

SIMON CROMPTON

THE FINEST MENSWEAR
IN THE WORLD



Thames & Hudson

Simon Crompton

THE FINEST MENSWEAR IN THE WORLD

THE CRAFTSMANSHIP OF LUXURY

With 350 illustrations



Thames & Hudson

PRECEDING PAGE: The author wearing a Cifonelli suit, a Kiton shirt and a Begg & Co. scarf.

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INTRODUCTION

THE CRAFT BEHIND THE FINEST MENSWEAR IN THE WORLD

Baby cashmere is only two microns finer than regular cashmere, but ten years and millions of dollars were spent convincing Mongolian herdsman to gather it. To sew a Milanese buttonhole, a tailor must spend almost an hour carefully winding silk for something only an aficionado will see. These are tiny details – in the eyes of many, needless details – but they are what elevate a fine piece of menswear into being the finest of its kind.

I remember the first time I saw a bespoke suit being made. I was simply staggered at the level of craft. The chest of the suit is constructed from layers of horsehair, canvas and felt, sewn together with hundreds of hand stitches. The top of the sleeve is much bigger than the armhole it goes into and must be worked in stitch by stitch. Even a patch pocket is a work of art. Some of these crafts produce beauty – such as the Milanese buttonholes. Others create greater comfort – such as the sleeve/armhole combination. Still others are questions of innovation and perseverance, such as the baby cashmere. But they all have the same aim: to achieve the highest possible quality.

A fading beauty

This excellence in menswear has become harder to discern. Thirty years ago, it was remarked that for the first time

people were wearing labels on the outside of their clothes. Since then, branding has become all-powerful. Men, even more than women, have adopted brands as a shorthand for quality and style. Faced with an indigestible number of choices, they retreat to the safety of a familiar name.

Advertising and the ‘communications’ industry don’t help. Often, they deliberately obfuscate. Old brands will play on their longevity, while local brands emphasize nationality, even though neither necessarily has anything to do with quality. Combine that with ill-trained sales staff and the rise of internet shopping, and understanding quality in menswear has never been harder.

This book is hopefully a step in the right direction. By explaining how the finest clothes are made it aims to deepen understanding and lead to more discerning choices. I make no argument with men who have simply given up on clothing. As Bruce Boyer, one of the greatest menswear writers, put it, they did not reason their way into their position and they will not be reasoned out of it. This book is addressed, rather, to men who want to be able to turn aside one brand in favour of another, confident in its inherent quality – who want to be able to select the finest menswear in the world.

The methodology

Judgments of what constitutes the 'best' in any field are subjective, simply because no judge uses the same criteria. But a discussion of the finest can be different. A judgment on the finest wool thread is objective. So too the length of yarn. The products recommended in this book are, in that sense, the finest available anywhere in the world. They use the best materials and they require the most skill and time to make: they are the zenith of their art.

One or two points remain subjective – and where so, this will be clearly admitted. The fineness of a Drake's tie, for example, is down to both technical aspects, such as the hand-screen printing of silk, and aesthetic points, such as the sophistication of the designs. Some of the information in the following chapters is also rather technical. That is deliberate. The intention throughout is to help those with the money and desire for the finest menswear in the world but a paucity of information.

The judgments and selections are my own, and are based on wide-ranging experience in the luxury industry. For every factory mentioned, chances are I've also visited most of their main competitors. I own every product, and have tried and reviewed many others. Most importantly, I have made use of extensive contacts

among manufacturers, agents and buyers to validate my conclusions.

To qualify for inclusion in this book, companies have to design, make and sell their own product, and thereby control its quality throughout. There are some great factories out there, maintaining the highest standards of traditional manufacturing, but their product is rebranded by a variety of designers and their recommendation is therefore complicated.

Equally, some brands should be applauded for seeking out the best factories in Europe and even China to make their menswear. But their control of the process is never complete, and production policies change.

One result of emphasizing both the manufacturing and retail sides of the industry is that all the items recommended in this book can be readily purchased, although sometimes this requires a trip to England or Italy, and perhaps a six-month wait. Each will more than reward the time spent learning about them, and any travel or delay: their careful and steady acquisition will give any man a peerless modern wardrobe.

BIOGRAPHY

THE CONNOISSEUR BEHIND THE FINEST MENSWEAR IN THE WORLD

Simon Crompton is one of the world's leading authorities on luxury menswear, with a particular passion for bespoke tailoring and traditional crafts. An author and journalist, he is sought after by publications such as *How to Spend It* and the *Telegraph* for both his advice on modern men's style and his expertise in handmade clothing, its values and quality.

Over the past ten years Simon has built up an enthusiastic fan base through his online magazine Permanent Style, which has been listed as one of the best in the world by both *The Times* and the *New York Times*. In a world crowded with amateur bloggers, Permanent Style is noted for its eloquence, erudition and industry-insider access.

In recent years Permanent Style has evolved into a platform for events, clothing collaborations and publishing, with a yearly hard-copy annual.

Educated at Trinity College, Oxford, Simon trained as a financial journalist before turning his attention to menswear. He lives in Peckham in south London with his wife and two daughters.

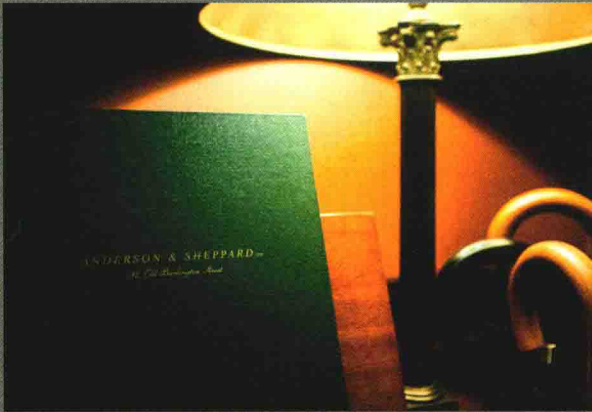


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