

# Indy Ipswich: Inside the town's coolest menswear shop

**Danielle Lett** talks with Twist 'N' Shout owner Alan Rayner about his retro finery and the importance of loyalty

As I stepped inside Twist 'N' Shout on a snowy Monday morning, I couldn't help but feel a sense of warmth.

Not only was shop owner Alan Rayner playing ska and reggae Christmas tunes (a nice change from hearing the usual dreadfully overplayed pop music that's dusted off at this time of year), but he was incredibly friendly and welcoming – something that doesn't go unnoticed, and must keep customers coming back in time and time again.

"Loyal customers are key to longevity," he says.

"And you've got to like people. I get on with all different types of people, and I like to have a laugh and a joke with my customers. It's why I play the music I do. You're not going to get traditional Christmas music, I like to keep it funky in here."

And he's not wrong. As you look around, the shop – which first opened its doors in 2010 – is filled with brightly-coloured, loud print shirts.

"I like this building," he explains.

"My landlords are the same people who own the Buttermarket. They wanted me in there but I love this building. It's got character – a bit like me. It's quirky and different – it's not your run-of-the-mill high street shop."

For anyone who doesn't know, Twist 'N' Shout is menswear specialist on St Stephen's Lane. It's perhaps one of Ipswich's most recognisable independents, and has been kitting out shoppers in 60s and 70s-style finery for the past decade.

"Prior to running the shop, I was a buyer and area manager for another menswear company, but I've always wanted to down my own thing. I got fed up of working for other people and not getting the credit for what I do. I was always told to open my own shop – so that's what I did," Alan says.

Twelve years on, Alan has built up a reliable base of steady customers – with many making the trek to come shop at Twist 'N' Shout.



Inside Twist 'N' Shout

Pictures: CHARLOTTE BOND

"People come from all over – not just here but Chelmsford, Norwich and Colchester," he says.

"They all know me by name and people will often come in so I can help them pick stuff out, or help women who come in shopping for their other halves. We always run through what they want, and we'll go through everything that might work.

"And I make sure to never oversell to my customers. If they just want a suit, I'll sell them a suit. I won't try to sell them a suit, a shirt, a tie and a belt. If that's what they want, then great, but I'm happy to sell less to make sure the customer leaves happy, and that they've got what they really wanted."

On the ground floor you'll find iconic brands and labels such as Ben Sherman, Claudio Lugli, Gabicci, and Trojan.

Think suits, jumpers, shoes, parka jackets, button-up shirts, polo shirts, bags, and anything in-between. Alan stocks the lot.

Upstairs is totally dedicated to Lambretta. A shrine to a bygone era, the walls of his Lambretta room are adorned with Mod memorabilia.

"I've always liked that older stuff, from the 60s and early 70s. A lot of fashion in my shop is based around that but has a modern twist to it. Originally, it was a slightly older look, but the youngsters love it too now.

"When I first opened, my market was initially 40 and up, but now it's anyone who 16 and older; as the kids are influenced by what their parents wore. They'll come in want a Harrington jacket because they've been wearing their dad's one and want one of their own."

Alan's clothing range goes from

small to 4XL – ensuring everyone is catered for.

But what is it he likes so much about this style era?

"It's timeless fashion," he says.

There's a core selection of brands he stocks – but he'll always adapt where needed to keep up with the ever-changing trends.

"Some brands might not work well one season so I may stop doing them for a year or so, and bring something else in and see how that goes, and then maybe bring it back in. Fashion trends always change anyway, so you work your way around those."

Anything he doesn't manage to sell is kindly donated to Cancer Research UK in Ipswich, as well as St Helena's Hospice in Colchester because, for him, fashion shouldn't come with an outrageous price tag.

"Any end of range stock I have, as well as the odd bit of personal clothing, I'd rather give it to charity so they can resell it and it can go to someone who can't afford it."

Does Alan see himself branching out and opening a second branch anytime in the future?

"Nope," he says.

"I live in Colchester, so drive here four days a week, but I can't see myself anywhere else. I know there's a lot of negativity about Ipswich, and the high street is changing, but you've got to go with it.

"Sixty per cent of what's bought online is returned – but I hardly get returns, as I spend time helping people with their shopping, and getting to know the customer. I have looked at offering online shopping, but I haven't made my mind up yet. I much prefer in-person."





Alan outside Twist 'N' Shout

