







# Weights and measures

The Savile Row suit is something for which every gentleman secretly yearns. In times gone by, it was a rite of passage. These days, it's the bastion of the well-heeled. In the first of two special reports, *Nick Hammond* draws a deep breath and gives himself over to the tape...

Photography Harry Ross

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I finally plucked-up the courage to go inside after walking past and surreptitiously eyeing the shop no less than three times.

Silly really but I'm not afraid to admit that I felt out of my depth. What did I know about suits? Or how I liked my jacket to hang? Or whether my trouser leg should break just over my laces or not at all?

The thought made me very nearly turn on my heels and head back out the doorway for another flypast but then the door flew open and there was a fresh face, an immaculate suit and a London accent saying, "Good morning Sir. How can I help you?"

And before I was able to protest, I was quickly ushered inside London's oldest tailor's shop.

It looks like things here haven't changed since Churchill ruled the roost at The Admiralty - there's even a portrait of the great man overseeing affairs, Havana glued to lugubrious lip. I am guided to a faded green leather Chesterfield and find myself being gently interrogated by a man whose mere name dropped in the right circles will result in tones of hushed reverence.

"A suit you say, Sir. Very good - two or three-piece?"

I stammer about always having wanted a three-piece and slowly, a curious process of enlightenment begins. A few minutes later, I've learned that waistcoats should really be worn along with trousers and braces for the ultimate sleek lines; and that the three-piece jacket, if worn on its own with different slacks, will then not fit quite so well as a two-piece, because it was made bigger to accommodate the waistcoat which was originally intended.

A pair of crystal tumblers and an extraordinarily-good Robert Graham cask-strength bottle of Invergordon - 30-years-old, no less - somehow appears before us. And before long, we find ourselves chatting like old friends.

Instead of feeling like a Plebeian in front of the Senate, I am engaged; the world of fine tailoring flowers before me like a winter-dormant rose. I am free to choose from pocket style to buttons; double-breasted or single; snap buckles on the trouser; a colourful flourish on inner pocket piping and much, much more.







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## “As a Savile Row master cutter, Steven personally measures and cuts for every single suit”

Steven Hitchcock is rightly known as a master tailor; perhaps one of the last that learned his trade the old-fashioned way. His father, John, is the doyen cutter of Anderson & Sheppard, a lifer in the shop's glory days when it made 200 suits a week. John was cutter himself for the Prince of Wales and Steven learned his trade under his father in the cutting room.

And while thumbing through patterns and cloth samples, I couldn't help but notice that HRH's vital statistics were also recorded here; Steven has made a number of garments for him over the years.

Steven is famed for his soft-tailored approach. Not straight lined and rigid as, say, a Huntsman cut; individually stylish, ultra comfortable, high arm holes; soft shoulders mimic the natural shape of the wearer; the illusion of narrowness of waist.

After an hour of revelation, three glasses of sensational Scotch and a tour of the beautiful cloths and styles which line this wonderful time machine of a shop, my first bespoke suit is beginning to take shape in the mind's eye.

Under the flinty gaze of Sir Winston, I am given the whole tape-measure treatment.









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Every conceivable measurement is taken; cuff to thumbnail (“Four and half inches is about right”), across the shoulder, inside leg, shoulder to elbow. And a page of hieroglyphics is gradually built up on Steven’s notepad.

We opt for a classic two-piece in beautiful blue tweed. Think RAF blue, bespeckled with a wonderful kaleidoscope of colours which, from a distance, are non-existent but up close offer a range of options for tie, pocket square, sock and shoe combinations.

I specify a cigar pocket discreetly inside left, just the right size for something cultured; a phone pocket; a ticket pocket above the right hand external jacket pocket. Trousers legs will break just on my shoelaces and their cut is higher on the waist not hips.

All of this would have been impossible without the expertise of a man steeped in gents tailoring all his working life. He’s seen the mistakes, watched people make wrong decisions and has an unerring eye for the most incredible detail of how a suit hangs on its wearer. I leave the shop feeling confident and excited and a little more aware of how my off-the-peg suit doesn’t really fit at all.

I cannot wait for the next fittings - first, forward and final - which will reveal ‘my’ suit in all its stages of manufacture. More than 50 man-hours will go into lovingly putting it together. As a Savile Row master cutter, Steven personally measures and cuts for every single suit, then passes the work along to his team of tailors and finishers. Everything is put together in-house, using traditional craftspeople. No cheap sweatshop mail orders here.

I cannot speak highly enough of being able to consult an expert, someone who has spent his life learning about what combines to make a great suit.

This has already been a revelation - and I haven’t worn a stitch of bespoke yet. I’m counting the days until I do.

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*See the end result in our November edition.*

