

The Italian Job

THE PORTFOLIO

As the workplace chillaxes and dress codes become less formal, the suit can seem more and more like an anachronism. But if there's one thing the Romans did for us, it was prove that tailoring and nonchalance needn't be mutually exclusive. This is our SS18 guide to dressing up without buttoning down. Prego

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PIP - STYLING BY ERIC DOWN - WORDS BY SHANE C KURUP



Palette Master

"Never wear brown in town," goes the old British adage, which tells you all you need to know about how draconian dress rules once were on these shores. By contrast, Italians aren't nearly so priggish (except, perhaps, when it comes to food), and their use of colour in tailoring is a masterclass of creativity tempered by restraint. "Italians have never been afraid to use unorthodox colours," says Patrick Johnson, a Sydney-based tailor with a workshop in Tuscany. "In the north, brown is worn both formally and casually - often in a fresh, sporty way. Then, as you go further south, the blues tend to get brighter and bolder." These "distinctive blues of Italian suiting" are, says Elisabetta Canali, global communications director of Milan-based Canali, what enable men to dress elegantly without being too showy. Take this as inspiration and you'll stand out in the cold British sea of navy and grey. But there's a fine line between embracing brighter tones and looking like a fruit pastille. A subtle blend of colours in the yarn can lend your suit a rich yet sophisticated depth.

SUIT £1,550 CANALI
SHIRT £326 BOGLIOLI AT MATCHESFASHION.COM
SUNGLASSES £130 RETROSUPERFUTURE
POCKET SQUARE £60 AND SCARF £165 BOTH DRAKE'S
SHOES £420 SANTONI
SOCKS £14 FALKE (JUST SEEN)

Softly Does It

Don Draper's strong-shouldered two-piece suits may have been all part of the hard-drinking ad sell, but an Italian would probably be inclined to tell the mad men of Madison Avenue to loosen up. Italian jackets are often defined by soft, "Neapolitan" shoulders and the absence of stiff padding. "They are designed more like a shirt," says Luigi Lardini, creative director of eponymous brand Lardini. "It's an elegant but relaxed look that isn't constricting." It's also a far more accommodating structure if you've been putting in hours at the gym. How can you tell if a jacket has been made in this way? Look for dimples around the shoulder seams – this is where the sleeves have been eased into place, says Mehmet Ali, founder of menswear label MEHM+. Partial (or "buggy") linings around the shoulders that enhance breathability are also an Italian hallmark. Rather than fleecing you with half a suit, this is actually a sign of precision craftsmanship. Without a full lining, the tailor's handiwork is on show, meaning there's nothing to hide behind.

JACKET £630
TROUSERS £460
AND SHIRT £210
ALL EMPORIO ARMANI
WATCH £990
SALVATORE FERRAGAMO

MODEL: ARJAN AT THE SQUAD | PHOTOGRAPHER'S ASSISTANTS: DECLAN SLATTERY, ALEX INGRAM | FASHION ASSISTANT: RICCARDO CHIUDDIONI | GROOMING: KEVIN FORD USING DERMALOGICA | ARMANI.COM, BOGLIOLI AT MATCHESFASHION.COM, BRUNELLOCUCINELLI.COM

Material Gains

Traditional tailoring is often seen by naysayers as the scourge of comfort. The blame for this lies largely with the burdensome weight of British fabrics such as flannel and tweed, which tend to become stifflingly thermogenic at the rarest hint of sun. Italians do it differently. "Since the 1960s, comfort has played a vital role in the way we dress," says Canali. "Daily commutes became a bigger factor of everyday life and our varied weather demanded flexibility. So Italian mills began investing in the technology to make natural fabrics adaptable to the seasons and both crease- and stain-resistant." The design team at Brunello Cucinelli agrees: "With Italian fabrics, there's often a keen focus on sourcing ultra-fine yarns to give them an incredibly soft handle." This means that even typically warm materials such as cashmere and mohair become light and breathable in the hands of luxury tailors – handy in the summer, whether you're attending a wedding or simply catching the train to work. In short, when going Italian, it pays to weigh up your options.

JACKET £2,770
(FOR THE FULL SUIT)
TROUSERS £2,850
(FOR THE FULL SUIT) AND
POCKET SQUARE £150
ALL BRUNELLO CUCINELLI
T-SHIRT £180
MISSONI AT MRPORTER.COM
BAG £1,350 AND
SHOES £360 BOTH TOD'S

Making The Cut

After fabric, cut is the most important factor to consider in tailoring. Not only is it the key to comfort and carriage, but it can make the difference between casting a refined silhouette and looking like you've inherited a hand-me-down. "Italian suits typically feature a generous lapel, streamlined shape and subtly nipped-in waist," says Michael Hill, creative director of Drake's, a British brand that favours Italian techniques. "These qualities serve to flatter the body, irrespective of your build. Good tailoring always pays close attention to proportions." Other Italianate features include high-cut armholes, which improve manoeuvrability. "They allow arms to move freely so the sleeves don't pull at the body of the jacket – a common flaw in American tailoring," says Ali. "Our goal has always been to create a sense of easy luxury," adds Davide Marelllo, creative director at Boglioli, known for its lightweight, unstructured jackets. "By cutting in a soft yet tailored profile, you'll always feel more comfortable in your own skin. We Italians invented that."



SUIT £3,290
ERMENEGILDO
ZEGNA COUTURE
SHIRT £250 CARUSO
AT MRPORTER.COM
SHOES £65 SUPERGA

Sartorial Fluency

Of course, it's not necessarily what you wear, but how you wear it. And Italians are so good at making tailoring look relaxed that they even have a word for it: *sprezzatura*. Translated as "studied nonchalance", it refers to the distinctly Italian concept of making style look effortless. To the Milanese, trying too hard not only reeks of Britishness, but defeats the object entirely. Key to this, says Hill, is your accessories: "A simple knitted tie or modest pocket square can be enough to lend your outfit an air of insouciance." Marelllo advises mixing things up and avoiding rigid, outdated codes. "You don't have to wear your suit with a dress shirt," he says. "A sweatshirt, T-shirt, polo, turtleneck or denim shirt are all great pieces for dressing down tailoring. This is the age of the experimental suit." Oh, and if you do wear a tie, never fasten it with the Windsor knot favoured by foreign exchange brokers. Instead, opt for an elegant four-in-hand knot, not dissimilar from the one you tied at school. Capicche?



JACKET £1,145 AND
POLO SHIRT £405
BOTH FENDI
TROUSERS £265
P. JOHNSON
POCKET SQUARE £60
DRAKE'S
BAG £895
VALENTINO GARAVANI
WATCH £990 FERRAGAMO
SHOES £455 SANTONI

CANALI.COM, CARUSO AT MRPORTER.COM, DRAKES.COM, FALKE.COM, FENDI.COM, MISSONI AT MRPORTER.COM, P. JOHNSON, RETRO SUPER FUTURE.COM, FERRAGAMO.COM, SANTONISHOES.COM, SUPERGA.CO.UK, TODS.COM, VALENTINO.COM, ZEGNA.CO.UK