



THE HOLY LAND OF TAILORING: ANDERSON

Nearly a century ago, Savile Row's Anderson & Sheppard created a new set of sartorial commandments.

Now, the firm that forever revolutionised tailoring is atoning for past sins and winning a host of converts to the bespoke creed

SHEPPARD

by *wei koh* photography *munster*

“Men used to dress so superbly, so elegantly... to dress sublimely was the male birthright... your bespoke suit used to be the way you expressed who you were” — Anda Rowland

In most of the world's great religions, there is the idea of a Holy Land — an emotional centre that is the source of a faith's beliefs and value systems, the site of key moments in its history. In the cult of men's classic elegance, the spiritual homeland is a 102-year-old British tailoring firm named Anderson & Sheppard.

Today, new converts to the faith are welcomed. But in the past, as with many pilgrimages, the route to Anderson & Sheppard could be fraught with hardship, demanding courage and persistence of devotees. The firm had a harsh reputation for frosty treatment — and at times, outright rejection — of hopeful first-time customers. Dogma was strictly enforced. Take, for example, this anecdote from current vice chairman Anda Rowland, which brings to mind a certain saying concerning Mohammad and the mountain. “Tom Cruise's representatives once requested that our head cutter John Hitchcock come to the Dorchester Hotel to fit him,” says Rowland. “Mr. Hitchcock thought that this would be quite fun, but our rather stern former managing director regrettably refused, stating, ‘If he wants a suit, then he can come here.’”

This aloofness only spurred men on, made them more determined to pass through the secret stages of liminality, and be inducted into this elite Knights Templar-esque secret fraternity. While its insularity and discretion may help explain why every one of the world's best-dressed men of all time (including Fred Astaire, Gary Cooper and Rudolph Valentino) had been an Anderson & Sheppard client, the more prevailing reason has to do with the unique qualities of the Anderson & Sheppard suit itself.

In technical terms, the firm's soft drape suit represented the modern era's most significant revolution in men's tailoring — a sartorial reformation, if you will. Anderson & Sheppard's heretical approach rocked the tailoring world, resonating so far and wide that its core tenets were heavily incorporated into the iconic school of Neapolitan tailoring founded by Attolini and Rubinacci. An Anderson & Sheppard suit clad the wearer in perfect nonchalant elegance, while providing a never-before-attained level of mobility and comfort. It was truly a revelation.

MAN'S DIVINE RIGHT

Anda Rowland is beautiful — in a Sandro Botticelli *Madonna del Magnificat* come to life kind of beautiful. So, you may find it curious that she's running the world's most iconic men's tailoring firm... that is, until this ‘woman of the cloth’ begins sermonising. “Men used to dress so superbly, so elegantly,” says

Rowland. “If one goes back to the time of court and military uniforms, there is a clear expression that to dress sublimely was the male birthright. In fact, there are certain periods in history where men are absolute peacocks, and women are downright dowdy. All of that was lost in the culture of ready-to-wear, which wiped out creativity and options. Dressing in your bespoke suit used to be the way you expressed who you were. And there has been a vast renewal in bespoke culture. This is not new. It is not evolution. It is a return to the natural condition.”

It's apt that Rowland denies the theory of evolution, considering the role that intelligent design played in spawning the Anderson & Sheppard legend. The design in question was the work of maverick Dutch tailor Frederick Scholte. In the early 20th century, men's tailoring was still derived from military uniforms where aesthetics and bearing were everything, and comfort was, in many instances, totally disregarded. In contrast to this stiffness, after World War I, there was an air of adventure born of developments in travel, technology, art and music. Scholte sought to create clothes that embodied the spirit of freedom found in this brave new world. His champion was the style icon Edward VIII, the Duke of Windsor. They set out to dispense with the corseted stiffness of dress clothes, and introduce lightness, comfort, and mobility without compromising appearance. Their solution was the drape cut, where cloth was draped rather than molded restrictively to the body, to create the silhouette.

Says Anderson & Sheppard's managing director, head cutter and high priest of the British drape, John Hitchcock, “Scholte wanted the wearer to always remain comfortable, yet always appear immaculate. So, he constructed clothes that caressed the body, but didn't constrict it.”

To do so, he employed techniques that have become recognised as some of the most important technical breakthroughs in modern tailoring. He started with softer shoulders, often just a one-ply pad with a bit of wadding that breaks down over time. The shape of the coat drapes from the shoulders into a full chest, and finds a subtly narrower point at the waist. Says Hitchcock, “This creates that classic Atlas silhouette.” But Scholte's real innovation arose at the juncture of the sleeves and the armholes of the coat. By easing large sleeveheads into small armholes, arms were given mobility while the body of the suit remained isolated from their movement.

A NEW DOCTRINE

That the modern-day Anderson & Sheppard remains a bastion of the same artisan technical tailoring created by Frederick Scholte, and which passed

from him to the firm's co-founder Per Anderson, is irrefutable. However, this institution's custodians are by no means keen to see all of its traditions preserved. Case in point: the firm's legendary snootiness.

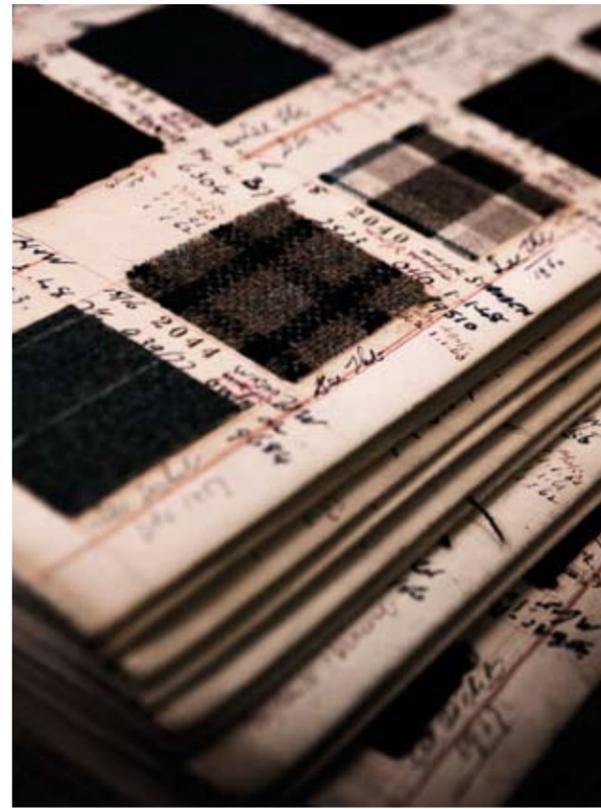
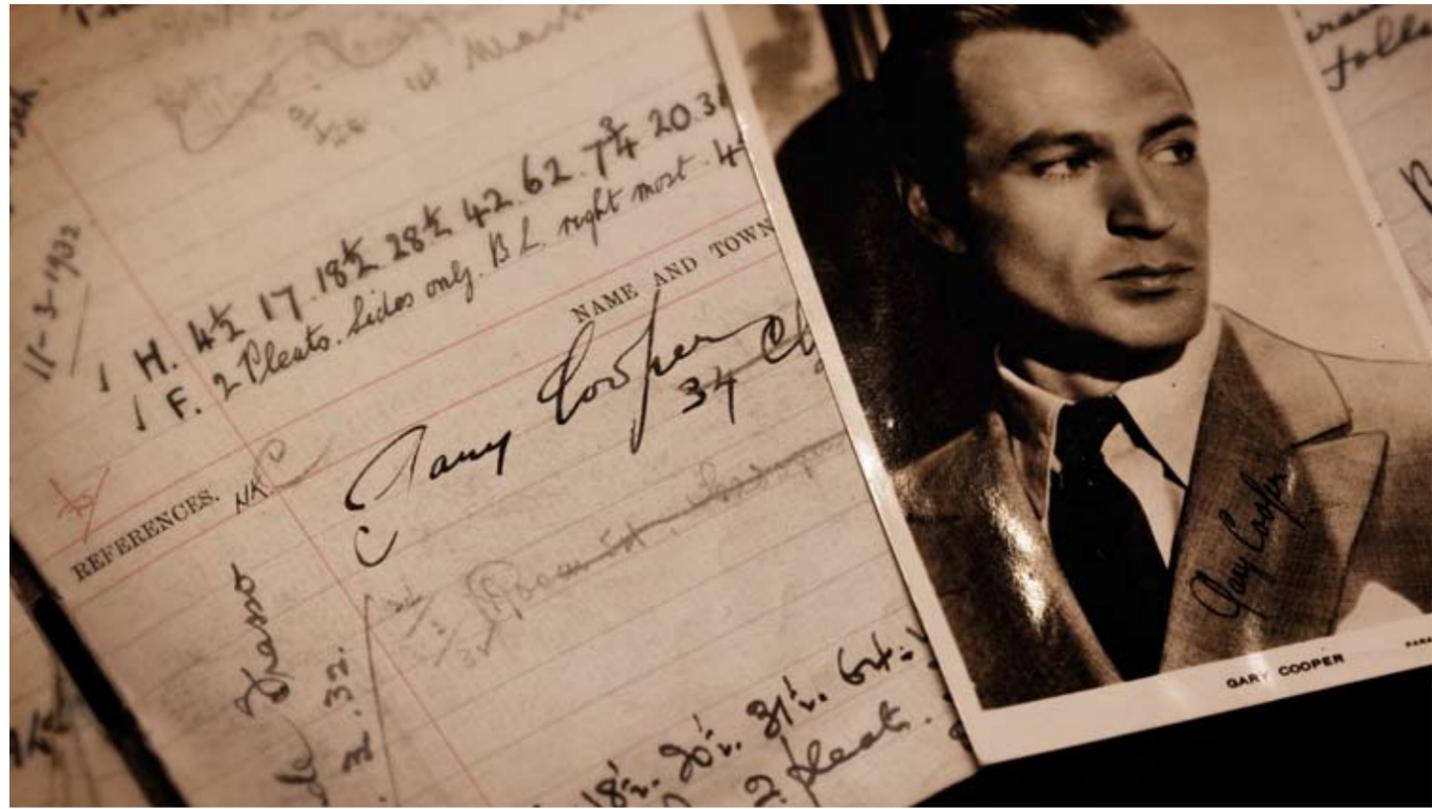
While recognising the curmudgeonly charm of Anderson & Sheppard's past reputation (a famous story has Scholte, in keeping with his outright ban on catering to musicians, ejecting the great conductor Arturo Toscanini from the premises), Rowland is adamant that things have changed. She says, “It is very important to understand that the Anderson & Sheppard suit and this mentality do not have to mutually co-exist.”

Hitchcock adds, “Our former managing director could be rather intimidating. But I don't think there's any need for that today. Anyway, my nature is to be open. Anda is a very open and warm person, so I think with us at the helm, Anderson & Sheppard has just naturally become a friendlier environment. Nothing gives either of us more pleasure than to show new clients or potential clients what makes an Anderson & Sheppard suit something beyond description, something alive and wonderful, and a companion that accompanies you through life's adventures.”

Says Rowland, “To change from our past culture to the culture we have now is a big step. For example, we didn't have a proper website until 2007. But we needed one badly, because today's clients use the Internet as a key decision-making tool. We also made a three-minute film that goes through the process of what to expect when you make a bespoke suit, so as to make the process more fun and less intimidating.”

“It's important to get our name out there, and reinforce who we are and what distinguishes our product. I think that in today's marketing-driven environment, people are looking for artisan objects that represent real legitimate and lasting values. To my mind, no tailoring firm represents this better than Anderson & Sheppard. We had to push forward our communication to reclaim our heritage from fashion brands that had attempted to co-opt the concept of ‘bespoke’, and to express our values to a new generation to ensure our future survivability.”

Says Hitchcock of Rowland's forward-thinking approach to communication, “It's a perfect partnership. Our personalities and backgrounds have merged very well. I come from a tradition of cutting suits, and know the Anderson & Sheppard philosophy related to constructing unique, extraordinary garments. Anda is a graduate of INSEAD, and worked for many years in Paris for Christian Dior, so she perfectly understands the world of luxury and the business mechanics of luxury.” [continued p 175]





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“Add to this that her father (the late tycoon Tiny Rowland) was one of Anderson & Sheppard’s greatest champions who later bought the firm. She’s been raised with a fundamental belief in our values, and we couldn’t ask for a better owner. She’s brought a new level of openness to Anderson & Sheppard which didn’t exist before, and we’ve benefited enormously from it.” Convincing evidence that Rowland’s new vision for Anderson & Sheppard has had a critical impact is found in the new generation of surprisingly diverse clients who’ve come knocking on the door of this Mecca of bespoke tailoring.

FREEDOM OF BELIEF

It used to be that commissioning an Anderson & Sheppard suit was a little like buying a Ford Model T, the car you could famously have “in any colour as long as it’s black”. In the past, Anderson & Sheppard did one kind of cut, and that was it. Functional buttonholes on your sleeves? Forget it, it wasn’t part of their philosophy. Their prevailing belief was that the only man who needs to unbutton and roll up his sleeve is a veterinarian.

Says Hitchcock, “Today, we accommodate the customer more. I don’t see any harm in this at all. As long as we stick to the codes of what an Anderson & Sheppard suit is, which is a drape cut with small armholes and large sleeveheads, then why shouldn’t people enjoy expressing who they are? It is precisely the cut that I made for Tom Ford for his white-tie suit that he’s been photographed in many times. He had two requests. He wanted the lapels of his suit to be 5½ inches wide as opposed to 4½ inches, and he wanted the waist of his suit to be nipped in more than normal. So, that’s what we did, but it was basically the old Scholte cut.”

Says Rowland, “The basic design architecture, and the underlying tailoring techniques that allow us to create an Anderson & Sheppard coat have not changed for 100 years. It’s a classic cut. It’s not a fashion cut. You will still be wearing this suit 20 years from now.”

Hitchcock adds, “We are taking our values, bringing them up to date, and introducing them to a whole new generation. We’ve had requests to put Hermès scarves into coats for linings, and we are happy to do this also. Why not have a bit of fun? We have customers come in for a glass of sherry, and we exchange ideas. At one point, we refused to make functional buttonholes, but today, clients expect them, so we make them. We make four buttons with three functional ones, and the fourth one as a dummy, so the sleeve can be lengthened later on, should you pass the coat on to your son.”

With a growing breed of new clients from diverse cultures and backgrounds, Hitchcock feels the mantra of “knowing your client” still prevails, though it has made for amusing incidents of late. He explains, “You look at the person to get a sense of personality. This, more than the clothes on his back, tells you what

kind of suit he wants. But the other day, a really fun and flamboyant Japanese gentleman came in. He was wearing a baseball hat and some rather impressive jewelry, and he was accompanied by three very large men. He enquired about a suit and I asked him, ‘How would you like to look, sir?’ He looked at me, pointed at the blue chalk stripe suit I had on, and said, ‘I want to look exactly like you.’” The gentleman in question turned out to be Nigo, impresario of cult hip-hop clothing brand A Bathing Ape.

Adds Hitchcock, “It was particularly funny when one of our tailors mentioned to me, ‘My son goes to his store to buy his clothes.’ I liked the fact that he came to us so I can make his!”

As a sign of the times, women — who were previously “banished” from Anderson & Sheppard — are now made welcome. Hitchcock explains, “In the old days, the cutters would get so upset if a lady told them what to do. In fact, they were not allowed in the shop. But I’ve heard some of the best commentaries from women. For example, I once went to fit Prince Charles, and it happened that the late Princess Diana was there. She took a look at the coat that we’d done to our usual length, and said she felt it should be shortened half an inch. It worked out fine — in fact, everyone thought it looked fantastic.”

A DISTINCTIVE LOOK

Before embarking on the Anderson & Sheppard experience, it is important to understand the particularities of its suits. Because of the brand’s focus on comfort, the silhouette of its coats is far less shaped than the lean silhouette currently in vogue in contemporary men’s fashion, even when the waist is strongly suppressed. It is, in other words, a loose-fitting and largely unshaped coat. It is the antithesis of Hedi Slimane’s Dior Homme suits, and even more relaxed in fit than Armani’s deconstructed garments. Those seeking out a more slim-fitting British suit would be better off with Savile Row firms such as Richard Anderson, the master of the sculptural constructed look; or Chittleborough & Morgan, who has perfected a “whippet-sleek” silhouette. Alternatively, Ralph Lauren’s Purple Label has managed to combine some of Anderson & Sheppard’s legendary drape with a more fitted silhouette. But if you are looking for the ultimate in comfort and relaxed elegance, nothing will literally suit you better than an Anderson & Sheppard suit. As John Hitchcock says candidly, “Some people swear at our clothes, others swear by them.” Which group you belong to depends on how fitted and shaped you like your clothes to be. We highly recommend that you begin with a simple single-breasted model in a plain color as your first suit to get a feel for the house style. Consult with Karl Matthews, the front-of-house salesman, who will unerringly guide you through the process of fabric, style and lining choices. We love the beautiful 12-ounce Anderson & Sheppard double pinstripe fabrics that are made exclusively for the firm, but these may be too heavy for year-round use depending on where you live.



THE ETERNAL BOND

A bespoke suit is a very personal experience, and the primary bond that occurs is between you and your cutter. The cutter is the person who takes your measurements, transforms them into a pattern on paper, and then cuts the cloths for your suits using this pattern. The ideal situation is for you and your cutter to have a long-term relationship. Every time he fits you for a suit, he looks to see if your body has changed, and will make alterations to the pattern to adjust the fit. And that is the other unique aspect of the bespoke suit — it can always be re-adjusted as your body changes. It is, in many ways, a fluid thing, constantly adapting to you as you progress through life.

THE SPIRIT MOVES

In a move that had the tailoring industry reeling, in 2005, Anderson & Sheppard decided to give-up its iconic old address at 30 Savile Row, relocating one street over to smaller yet beautifully appointed premises at 32 Old Burlington Street.

“We have a smaller shop, certainly, but the new space is used more efficiently,” says Rowland, explaining the rationale for the move. “In fact, work is organised much better here. And I’ll give you another reason why I love this space: it allows us to concentrate fully on bespoke suits. The majority of tailors on Savile Row have had to branch into ready-to-wear or made-to-measure (which are essentially outsourced to other companies with little expression of the tailoring houses’ expertise) to combat their elevated rentals. But at Anderson & Sheppard, we concentrate singularly on bespoke.”

Says Hitchcock, “I’m very happy with this new address, because the focus here is on the workrooms having the best light, and accommodating the tailors. It is very important to have as much of the tailoring as possible done on the premises, so that we can communicate with each other clearly about the client’s needs. Isn’t it nice, if you are having a coat made, that you can go down and see your coat being made?”

As to whether the soul of the company remains perfectly intact after the relocation, Rowland is emphatic, “The soul of the company thrives in the team here and our wonderful customers.”

Simultaneous to the move, Rowland has also cagily reworked Anderson & Sheppard’s new environment to create a far warmer and inviting space. She explains, “There was something intimidating about the old set-up. I remember when I was a girl, you came in through the door, and would be faced with this very long counter that immediately created a separation between tailor and client. And on the counter was this endless choice of fabrics that, for a first-time customer, was daunting. He would think, ‘How am I going to wade through all this?’ For a first-time customer, say, someone in his 30s, he would walk in and just not connect with the environment.”

Adds front-of-house salesman Karl Matthews, “What’s very nice about the new environment is that we’ve removed the separation between our salesperson and the customer. They can interact like friends, and sit together to discuss ideas or fabrics for suits in a totally relaxed and intimate manner.”

But the brilliance of Rowland’s plan literally comes to light when you realise that the client has, from any angle in the sitting room, an uninterrupted view of the beating heart of Anderson & Sheppard — its cutting room, surrounded by its bank of paper patterns.

Says Rowland, “This instantly connects you to the fact that what you are commissioning is a handmade garment that a human being has put many hours of his life into creating for you. In the old environment, the workrooms were hidden, and I thought, hang on, because our craftsmanship is our greatest equity. When a new client walks in — say, someone who has been wearing Prada or Zegna — he will look around to see visual evidence of what he’s paying for. And when he sees suits being cut from real bespoke patterns, he instantly gets it.

Today, men are extremely intelligent in their buying. They’ve done their homework, and they are not interested in hype. They want to see real workmanship and technical value. Here, even if a client is just visiting for the first time, he can look into our workroom and ask any question he wants. We will explain how a true bespoke suit differs immeasurably from ready-to-wear or made-to-measure products.”

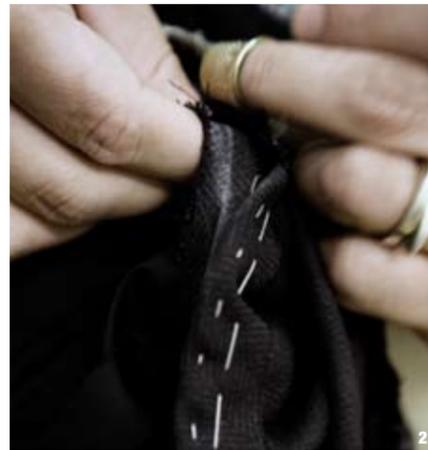
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When asked what she sees in the future for Anderson & Sheppard, and the culture of British bespoke tailoring, Rowland replies eloquently, “Bespoke tailoring is, in many ways, a backward-looking craft, and there is something quite lovely about it, because there is a refusal to compromise. The thought is that we have always done things to these standards, with these exacting processes, so why should we change? But from the perspective of marketing and communication, any luxury business must be forward-looking as well. You see, I want this wonderful craft to continue, and to do that, there must be enough consistent work for the tailors. It’s good for them not only financially, but also in terms of their feelings of self-worth. Because, believe me, here at Anderson & Sheppard, they put everything — their labor and also their hearts — into the clothing they make for you.”

And then you realise that the soul of Anderson & Sheppard is indeed intact. It’s embodied in the unconventional yet perfect pairing of Anda Rowland and John Hitchcock, together with all the artisans who labor ceaselessly in tailoring’s Holy Land.

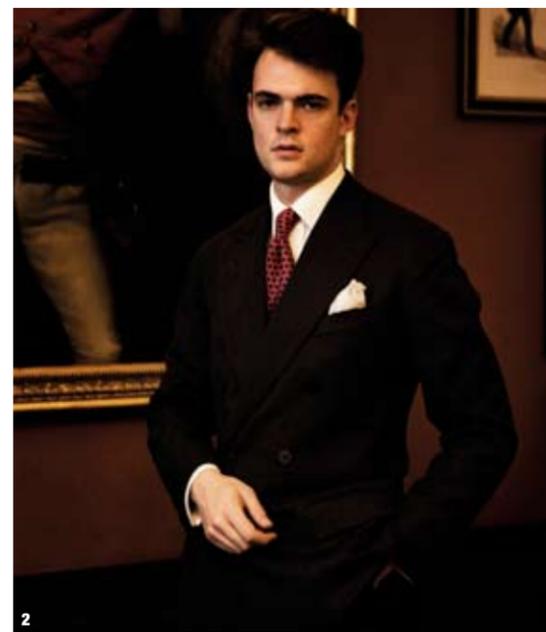
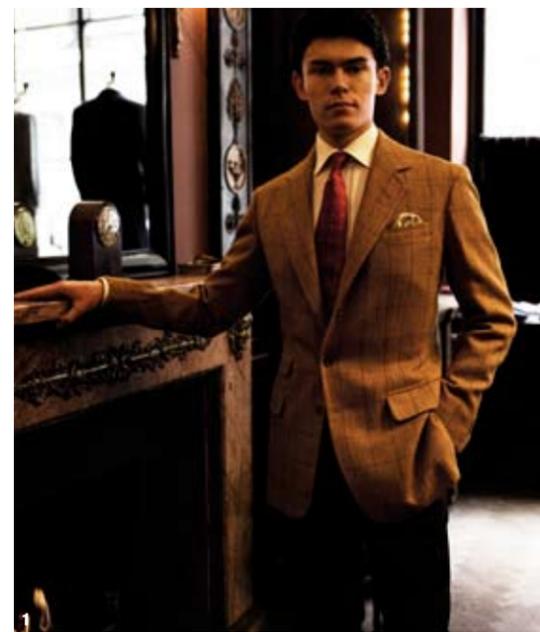


ARMHOLES & SLEEVEHEADS



- 1 Slight dimpling of sleevehead shows that a large sleevehead is eased into a smaller armhole
- 2 This procedure can only be accomplished by hand
- 3 High armholes allow you to move freely without disturbing the body of your coat

THE SUITS



- 1 The single-breasted silhouette of Anderson & Sheppard
- 2 The double-breasted silhouette of Anderson & Sheppard

MATCHED JETTING & POCKET FLAPS



- 1 A separate jet is cut out and matched perfectly
- 2 A pocket flap is matched
- 3 Jetting is hand sewn
- 4 Jetting flap and body align perfectly

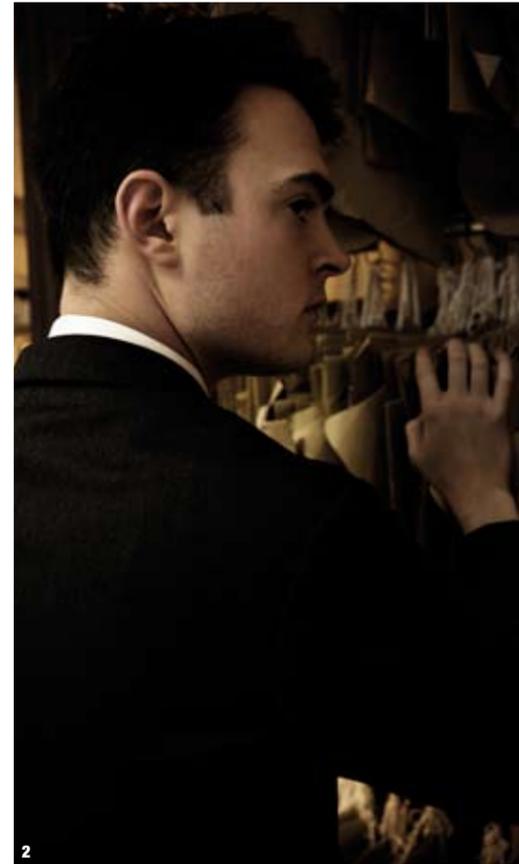
A MIRACLE OF FIT: THE MAGIC OF THE ANDERSON & SHEPPARD DRAPE SUIT

Human beings don't spend their whole day posing in one position. Thus, the Anderson & Sheppard suit is made to move with you, as you adopt various positions. Look at one of the firm's suits and you'll immediately notice the large amount of material left around the chest, allowing for freedom of movement in this area. But a less obvious secret is a very small armhole, tailored to the exact specifications of the individual client, combined with a large sleevehead. But wait a second — if you were to measure the diameter of the armhole relative to the diameter of the sleevehead, the latter would be significantly larger. So, how do you attach a large sleevehead to an armhole of smaller diameter? This involves a highly specialised tailoring technique of hand-fitting, and easing the sleevehead into the armhole. What results is a very subtle pleating effect, as the sleevehead extends out of the armhole. At the armhole itself, the sleevehead is perfectly fitted as a result of the shrinking of materials at the seam using an iron. To aid in this, John Hitchcock adds, "The seam of the sleeves is hand sewn using silk. If it was sewn by machine, there would be no pliability to it."

THE SPIRIT WITHIN

Between the outer cloth, and the inner lining, every Anderson & Sheppard coat has a piece of structure-providing canvas. In a ready-to-wear suit, this canvas is almost always fused to the outer cloth using glue. This results in stiffness reminiscent of a frigid Victorian matriarch given to playing the cello. In a bespoke suit, the canvas is attached by a myriad of tiny, slightly loose handmade stitches that allow it to "float", endowing it with springiness and liveliness. But the canvases in Anderson & Sheppard's coats are even lighter and more flexible than those used in traditional tailoring, with almost none of the stiff horsehair normally used, resulting in an extremely soft, pliable coat. Furthermore, according to renowned tailor Timothy Everest, "Anderson & Sheppard's canvases are cut on the bias for added flexibility, which contributes to the magic of their drape cut."

BACK NECK



- 1 The back neck of any Anderson & Sheppard coat is always three inches wide
- 2 A small back neck keeps your coat's neck on your collar at all times

SHOULDER SEAM



- 1 All Anderson & Sheppard suits have angled shoulder seams
- 2 The back of the coat is one inch wider than the front
- 3 Angled trouser seams are hidden behind pocket lip

THE WINGS OF ANGLES

Another signature touch in the Anderson & Sheppard coat is the backward-angled shoulder seam. This creates greater fullness over the shoulder blade, and more importantly, allows the material that meets at the shoulders to be cut on the bias. Every woven fabric has a grain. A bias cut means to cut diagonally across the grain, thus giving a greater level of drape, elasticity and flexibility. While French designer Madeleine Vionnet was thought to have pioneered the bias-cut technique for her dresses in the 1920s, it should be noted that Anderson & Sheppard had already made bias cutting commonplace by 1906.

Says Hitchcock, “Any machine-made suit is made with a straight seam, and the cloth is cut on the grain, resulting in a stiff garment. When you cut your shoulder seam at an angle, you can cut the cloth for the front and back of your suit on the bias. This gives the material in these two critical areas more flexibility. It may look decorative, but everything we do at Anderson & Sheppard is for a reason.”

In addition to this, Anderson & Sheppard is famed for cutting the back of its coats fuller than the front — again, in the aid of mobility. Feel your own shoulder, and you’ll immediately see that it is rounder and has more volume in the back, but is smaller and flatter in front, which means you will need more cloth to cover the back of the shoulder. Therefore, the tailors at Anderson & Sheppard use a considerably wider piece of material for the back of the coat as compared to that used for the front.

To accommodate this excess cloth where the front and back of the coat meet, the entire back of the coat is eased into the shoulder seam, which means that the additional width is subtly compressed over the entire length of the seam, and then ironed flat in such a way that the excess cloth is shrunk perfectly. This can only be done by hand and requires an enormous amount of skill in order for the back of the jacket not to pucker along the shoulder seam. When perfectly achieved, it is totally invisible to the eye, yet provides the marvelous volume around the shoulder blade. This is also the reason why patterns along the shoulders of a bespoke suit do not line up, because more fabric is used at the back than at the front. In a ready-to-wear suit, equal amounts of fabric are used on either side of the shoulder seam. As such, it is easy to align the fabric on both sides.

A TEST OF FAITH

One man who pushed the envelope as to how well Anderson & Sheppard’s suits adapted to his movements was the legendary actor and dancer Fred Astaire. During his fittings, the carpet in Anderson & Sheppard would be rolled back, and Astaire would dance in his clothes, stopping mid-flight to catch a glimpse of himself in the mirrors. Astaire did this, says Hitchcock, to check that the neck of his coat sat flush against his shirt collar at all times. “If his coat came off the neck while he danced,” Hitchcock explains, “he wouldn’t accept it.”

Take a look at any Anderson & Sheppard suit, and regardless of how its wearer moves, an unsightly gap (a sure sign of a poorly fitted and inferior suit) will never appear between the neck of the coat and the shirt collar. The secret to achieving such a sublime fit? “We do a very small back neck,” says Hitchcock.

The back neck of a suit is the distance between the centre seam of the coat and the shoulder seam along the neck seam. A smaller back neck allows for greater fullness of the shoulder blade, and is the primary reason that a coat’s neck stays in place, even during movements, such as dancing. All of Anderson & Sheppard’s suits use a 3-inch back neck. “Everyone else does it at a minimum of 3½ inches,” says Hitchcock. “Some of Tom Ford’s coats, which are inspired by those of Anderson & Sheppard, have back necks of 3¾ inches. For some reason or other, the others can’t do it.”

GOD IS IN THE DETAILS

Another inimitable technique of Anderson & Sheppard is that of matching pocket jettings — a detail that dances deliciously on the precipice of obsessive compulsion. No other tailoring house on Savile Row perfectly matches the jettings on the pockets to the body material of the coat. Jettings (also known as besoms) are the thin strips of material found on either edge of the pocket opening. This material is commonly placed at 90 degrees to the material of the coat body; not so at Anderson & Sheppard, where a fixation on nuance dictates

that even the most elaborately checked pattern must be matched, so that the material of the coat’s pattern is extended with unbroken perfection through the jetting and the flap of the coat pocket.

The slavishness to nuance extends also to Anderson & Sheppard’s philosophy for trousers. Its trousers have the seams hidden such that if the trouser pockets are angled, the seams follow the angled lip and are hidden behind it. Says Hitchcock, “Isn’t it better not to see the seams? At Anderson & Sheppard, we believe the least amount of seams, the better. You only put seams in when you can’t get something to fit.”

Another appealing detail is that the edges of the jacket’s side vents are actually curved, so that the front of the coat slightly overlaps the back of the coat at each vent. This results in side vents that gape less when you move.

However, it is not with the intention of attracting onlookers’ attention that Anderson & Sheppard suits are imbued with such exquisite detailing. Quite the opposite. “We always like to say that if someone compliments you on your suit, we have failed,” Rowland explains. “We want to make you look subtly better, but people should almost not be able to tell why. That is the magic of our suit. It doesn’t wear you. You inhabit it. You and it become one.”