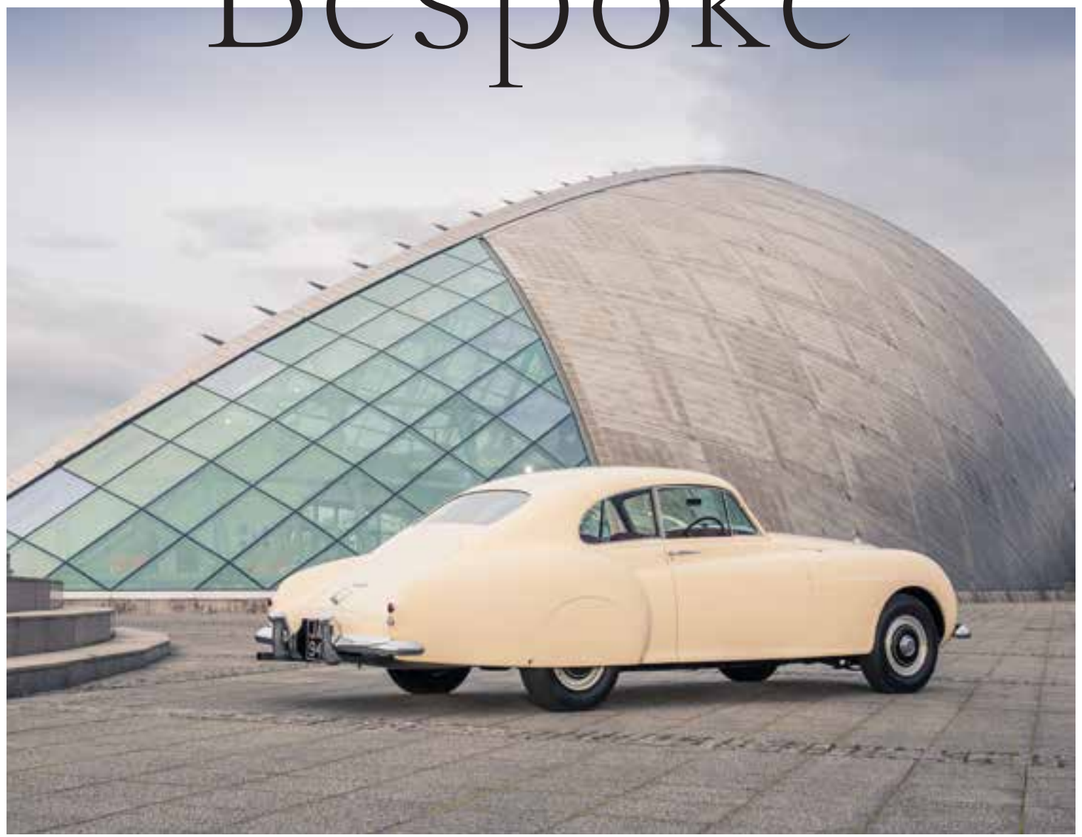


Opposite the old firehouse on Chiltern Street. A really calm place to sit and watch the world go by, it belies its location in one of the world's busiest cities

Alfies Antiques in Marylebone is such a distinctive building.
It stands out as an Egyptian monument housing so many distinctly British artefacts. While life in the city moves on apace, Marylebone seems to exist within its own time. Not to be hurried along or left behind

The mews of Marylebone feel so typically west London.
Small quiet thoroughfares that have seen so many carriages coming and going. Their cobbled streets leading to rear entrances of properties that must hold so many stories

Bentley Bespoke



Classic British carmaker Bentley and Mulliner, its customisation division, have made an art form out of personalising luxury cars – even if it's pink leather seats the owner wants

WORDS
ALYN GRIFFITHS

Bespoke services are seen as the pinnacle of luxury in many industries, offering a level of personalisation that elevates both the end product and the purchasing experience. For British automotive brand Bentley, bespoke manufacturing forms an integral part of its offering to high net-worth clients, as well as providing an opportunity to trial ideas that are a little too radical for the mass market.

Bentley's customers are used to having things done just the way they want. For the ultimate bespoke experience, they are placed in the capable hands of the company's Mulliner coach-building division, which can oblige virtually any request. From leather upholstery matched to the shade of their favourite nail polish, to a family crest stitched into the headrests, Mulliner's dedicated team of designers and artisans specialises in creating cars that are as unique as their owners.

At its workshop in Crewe, Bentley makes vehicles that draw on a heritage stretching back to 1919. The company's focus has consistently been on striking a balance between performance and luxury, setting it apart in a market where most brands specialise in one or the other. Its current line-up of four models comprises the flagship Mulsanne, the Flying Spur sedan, the sporty Continental and the Bentayga SUV. A tour of the vehicle production line demonstrates the craftsmanship involved in the production of each of these vehicles, with the work done by Mulliner adding an extra layer of luxury.

The entry level of customisation offered by Bentley allows owners to specify hundreds of details including polished alloy wheels, contrasting leather and stitching, carbon ceramic brake discs and refrigerated bottle coolers with bespoke crystal champagne flutes. Around 90% of customers engage in this process, often using the company's sophisticated online configurator to personalise their vehicle. These alterations are simple to incorporate into the standard production line and can be achieved within the typical three-month lead time for the car's manufacture.

According to Mulliner's product manager, Jamie Smith, only around 5% of vehicles make their way "across the road" to the specialist, top-secret workshop opposite the main factory, where the majority of truly bespoke work is carried out. "We look after about 500 cars per year," says Smith, adding that this number has almost doubled since 2014, when the firm began promoting the work of Mulliner more vigorously. "Mulliner always existed as an option for our customers, but we weren't really promoting it," he recalls, "so we started to talk about it more as a brand and to look for projects that give us an opportunity to share our voice in the marketplace."

Mulliner's roots can be traced back to a family of 16th-century saddle-makers, which diversified into building coaches in the 19th century. Prior to the outbreak of the first world war, the family business switched to making car cabins and bodies, subsequently working on many Bentleys before it was incorporated into the company in 1959. It has since been responsible for producing some of the firm's most prestigious vehicles, including the royal limousine used for public occasions.

As a result of its recently elevated profile and the subsequent upsurge in demand, Mulliner moved out of the factory and into its own facility, which can accommodate up to six cars at a time. This building contains dedicated workshops for metal, wood, upholstery and traditional coach-building, as well as contemporary machinery such as 3D printers. It's here that a team of around 60 craftspeople oversees particularly sensitive private projects, or work that is too unusual to be handled on the production line.

The most comprehensive customisation service Mulliner provides is bespoke coach-building, which involves modifying standard Bentley models to create vehicles with varying proportions. The Mulsanne, for example, can be stretched to create a long-wheelbase limousine with a more spacious cabin. One car was even elongated by a full metre to accommodate forward- and rear-facing seats, like those in a private jet.

A major concern with inviting customers to make radical changes to the basic architecture of a car is that the result could compromise the Bentley aesthetic. For this reason, the design team is involved from the beginning of major bespoke commissions, advising on optimal dimensions and eventually sculpting a new shell that retains the key lines and details to ensure consistency with the original form.

"There can't be a Bentley that isn't beautiful ... if someone wants something bespoke, we have to be involved to adjust proportions and make sure it's still a beautiful car"

"There simply cannot be a Bentley that isn't beautiful," the company's head of exterior design, John Paul Gregory, points out. "When we design the base car, every inch is considered, so if someone wants something bespoke, we have to be involved to adjust proportions and make sure it's still a beautiful car. It's more like a brief, and we interpret that brief with as much care and attention as we do with our base models."

More typical requests handled by the Mulliner team might include bespoke colours for the paintwork or leather, alternative materials for the fascia panels, or the integration of wireless charging for mobile devices. Four designers from Mulliner work within the main design studio, making it straightforward for them to discuss projects with the rest of the team and ensure the outcomes remain within the Bentley parameters. The issue of taste, however, means that some of the cars rolling out of the Mulliner workshop these days are a long way from many people's idea of a traditional Bentley. "Pink hide is more popular than you'd expect," claims a smiling Smith. "It's our most requested colour aside from the standard Bentley offer. Sometimes you see it in a car and think it's too much, but it can be done quite tastefully."

Another focus for Mulliner is identifying projects that help to enhance Bentley's profile within the automotive arena and demonstrate the capabilities of its bespoke service. Mulliner's designers regularly develop ideas for limited-edition models featuring new colour combinations and materials targeted at a specific market, or intended to showcase a particular craft or technology. A limited edition Flying Spur celebrated Britishness through its union-flag embroidery and English-elm veneer, while a version of the extended-wheelbase Mulsanne presented at a leading motor show featured stone veneer applied to internal surfaces. "One of the things I find exciting about my job is getting to test ideas that will have a low uptake and might not make it into production," adds Smith. "We're able to investigate risky technical finishes that appeal to customers who are interested in the more progressive side of Bentley."

Mulliner also collaborates with important clients or other like-minded brands on limited-edition vehicles. One of its most ambitious collaborations was with George Bamford of bespoke timepiece maker Bamford Watch Department. Mulliner produced a custom-made Mulsanne Speed featuring a stealthy black exterior and flashes of kingfisher blue intended to recall Bamford's signature colour scheme. A carbon-fibre watch holder was included to transport watches while seats combining leather and anthracite fabric introduced a vintage element. Bamford was impressed with both the care taken throughout the 18-month process, and the outcome, claiming: "This is how you do personalisation."

Prestigious collaborations and limited editions regularly provide Mulliner with fresh material that can be used to promote and publicise its work. Social media, in particular, enables the brand to share these projects with Bentley fans and car enthusiasts around the world in a new and dynamic way. Within a day of being posted on Instagram, the Bamford x Bentley Mulliner collaboration had accumulated some 70,000 "likes". "Sometimes you have to step beyond the Bentley world to bring in new audiences and get people thinking about the brand a bit differently," suggests Smith. "The response to the Bamford project shows that we're heading in the right direction and working on the right sort of projects."

Raising awareness of its brand and telling compelling lifestyle stories will be key to Bentley's continued success. To this end, Mulliner plays a vital role in bringing stories about heritage, luxury and craftsmanship into a contemporary context. "Much of the work we do at Mulliner isn't about selling lots of cars," Smith concludes. "It's there to show people the options that are available if they want to venture off the beaten track."

Pink leather, social media and lifestyle-led collaborations might seem incongruous with the way Bentley has traditionally been perceived, but this is a brand looking to the future. For a new generation of potential Bentley owners, whose idea of luxury centres around standing out in a world dominated by mass production, Mulliner's bespoke service offers an opportunity to tailor an already premium product to their individual style. As long as the outcome retains the essential Bentley DNA, almost anything is possible. ◆

"Pink hide is more popular than you'd expect. It's our most requested colour aside from the standard Bentley offer. Sometimes you see it in a car and think it's too much, but it can be done quite tastefully"

Illustration Rachel Gannon

A Day in the Life ... Jennifer Boucher

As a concierge at the Mandarin Oriental hotel in Boston, it's Jennifer Boucher's job to answer questions, book tables ... and to track down labradors across the country

JAMIE MILLAR

If I'm on the early shift, then my alarm goes off at 4.30am. Which is no fun! I get up, make coffee and walk my dog. I get to the train by 5.30am, to work by 6.30am and to the desk by 7am. The shifts vary though—7am to 3.30pm, or 2.30pm to 11pm—so my schedule is never consistent. And my commute is about an hour each way, which makes for a long day.

My travelling isn't too bad, though. I don't even really mind the snow—it's the rain I dislike. I drive to the train station, take the Blue Line, then the Green Line and walk a few blocks to the hotel. If there's a blizzard, then we can normally stay in the hotel if we offer to work the next shift. If you've ever seen the bathtubs at the Mandarin Oriental, you'll understand why I offer.

In a five-star hotel, we get all different requests all day. Often I'm booking transportation and making dinner reservations, but I could be finding private helicopters or yachts. Once I had a guest ask me to find a 10-week-old Bernese mountain dog and labrador that had had their shots, so that she could purchase them and send them to Saudi Arabia. I found them, but at the opposite ends of the US, of course: the Bernese in Montana and the labrador in Vermont. I most definitely got a few grey hairs in the process. She never did end up purchasing them. But I found them!

There's never any pattern to the day, so I pretty much have no idea what I'm heading into. Because the guests change every day and are all staying for different reasons—business, medical, visiting colleges—the requests change. I need to be prepared to answer any question that comes; I have to know everything. Thank God for Google.

I get one 30-minute break and one 10-minute break, but it's nearly impossible to sneak out as it's so busy. I can actually leave for my break whenever I'm ready, but because we constantly get requests that need attending to ASAP, and there isn't someone else who can complete the task, it's hard to get away. Thankfully, our bellman will always do a coffee run for us. (Boston has a cafe on every street corner.) Or occasionally a restaurant will send a bag of food as a thank you.

To be a concierge, you need a good knowledge of the city, and good relationships with the restaurant managers and especially the hostesses—they're the ones that you have to plead with to get that impossible reservation. First and foremost though, you have to really like to help people: if you're not a people person, this job is tough. And you need to be able to come up with a solution when the answer is "no", because in this job the answer is never "no". Thankfully, I love talking to people: they're so interesting. Absolutely my favourite part is meeting guests from all over the world on a daily basis. My least favorite part—and I think I speak for everyone in hospitality—is the tough scheduling. That, and the paperwork.

Many of the guests come back year after year and they get to be like family. I look forward to seeing them and watching their kids grow up. And it makes my job much easier because I can anticipate their needs and be ready when they arrive. Building relationships is key.

I was introduced to English Cut by one of the tailors, Eden Lewis, who was here for the launch event in the hotel. I talk to everybody, so I offered to help if he needed anything at all, and we quickly became friends. On his second visit, during the height of the busy season in Boston when the city is booked solid, he couldn't find a hotel that had a room, so I offered my home. I really needed a dog walker while I was on vacation, so it worked out well. I've begged him to come back as my son is at college in Georgia and I loved having someone to cook for again.

I stumbled into my job. I started working at a brand-new hotel, and they hadn't hired a concierge yet; people kept asking me questions so I started to fill in at the desk and the rest is history. Prior to the hotel life, I ran my own art studio teaching people how to paint; I also worked for UPS. When my son went to college, I decided that I was ready for a change.

If I'm on the late shift, then I won't get home until 12.30am. I literally get in, walk my dog and go to bed. If I was giving advice to someone who was thinking about becoming a concierge, I'd say: be prepared to be exhausted.

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