

It's that's time of year again, when the mind must turn to gift-giving. You want to delight, surprise or impress someone with something special. But it's hard when everything is available everywhere to everyone at the click of a mouse, and the price and provenance of most items can be discovered by a curious recipient in a Googling instant. What to do? Buy bespoke.

In the search for the super-special, bespoke is best. A wonderful one-off, personalised or made-to-measure – nothing could be nicer. Which is why the only hazard as you set off on this route is that you might end up commissioning one for them and one for you. But at least they won't be duplicates.

Start exploring the arena of bespoke, which, in a world of logos and mass production, revives the authenticity and personal touch of craftsmanship, and you soon discover that it has expanded massively beyond the confines of London's Savile Row, home of the handmade suit that most people associate with the term bespoke, and that spawned the word – cloth already set aside for another client: "be spoken for".

There are craftsmen and artisans around the world – most of them elderly but some, increasingly, who are young – reviving almost-lost skills. In Paris, the couture houses keep old decorative crafts alive and attract clients from around the world looking for bespoke accessories, such as the beautiful handmade men's shoes at Crockett & Jones on Rue Chauveau-Lagarde (www.crockettandjones.com).

Berlin has seen a resurgence of young artisans, with companies such as Lapaporter letting customers specify the skin (ostrich, calf, crocodile?), colour (scarlet, sky blue?) and fastening on made-to-measure laptop, phone and iPad cases that are in a class of their own (www.lapaporter.de).

In resorts such as Capri and St Tropez, long-established bespoke sandal-makers Canfora

(www.canfora.com) and Rondini (www.rondini.fr) flourish. And across Delhi and Mumbai, sewing machines buzz from morning to night, creating bespoke soft furnishings from the exquisite handmade fabrics that India is famous for.

But if there's a single destination that rewards the seeker of the bespoke at a super-luxury level, it's London, with its mix of high-end shops and new generation artisan makers.

As a special present from father to son, one of those Savile Row suits is still a tradition in many families. Richard James, who kick-started the trend for slimmer-cut handmade suits and counts David Beckham, P Diddy and Sir Elton John among clients, charges from Dh26,230 for one of his creations (www.richardjames.co.uk). That's pretty much the going price all along this famous street. Huntsman was established in 1849 and is particularly good on hot-climate suits – for which it recommends a high-twist cloth that will resist creasing and spring back well – and has its own house tweeds made up on the island of Islay at Britain's oldest working mill (www.huntsman.com). There's also Gieves & Hawkes, with clients who include Prince William and Robbie Williams (www.gievesandhawkes.com). Nearby, Holland and Holland, founded in 1835, uses the softest cashmere for bespoke hunting and riding jackets (www.hollandandholland.com) that go so well with the bespoke saddles made by Wow (www.wowsaddles.com).

Five minutes' walk from Savile Row, across Berkeley Square, on Mount Street, William + Son – which also has a branch in the UAE – offers a zillion potential gifts, many made bespoke in workshops in London's East End (www.williamandson.com). Its leather backgammon sets make a somewhat affordable present for a man, with the colours of the leather board customisable and a tournament-sized set with aluminium-spun counters priced at Dh16,615.



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For a woman, jewellery has eternal appeal. Designers such as Polly Wales, who uses old wax-casting techniques to lusciously stud gold with gemstones, will sketch ideas and discuss likes and dislikes until a final design is agreed upon (www.pollywales.com). Robinson Pelham, which made bespoke earrings for the Duchess of Cambridge's wedding, includes the final sketch with delivery (www.robinsonpelham.com).

But a famous name adds lustre to a gift of jewels. The celebrated house of Fabergé, known worldwide since the 19th century when Peter Carl Fabergé produced his enthralling jewelled eggs for the Russian tsars, lets customers specify personalised variations of each collection according to whim (www.faberge.com). An egg pendant studded with rubies and emeralds will cost around Dh239,000.

And if a handbag can always be relied on to thrill the female heart, a jewelled handbag could make for the ultimate gift. On New Bond Street, Asprey's is the place to be: one of the great destinations for delectable bespoke gifts, with craftsmen on the premises still using some of the tools favoured by their 18th-century predecessors (www.aspreys.com). A bespoke crocodile-skin bag elaborately embellished with semi-precious stones will cost from between Dh174,885 and Dh233,180; one with hardware studded with precious stones such as sapphires and diamonds, lapis or jade, set in 18-carat gold, will set you back Dh349,770 to Dh582,950. Inside, a silver plate can be embossed with a private message.

A considerably more affordable personalised message can also be added to the leather Walton luggage Anya Hindmarch sells at her Pont Street shop (www.anyahindmarch.com). Handwritten, it can be embossed or engraved on the key cover, with initials added in leather appliqué. Somehow this leaps out as a pretty perfect present for a beloved daughter departing the family nest.

Meanwhile, Globe-Trotter, set up in 1897 (Sir Winston Churchill travelled with nothing else and the Queen of England still uses the company's cases), offers customers the chance to specify each element of their famously robust cases – exterior, interior, hardware and locks (www.globetrotter1897.com).

And at Moncrief, sumptuous weekend bags can be made using a variety of exotic skins – alligator,

crocodile, ostrich – with a lambskin lining to match (www.moncrieflondon.com).

Meanwhile, personalised writing sets appeal to almost anyone, of any age or disposition.

Smythson is the great name in bespoke stationery (www.smythson.com). The paper colour, lettering and ink colour are all specifiable for printing on its brilliantly long-lasting, deceptively delicate-looking watermarked paper.

At Louis Vuitton, the grandly named L'écriture est un Voyage writing set is completely personalisable, from the weight of the paper to the colour of the alligator-skin writing case (www.louisvuitton.fr). Fountain pens, too, can be personalised, with engraved initials.

Especially tempting special-edition offerings this winter include Montegrappa's Dh98,897, 18-carat gold Rigoletto pen (www.montegrappa.com) and Parker's gold and diamond-studded Dh174,595 Duofold Giant (www.parker.com).

A seductive bridle-leather-covered journal at Dh460 from Aspinal can be personalised with embossed initials or a message (www.aspinaloflondon.com).

And that trusty standby gift, a scented candle, never goes out of fashion. At the delicious little shop recently opened by Rachel Vosper near

Harvey Nichols in Knightsbridge, customers can bring their own vessels to be filled with her exquisite scented beeswax for completely bespoke candles (www.rachelvosper.com).

And if you don't have the time to commission an actual real-world item? Then you can always buy a bespoke experience. Log onto The Dorchester's site, for instance, and you can buy someone a gift card for a morning of treatments in the spa (www.dorchestercollection.com).

Take over the Smith Fork Ranch outside Aspen, which looks out over the Rockies, with fireplaces for guaranteed cosiness, and cookout spots galore, and there would be horseback riding, wilderness trips into the backcountry, fly-fishing on a private river, archery, hiking, evening camp fires and stargazing for 26 definitely-should-be-grateful recipients for Dh310,334 for five nights (www.SmithForkRanch.com). A private jet to bring you all from New York – yes, of course you deserve to go too, not least to bask in the gratitude – would be an extra Dh113,850. ○

PRIVATE AFFAIR

Riding, fishing, stargazing – the luxurious Smith Fork Ranch in Colorado can organise it all for small and large groups, including a private jet service from New York.



FITTING GESTURE

The bespoke shoes from Crockett & Jones, above, and riding jackets from Holland + Holland, below, promise a perfect fit for your person and your personality.



SMITH FORK RANCH; CROCKETT & JONES; HOLLAND + HOLLAND (3)