



# STREET SPIRIT

Why is it Savile Row's centuries-old tailoring firms are still the world's best?

WORDS BY GEORGINA WILSON-POWELL



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“Once you're a tailor, you're a tailor for life,” explains Davide Taub, Head Cutter at Gieves & Hawkes, the 200-year-old tailors that occupies 1 Savile Row. He can't move in his workshop for rustling the suit patterns. Each customer looking to be fitted for one of the company's bespoke suits will be measured by a cutter such as Taub. These measurements create a lifelong template for the team of tailors and cutters that creates some of the best suits in the world.

Savile Row is more than just a street in London. It's the soul of suit making. Piccadilly has been home to military and aristocratic tailors and milliners since the mid-1600s, but it wasn't until 1846 that newly built Savile Row got its first tailors. Henry Pool & Co opened that year, and the bowler hat, an icon of British upper-class fashion, debuted here just four years later. Over the years, Savile Row has been the birthplace of the tuxedo, the home of Prime Ministers, countesses, poets and rogues, and still it has this magical, timeless allure. But how do tailors founded hundreds of years ago stay relevant in today's world?

“It's not just that we're tailors,” says Taub. “It's the concentration of tailors. We have everything here: our workshops have tailors who have worked here for 50 or 60 years. There's a challenge in the concentration of companies. If you produce a bad suit, your customer could go next door. You always have to be top of your game and improve the fitting, the style... our tailors help each other to learn new techniques and combine them with our experience.”

Gieves & Hawkes' client list reads like a who's who from British history. They (as two separate companies prior to 1974) have dressed ten generations of British royalty (including Princes William and Harry), Admiral Lord Nelson and the famous African explorer Dr David Livingstone, which is fitting, considering the firm's residence was the home of the Royal Geographical Society, the upper-class Victorian club that was the breeding ground for so many British expeditions.

“It's about making a garment, and you get better the longer you do it. We have people in their 80s and 90s still working with us, to keep their hand in,” says Anda Rowland, the CEO of Anderson & Sheppard. This relative newcomer (established in 1906) was a favourite with Frank Sinatra and Noel

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- 1 The experienced team from Anderson & Sheppard.
- 2 The Gieves & Hawkes patterns are made from scratch and kept on record.
- 3 & 4 Bespoke Gieves & Hawkes tailoring.
- 5 Anderson & Sheppard bespoke single breasted Glen check jacket with waistcoat.
- 6 The first suit takes eight to ten weeks, and several fittings, to make.
- 7 Gieves & Hawkes' client and measuring book list.

Coward – as well as current designers such as Tom Ford and Ralph Lauren – for its more relaxed English drape suit. Each suit needs 27 measurements, which are hand recorded in a ledger. The first suit takes several fittings and eight to ten weeks to make.

“There's a temptation to change, and we resisted the urge to do something different. So many companies have become obsessed with being up to date or cutting costs and have lost that special niche; we have resisted it,” Rowland explains.

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“I think there's a renewed love for craftsmanship as a reaction to disposable culture; young people are well informed with working conditions, sourcing and sustainability,” says Rowland. “The keen apprentices have researched things and have made a conscious choice to be a tailor.”





Gieves & Hawkes map room.

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“Tailors don’t have to worry about retirement, they’re not going to get ousted by a younger generation with different skills, and I think people value that now. It’s a lifelong skill,” she adds. “In the Nineties it was very hard to recruit people, but now about three people a week enquire about our apprenticeships.”

In a culture full of disposable fashion (high-end designers like Dior now have six collections a year), Savile Row is about investing in style that lasts – suits are often handed down from father to son. Each tailor cultivates its customers and, unlike a check-out girl more interested in thumbing her phone than helping you, impeccable service comes as standard.

“The customer knows they’re being looked after and aren’t just a number. It’s not a factory process, there’s no salesman,” says Taub. The customer sees the person who

makes their suit, there’s no middle man, the patterns are made from scratch and then kept on record. You’re not just buying a suit to walk out the door with a flashy bag, you’re making a lifelong investment, and that appeals to a range of people from a CEO to a young man who has had to save up to come here.”

Another major difference between this kind of tailoring and high-end fashion is where the customer fits in. Truly bespoke service puts the customer front and centre and works outwards, rather than creating the clothes that the customer is expected to adapt to.

“We don’t ask everyone to be the same shape to fit into clothes; we work with people as individuals, to build up their wardrobe based on who they are and what they do” explains Taub. We learn from them and build our clothes around their personal comfort, rather than asking them to buy into a certain look.”

It’s this driving passion to get everything right for each individual and to uphold a historic level of quality and skill that sees both tailors attract a global customer base and keeps the magic of Savile Row alive.

The individual tailors might seem old-fashioned but it’s their staunch commitment to their craft at every stage – from supporting British suppliers who make the cloth, to investing in apprentices, and their refusal to bend to the 21st century’s ways – that helps this particular street retain its appeal. Some things may never change, but that’s not always a bad thing. ▲



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A Savile Row suit needs suitable accessories.

**1. HANDKERCHIEF**

No man should be without a proper hanky. These stag-adorned ones come from Annabel James, an online store dedicated to British artisans. [annabeljames.co.uk](http://annabeljames.co.uk)

**2. CUFFLINKS**

Deakin & Francis has been making cufflinks since 1786 and its vintage collection should be top of your list. These rose gold, engine turned ones will be a classic forever. [deakinandfrancis.co.uk](http://deakinandfrancis.co.uk)

**3. TIE PIN**

Alice Made This is a small British jewellers for men that uses industrial engineering methods to create clean and simple accessories. Their tie pins comes in copper, silver and gold. [alicemadethis.com](http://alicemadethis.com)

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