



FIT FOR A KINGSMAN

TODAY THE TERM 'BESPOKE' IS BANDIED AROUND WITH LITTLE REGARD FOR THE TRUE MEANING OF THE WORD, BUT ONE PLACE WHERE YOU CAN WALK AWAY WITH A TRULY BESPOKE ITEM IS SAVILE ROW. WE MEET JOHNNY ALLEN OF HUNTSMAN TAILORS TO DISCOVER THE LATEST, MOST INNOVATIVE INCARNATIONS OF THIS ANCIENT ART

written by FRED QUICK

Savile Row is probably England's last preserve of true bespoke and, once on the 'golden mile of tailoring', you'd be hard-pushed to find a more esteemed establishment than Huntsman, which has been plying its trade since 1849. Having cut suits for the likes of Sir Winston Churchill, Humphrey Bogart and Lucian Freud (to name but a few), Huntsman enjoys a distinguished reputation as one of the world's foremost tailors. In pursuit of an authentically customised experience we sat down with Huntsman's Head of Bespoke, Johnny Allen.

Sinking into a leather couch by the fireplace in Huntsman's lounge is an experience in itself; mounted stag's heads and portraits of famed clients look down on a space filled with sharply dressed mannequins and endless rolls of exclusive fabric. On a central table sits a time-worn ledger – the open page details an order for Queen Victoria's funeral, the next for Edward VII's coronation. Johnny arrives looking suitably debonair and claps his hands together: "So what do you want to know?"

What I'm most curious about is what Huntsman's new bespoke clients can expect. "I call Huntsman my stage because every day I have to perform," Johnny jokes. "The key is to understand what the customer needs and to work quickly – especially with men who tend to have a limited attention span! If you don't hit it first time they lose interest. The first thing to ascertain is what they need a suit for; is it for a black tie event or the shooting season? Will it be worn in London or the Far East? If you come in looking for a business suit in grey flannel, for example, I'll go to the pattern books and show you a grey flannel in three different shades and weights. You may prefer pure wool or wool mixed with cashmere; with the bespoke service there is a whole world of options."

Not only does Johnny work quickly, he talks quickly too. Treating me as a would-be customer, the sartorialist elucidated further. "Getting measured up is a wonderful process because it's all about you; your physicality is cut into the pattern. When the cutter looks at you he doesn't just measure your physique but looks at all your idiosyncrasies, like whether you're erect or stoop, your legs are bandy or bowed. They'll also accommodate unique personal preferences like a concealed pocket for your passport or a wider lapel."

I notice pictures of Gregory Peck and David Bowie in Huntsman suits on the wall and see if I can prise any renowned clients out of Johnny. "Well, I can't tell you about any current ones but Gianni Agnelli had about 200 suits off us; there are so many iconic pictures of him in a Huntsman suit. We attract everyone from Hollywood actors and billionaire industrialists to lords, ladies and dukes."

One Huntsman client that is certainly no secret is English film director Matthew Vaughn, who decided to set his movie 'Kingsman: The Secret Service' in a tailors following an appointment at Huntsman. "Matthew thought Huntsman was really fuddy duddy but then he came here and started to have fun," Johnny recalls.

Leaving the comfort of the lounge, we embark on a behind-the-scenes tour where a team of cutters are busily at work. What's most impressive is that nearly the entire process is done by hand; a very labour-intensive process but the results speak for themselves. Every buttonhole, for example, is sewed with silk by hand. Johnny informs me that they can only make around 1,200 suits a year like this, but Huntsman has always prioritised quality over quantity. Eighty man hours go into each bespoke suit, which includes approximately 30 measurements and three fittings. "When they pay £5,000 for a suit the customer wants to get what they're paying for," Johnny adds.



Although Huntsman is, and always will be, steeped in tradition, since being taken over by Pierre Lagrange and Roubi L'Roubi in January 2013, the introduction of modern innovations has seen the brand's appeal widen. One thing the new owners have introduced is tablets synched with Huntsman's new website to bring technology and CAD into the fray. We stole a moment from Pierre's busy schedule to find out about another new innovation, The Huntsman Card Holder. "This deerskin card holder is hand-crafted exclusively for Huntsman and incorporates an radio frequency shielding foil – a state-of-the-art piece of spyware engineering created to prevent hackers from stealing credit card details, blocking scanning devices within mobile technology. Huntsman's heritage over the years has seen us dress both real and fictional spies, crafting garments for the likes of Ian Fleming and serving as the inspiration for the 'Kingsman: The Secret Service team'. Our new card holder sees us once again at the helm of kitting gentlemen out for every eventuality!"

Not only have the new owners embraced modern technology at Huntsman, they have also made an ambitious expansion plan to open premises in New York this autumn and are set to visit six cities across Asia in an inaugural trunk show this September – 166 years in the making and no sign of slowing down!

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