

# giving the bold shoulder

**Tailoring is cool again – and the focus is squarely on the shoulder line as fashion designers, as well as traditional tailors, explore cuts and constructions.** Tom Stubbs reports. Photographs by George Ong.

Near right: Hardy Amies silk-lined wool herringbone jacket, £775.  
Far right: Dolce & Gabbana wool jacket, price on request. Merino turtlenecks throughout, £120, by John Smedley ([www.johnsmedley.com](http://www.johnsmedley.com)). Mundial 796-12in tailor's shears, £40, from [www.college-sewing.co.uk](http://www.college-sewing.co.uk). Styling by Fabio Immediato.

**T**here's no doubt that tailoring is currently the dominant story in men's fashion. If the catwalks of Milan and Paris are any indication, it's never been more in vogue. Meanwhile, tailors themselves are finding fresh ways to distinguish their work. This isn't everyday business garb I'm referring

to, but tailoring men want to wear because it's so damn cool. In the sartorial equivalent of Church versus State, tailors and fashion houses are toe to toe, and right now, both camps are focusing on the shoulder line.

The most creative fashion designers put their own twist on traditional tailoring techniques. Lanvin's approach, for example, is both inspired and significant: the autumn collection has a feel of Bowie in *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. But look past the catwalk styling – the fedoras and outré footwear – and it's clear that Lanvin's head of menswear design, Lucas Ossendrijver, who



works under creative director Alber Elbaz (profiled on page 14), has manipulated tailoring in a deft way. The fabrics are classic and in subtle hues, keeping things wearable for terrestrial chaps, and three types of shoulder line are offered. Ossendrijver says, “In tailoring, the shoulder is the key element. I experiment a lot, working closely with my tailor. One version is an extremely narrow fitted silhouette where the sleeve inset is actually on the body, requiring a special sleeve shaped with added darts [jacket pictured overleaf, £2,060]. Another is the slightly dropped shoulder and lapel, as if the jacket is a little too big, but with a fitted waistline [£2,640]. And the oversized ‘round’ jacket [£2,600] has a kimono-inspired sleeve, which doesn’t have a sleeve inset and is cut in one piece, creating a very round silhouette. These jackets are crafted in a traditional tailored way, fully canvased, making them precise. I play with cut and construction to blur boundaries between formal- and sportswear, the fashion-forward and the classic.”

Subversion can also be seen elsewhere. Constantly challenging accepted norms, Prada has developed a blunted shoulder from which to hang its boxy jacket shape. It breaks modern ground: a subtle arching shoulder produces a rounded, 1960s Mod shape for a new decade. In mohair wools, the three-button format and minimal, short lapels usher in a postmodern aesthetic executed in Prada’s unmistakable handwriting (jacket pictured overleaf, £1,320).

Unmistakable for different reasons, Dolce & Gabbana’s strong, masculine tailoring nods to a romantic tradition of Italian dressing. Currently its designs display tactile-looking fabrication and softer shoulders. Stefano Gabbana says, “We started where we always start: our roots. Then we built on them with new procedures, fabrics and washing and boiling methods. The look becomes very soft and relaxed, it’s no longer aggressive. Fabrics are also soft and warm.” The result (jackets from £995; wool jacket pictured on previous page, price on request) is a shoulder that melds to the body and facilitates shorter-length jackets, which are an important development and

flatter most frames without constricting. Gabbana adds, “We’ve taken the classic tailoring tradition and reviewed it through today’s aesthetics. We want to talk to people who don’t buy suits as an obligation.”

Similar motivations prompted the tailoring house Canali to devise its new Milanese silhouette (jackets from £700; version pictured below, £1,210). Its suits appear low-key and are remarkable to wear, combining ease of movement with lean lines. Conservative chalk stripes take on a new accent in this format. Elisabetta Canali, global communications director, elaborates: “The shoulder has stitched ‘fell’ [enforced] seams to emphasise its line, while the sleeve has large armholes, which emphasise the shoulder. The look is characterised by a very fitted waist, slim silhouette and a tighter trouser.” This cut delivers a firm statement in a relaxed way.

Soft shoulders are an old Italian tradition, however. Neapolitan tailoring uses no padding, and has shoulder seams that are reminiscent of shirting construction. Wearing these “natural” shoulders feels like wearing a cardigan. Rubinacci, Kiton and Brunello Cucinelli are all great bastions of this style.

A recent trend for separate jackets and trousers has also focused attention on these tailors – as has the appetite for cashmere blends and hopsack weaves that work so harmoniously with unpadded shoulders.

Little padding is used by Roland Mouret for his line Mr by Roland Mouret, yet his shoulder line is very bold indeed. He believes, “Women are defined by their waists. For me, with a man, it’s the shoulders that define the volume of an outfit.” His shoulder shapes are solid, almost square (Johnston jacket, £750). The jacket then falls naturally, in the manner of relaxed power dressing. “I like the contradiction of it. It’s not firm – it’s all in the cut, and the support is in the shoulders.” He also says shoulder pads should be used “just to push slightly – like an iconic 1940s look”. His jackets work well on larger-

framed men, and can flatter less-trim physiques.

Some designers cut yet more pronounced shoulders to make imposing statements. Gucci put on an early-1970s showcase – with models strutting like rock’n’roll playboys – right down to the swooping lapels (jacket pictured overleaf, £1,020) and kick-flare pants. These vigorous shoulders make for high-impact dressing, and will appeal to more audacious suit wearers. Mick Jagger famously donned something similar when he married Bianca in 1971. His suit was by the seminal British tailor Tommy Nutter (London’s Fashion and Textile Museum currently has an exhibition devoted to him, *Tommy Nutter: Rebel on the Row*, which runs until October 22). And Nutter’s creative partner and cutting legend Edward Sexton continues to make striking bespoke suits (from £3,800).

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Tom Ford is also an advocate of imposing shoulders and grand lapels (jackets from £1,200). His tailoring in bold retro checks, luxe cord or evening velvets makes arresting statements, and his uncompromising feel for luxury and instinctive dressy verve is singular, and certainly not for the faint-hearted.

Wide shoulders don’t necessarily have to be attention grabbing: Maison Martin Margiela has used broad but subtly cut shoulders to hang longer-length, elegant suiting in various pinstripes, particularly double-breasted jackets (from £835). Another Belgian, Dries Van Noten, uses double-breasting to spirited effect with luxe camel evening jackets (€737). Both brands reference 1940s suavity – the former with a sculpted vision and shield-shape, curved lapels, the latter’s blazers with an almost overcoat quality. Paul Smith also presents a manly shape with a lower-cut wrapover (£770). All these designers are taking vintage Savile Row forms and reinterpreting them.

Naturally, traditional British tailoring houses are not sitting back and allowing themselves to be outstyled. The best tailors utilise their heritage and combine it with new

From left to right: Thom Sweeney bespoke flannel jacket, £1,850. Canali wool/cashmere jacket (part of a suit), £1,210. E Tautz cotton/wool-mix Walnut Hopsack jacket, £840.



ideas about styling, fabrication and lifestyle. Their battle cry could well be “Give them enough rope!” as their signature look is the traditional Row construction known as a “rope” shoulder. They’re all employing it, but in different ways. “Rope” build is a piece of felt wadding worked into a sleeve-head that is cut bigger than the armhole of the jacket. The sleeve is then eased in, creating volume. The rope gives the shoulder seam a protruding swell. Its effect can be dashing or regal.

At Hardy Amies, creative director Claire Malcolm has produced noble double-breasted styles (suits from £895) that couldn’t be more British. The shoulders are broad, there’s reserved use of rope, but suits don’t look remotely stuffy. “I started with a classic Savile Row hourglass shape, which is very sexy, but made the point of the shoulder a lot narrower, making a far more modern silhouette,” Malcolm says. “I reduced the skirt, keeping a nipped-in waist, which makes everyone look great.” Indeed, Amies suits – in luxurious grey and navy flannels and herringbones (jacket pictured on opening page, £775) – are stately yet very chic affairs.

Meanwhile, over at Gieves & Hawkes, the military outfitter at number 1 Savile Row, you’ll find classic blazers. Head cutter Kathryn Sargent says, “We have developed two styles, taking influence from our military heritage. The blazers are sculptured in a way that emphasises the shoulder line by using a rope sleeve and increasing the stand of the collar, which dramatically impacts the silhouette. Forget soft tailoring, these are British and really sharp.” Single-breasted styles come from RAF archive examples and double-breasted from naval reefers, tweaked to look fresh (blazers from £495).

Meanwhile, bespoke tailoring duo Thom Whiddett and Luke Sweeney, aka Thom Sweeney, have garnered much attention with their pronounced shoulder lines. Using a meld of British and Italian construction, they favour a

racy rope shoulder but one that is narrow and lightly padded (bespoke jacket, from £1,595; version pictured on previous page, £1,850). Whiddett says, “I was taught that the shoulder was the focal point of a suit. With bespoke and handmade garments you get a particular roundness and softness that you can’t get when they’re glued or machine-made. Even with our casual separate jackets, which have no canvassing, we do rope shoulders.” With the larger-notch lapels they advocate and their inspired fabric suggestions, they deliver some of the most immediately attractive tailoring.

Dunhill, a heritage design house, has always had a modern take on tailoring and this is where its autumn suiting aligns itself. The silhouette is long and lean, and most styles have shoulders with a subtle rope, cut so that pad and sleeve are in line with the outer edge of the human shoulder within. There’s a reserve about it: the slim line and longer jacket (from £950) deliver a strong look that quietly produces an elongating, svelte shape.

Patrick Grant won the British Fashion Council’s menswear designer of the year 2010 for E Tautz, his resurrected heritage “sporting” outfitter. He cites a strong shoulder shape as critical: “You make an enormous impression with how you cut shoulders. They’re a key parameter to play with – and they’re getting wider.” He shows two styles – unstructured and half-lined (both from £840; the former pictured on previous page) – for his E Tautz runway shows. The completely unstructured one has sporting origins, and pronounced yet non-rigid shoulders. The “nouveau Brit” look of E Tautz jackets is becoming de rigueur. Entirely UK-sourced fabrics in stunning colours and weaves emphasise the contemporary nature of the brand.

So while the British shoulder line delivers a sartorial proclamation you can’t find elsewhere, Italian tailoring

takes it into casualwear territory with its softness. Meanwhile, the fashion houses provide customers who crave an extra flourish with a formidable array of choice. Just as with Church versus State, different viewpoints produce new developments. And friction between factions – not the dominance of one – is currently providing menswear with some lively shoulder action. ♦

#### SHOULDER’S BACK

**Brunello Cucinelli**, 159 Sloane Street, London SW1 (020-7730 5207; www.brunellocucinelli.com) and see Harrods. **Canali**, 126-127 New Bond Street, London W1 (020-7290 3500; www.canali.it). **Dolce & Gabbana**, 6-8 Old Bond Street, London W1 (020-7659 5300; www.dolcegabbana.com). **Dries Van Noten**, www.driesvannoten.be and see Selfridges. **Dunhill**, Bourdon House, 2 Davies Street, London W1 (0845-458 0779; www.dunhill.com). **Edward Sexton**, 26 Beauchamp Place, London SW3 (020-7838 0007; www.edwardsexton.co.uk). **E Tautz**, www.etautz.com and see mrporter.com. **Gieves & Hawkes**, 1 Savile Row, London W1 (020-7432 6403; www.gievesandhawkes.com). **Gucci**, 18 Sloane Street, London SW1 (020-7235 6707; www.gucci.com). **Hardy Amies**, 14 Savile Row, London W1 (020-7734 2436; www.hardyamies.com) and see Harrods. **Harrods**, 87-135 Brompton Road, London SW1 (020-7730 1234; www.harrods.com). **Harvey Nichols**, 109-125 Knightsbridge, London SW1 (020-7235 5000; www.harveynichols.com). **Kiton**, 14a Clifford Street, London W1 (020-7409 2000; www.kiton.it). **Lanvin**, 30-32 Savile Row, London W1 (020-7434 3384; www.lanvin.com). **Maison Martin Margiela Boutique**, 22 Bruton Street, London W1 (020-7629 2682; www.maisonmartinmargiela.com). **MrPorter.com**, www.mrporter.com. **Paul Smith**, 40-44 Floral Street, London WC2 (0800-023 4006; www.paulsmith.co.uk) and branches. **Prada**, 16-18 Old Bond Street, London W1 (020-7647 5000; www.prada.com) and branch. **Roland Mouret**, 8 Carlos Place, London W1 (020-7518 0700; www.rolandmouret.com). **Rubinacci**, 96 Mount Street, London W1 (020-7499 2299; www.marianorubinacci.net). **Selfridges**, 400 Oxford Street, London W1 (0800-123 400; www.selfridges.com). **Thom Sweeney**, 1-2 Weighhouse Street, London W1 (020-7629 6220; www.thomsweeney.co.uk). **Tom Ford**, www.tomford.com and see Harrods.

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From left to right: Prada silk mohair jacket, £1,320. Gucci wool/cashmere/flannel Marseille 1970s jacket, £1,020. Lanvin wool jacket, £2,060.

