



## Savile Row's tailored suits are still a cut above all the rest



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**If you've been bitten by the Quadrophenia bug or simply fancy upholding a bit of British tradition, Savile Row suits still epitomise why bespoke is best**



Well-suited: Kathryn Sargent became Savile Row's first female head cutter in January

A couple of weeks back I bagged an invite to the Orange British Academy Film Awards – a black tie event. I'd never worn a tuxedo before but managed to borrow one from a mate at the last minute.

The jacket sleeves were too long, I had clown trousers and my shirt clearly wasn't designed for a bow tie.

This might have gone unnoticed at most events but not when you find yourself flanking Hollywood star Claire Danes on a red carpet in front of thousands. Time to invest in a proper suit.

Being a mod revivalist at heart I've always been fascinated by the fashion and in particular a bespoke three-piece, but never ventured further than a fishtail parka, Fred Perry polo shirt and trusty pair of Clarks Originals.

In the world of lapels, linings and double-breasts I'm a novice, so I headed for Savile Row, the 'golden mile of tailoring', for a crash course in couture cloths and cuts. Now gentlemen, if your aim is to impress the ladies, what better way to reach your goal than to be dressed by one – enter Kathryn Sargent, who in January became the first woman to be appointed a head cutter in the history of London's finest tailoring houses. It's a responsibility magnified when you work at Gieves & Hawkes, dressing the likes of the Prince of Wales since 1771, and carrying the address: No.1 Savile Row. 'The response has been quite overwhelming, I've had wonderful letters from people saying it's such a fantastic achievement,' says Sargent, 35. 'It's generated so much interest and a raft of positive comments from colleagues. Even rival houses on the row have been encouraging.'

Most Savile Row tailors offer three levels of service: bespoke, made-to-measure and ready-to-wear. Bespoke means the garment is custom-made, guaranteeing the best fit and best fabric. Made-to-measure is a pre-made suit modified to fit the client. Ready-to-wear, or off the peg, are suits you simply pick up and purchase as they are. So what makes the perfect suit? 'A combination of good cutting and high-quality tailoring,' says Sargent. 'It has to be good quality cloth and a fit that suits the individual. A suit should enhance the good parts of your figure and hide the bad.'

If you want something to add value and stature to who you are, a bespoke suit is a great investment because it's going to last you a long time. It doesn't have to be loud, just something subtle that fits,' she explains.

'We can add whatever little touches you want too. For example, we have one client who requests a special pocket to fit his cigar,' she says. 'The attention you get on Savile Row guarantees you will notice the difference and so will other people. I've always believed you can achieve a lot in a well-cut suit.'

Like any other fashion, suits have seasons and it's more than just 'light or dark'. 'There are all-year-round cloths and there are seasonal cloths. Clients are currently looking at winter for spring, and our ready-to-wear range is a great indicator of influences for the season,' says Sargent. 'Double-breasted is very fashionable again in suits and slightly longer overcoats. You should be looking for something classical but with a bit of a twist, which is achievable with accessories and shirts. Greys seem hugely popular right now. We've had a lot of clients come in requesting that colour. They've been influenced by the show Mad Men (pictured right) – muted suits with loud ties and shirts.'

This all sounds lovely but incredibly expensive and, unfortunately, we can't all shop in Mayfair and be able to pick up the bill. Now I'm not saying venture down the Old Kent Road for your 'whistle and flute' but surely there's a compromise?

'Made-to-measure is great if you're on a budget; you'll get cloth of brilliant quality, we'll make you a suit unique to your measurements, even if the process isn't as thorough as bespoke. A lot of clients want suits they can travel in so will go with made-to-measure or ready-to-wear and leave bespoke for special occasions.'

'If you've got the great figure and your budget isn't in this realm, buying off the peg is absolutely fine,' says Sargent. 'But if you're looking for a long-term investment, bespoke is a great step.'

You could always cheat: the Savile Row Company has a naughty little outlet store on eBay with suits, shirts and ties all at 70 per cent off ([stores.shop.ebay.co.uk/savile-row-company](http://stores.shop.ebay.co.uk/savile-row-company)). Just don't tell Kathryn.

Ready-to-wear suits from £495; made-to-measure from £795; hand-made bespoke from £3,500. <http://www.gievesandhawkes.com>

Why trudge all the way to Savile Row when you can let Savile Row come to you? Charlie Collingwood, 31, is managing director of Henry Herbert Tailors, which provides a suit service on a scooter.

'A tailor on a Vespa turns up wherever or whenever is good for the client – I'm reversing the Savile Row process,' Collingwood (pictured) says. 'The principle benefits are convenience and cost, because we don't have the expensive overheads of retail space on Savile Row. We still make our suits in the traditional way: by hand, in England, using only English and Scottish cloths. The standards are as high but the costs are a lot lower.'

E-mail or phone Henry Herbert's and a tailor will be with you within 15 to 20 minutes in London and the next day elsewhere in Britain. 'It's a very quick response service but, with the suits still made in the traditional way, there are a number of fittings, which takes a bit more time to complete,' says Collingwood. 'We've been in homes, offices and even on building sites. We bring a comprehensive but compact kit, including more than 2,000 fabrics and all the other tools needed to do the job.'

All suits and shirts are cut in London then stitched in Yorkshire. The standard service takes five to six weeks and the express service two to three weeks.

Suits start at £595. <http://www.henryherbert.com>

7,000

The approximate number of bespoke suits made annually in and around Savile Row

\* Menswear label A Child Of The Jago made its fashion debut last year at London Fashion Week. Taking its name from Arthur Morrison's 1896 novel of the same name about one of the roughest neighbourhoods in the 19th-century East End, the label reworks Victorian style with an anything-goes attitude. Designers Joseph Corre and Simon Armitage give their AW10 Terrorist collection (pictured right) a modern edge, by fusing workwear and sartorial style. Milkman jackets are revamped with Savile Row tailoring traditions and fine shirting crafted in Jermyn Street factories, and their pin-stripe boiler suit was inspired by the suit Winston Churchill wore while visiting the Cabinet war rooms. Fabrics come in rich silks, pure wool, sharp gaberdines and rugged twills, while gold buttons give the rugged designs a suited-and-booted look. <http://www.achildofthejago.com>

\* The trench coat. Smart, simple and a staple garment for most men's wardrobes. A little boring in design maybe? Not any more. Topman's Trench Coat Project sees celebrated designers Mihara Yasuhiro, Tim Soar, BBlessing and Alister Mackie reinterpret the classic piece, each bringing their own personality to it. Yasuhiro has produced an olive green pakamac with a zip on the back to increase the volume of the coat, while New York-based BBlessing has added a poem running throughout the lining of its coat. Topman's own contribution to the project is this geometric pattern with buttoned funnel neck (pictured right).

Prices from £80 to £100. <http://www.topman.com>