

BUSINESS

Savile Row by Scooter

by Andrew Adebowale | Posted November 27, 2013

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The devil's in the detail: A made-to-measure ensemble by Henry Herbert Tailors. "Source: henryherbert.com"

In amongst the legal chambers and media companies based along London's Gray's Inn Road, lies a non-descript cobbled mews from which you can view a royal warrant fixed to the side of the brick wall. Walking past the exquisitely finished royal standard will lead you to a hotchpotch of units and workspaces, one of which houses the HQ of Hare and Humphreys, gilders and decorators to HM Queen Elizabeth II. This royal theme is continued courtesy of the company that I have come to see, which specialises in bespoke tailoring with a unique twist.

Henry Herbert Tailors, named after the man who was once the master of the royal wardrobe to both King Charles I and II, is the brainchild of 34-year-old proprietor Charlie Baker-Collingwood. The makers of bespoke shirts, suits, waistcoats and overcoats, Henry Herbert aims to deliver a bespoke service to the people courtesy of a crack team of helmet-clad tailors scooting about the city on motorcycles.

Scuttling through the busy roads of London on their monogrammed scooters and dashing hounds-toothed patterned crash helmets, Henry Herbert qualified tailors have set about to prove that Savile Row is not just a location but a state of mind. "We aim to make the Savile Row experience more personable, more convenient and less intimidating," explains Baker-Collingwood.

"We use our fleet of Vespas to meet clients, wherever and whenever is good for them," he adds, warming to the theme, as we chat in his small but perfectly formed studio. Part workspace, part fitting-room and part art gallery, there is a Nehru-style suit jacket adorned with gauntlet cuffs being chalked up on the cutting table, an experimental double-breasted cashmere cardigan on a mannequin and a framed blow-up print of a microscopic tuft of tweed on the wall.

A bespoke laboratory of experimental inspiration combines with the day-to-day accoutrements of a tailoring business within this room; organised like books in a library, hosts of catalogued fabric swatches offer a variety of styles and materials from chalk stripe to tweed.

Having been in operation for 7 years, the USP for this business is centred on the use of two wheels, as well as flexibility and a willingness to give what the client desires. It is this that separates Henry Herbert from other bespoke tailors situated within London's sartorial hub.

"The majority of bespoke tailors have a house style which can be quite restrictive," explains Baker-Collingwood. "Here at Henry Herbert we feel that a truly bespoke service lets the customer feel free to choose the style they desire." Henry Herbert's own house style includes a higher cut waist on the coat creating a taller and slimmer silhouette and features the 'the broken suit' styling combination, where the jacket fabric is different from that of the trousers.

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Armed with measuring tapes, fabric chalk and pins, there is something quintessentially English in how the Henry Herbert mobile team adopt their responsibility to provide excellent customer service. "We aim to be as responsive as possible, which means being on call day and night. Not so long ago, one of our tailors ended up on top of a partly built skyscraper to measure up an architect on site," recounted Baker-Collingwood. "The scooters allow us to get to locations quickly and the first words all our customers will hear from a Henry Herbert tailor is 'How can I help Sir?'"

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Henry Herbert proprietor Charlie Baker-Collingwood. Source: mannerofman.blogspot.com

Although Henry Herbert does source some of their fabrics from Italy, the majority of materials used to create their suits are from England and Scotland. Henry Herbert creations are imbued with a sense of British suit-making tradition and heritage courtesy of the finest woollen fabrics from the likes of Bradford's William Halstad and the oldest mill in the country, Huddersfield's Taylor & Lodge.

"Firstly, it makes sense logistically [to source fabric from these places] and can be delivered speedily; and secondly, we know exactly where the cloth is coming from. We also take great pride in the fact that we can say that a piece has been made and cut in England," explains Baker-Collingwood.

Like the fabrics used by Henry Herbert, there is a very rich sense of heritage to the skills possessed by the tailors too. As Baker-Collingwood notes on the company website, "I learned jacket making at Morley College (London), Trouser & Waistcoat making at Central St. Martin's and both shirtmaking and sewing skills at Westminster college."

Savile Row has become a by-word for the highest quality of bespoke tailoring around the world. There remains a thriving market for the Savile Row experience amongst the modern gentleman, who

prefers a suit that is that little bit sharper in the cut and thus more flattering for the proportions of their frame. Paradoxically, the power of bespoke tailoring remains keenly felt despite the 21st-century becoming an age in which ready-to-wear suits can be purchased on every high street with minimum fuss and lower price tag.

In such a competitive environment, Baker-Collingwood refuses to rest on his laurels and will only offer a considered "we are growing in the right direction" in response to an enquiry on how business is doing. With an entry price point of GBP £1095 plus VAT for a good weight 2-piece suit, Henry Herbert offers an affordable high-quality product for the discerning dresser, from City-based wide-boys to retired army colonels; this is a company that looks to cater to all tastes.

In the increasingly fast-paced city life, in which a trip to get measured up for a hand-made suit would seriously disrupt a schedule, a tailor willing to jump on a scooter in order to get to you at a drop of a trilby hat is not only convenient but also a truly unique experience.

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