

Bespoke Fashion comes to streets

The savile-row styled or single-needle stitched shirts with vibrantly-coloured, patterned linings and hidden grosgrain ribbons on a jacket's wrist sleeve are rising up the popularity charts in India. **Manisha Bapna** looks at what the bespoke players are here to offer.

Kamaal Kadri learned his trade from his father, who was a tailor during the British Raj. At Mood Fabrics, his clients can select the fabric directly from a ream of cloth; a sketch of the desired garment is then sent to a small team in India, where an estimated 10,000 stitches and 40 hours of work are spent on one handcrafted suit (\$1,500-\$2,500). These suits are lined with pure silk and horsehair canvas and trimmed with smoked-horn and mother of pearl buttons and silk-thread buttonholes. Alan David Custom, Beckenstein Bespoke, Brooklyn Tailors, Oliver Custom, Brioni, Kachin's, Kings and many across the world are known for their unmatched ability to understand the needs of their clientele and design something unique. Although the birth of bespoke clothing lies abroad, the emphasis on fabric, intricate embellishment and detailed tailoring for Indian kings and royalty has a rich history.

Over the years, the term 'bespoke' has evolved and is now used to denote anything customised to personal specifications, from collars and cuffs to pockets, colours, fabrics, etc. With the middle class becoming more affluent now, bespoke services are seeing higher demands.

Customised services account for over 15 per cent of the \$250 million, or about ₹1,300 crore of the luxury apparel and accessories market in the country (*Technopak Analysis*). Today, the Indian bespoke market has takers for shirts, trousers and suits made from fabrics of Dormeuil, Zegna, Sic Tess, Atelier Romantino, Loro Peana, cancellini and Alumo materials to name a few; materials as fine as 300/2 ply cotton to a blend of cashmere, cotton and silk! The exorbitant prices do not come as a surprise to customers who are willing to spend for the personalised services extended to them.

"Style is an extension of one's personality and through my designs I strive to provide my clients custom-made garments that work within the frames of who they are as an individual. I want my clients to look and feel their best by providing them ensembles that suit their body-type as well as compliment their personality," says Akshata Bhojania, Founder and

Creative Director of Akshata Bhojania.

Men's suiting is witness to global as well as Indian labels offering customised tailoring options today. While traditional tailors offer a bespoke suit for ₹60,000, Brioni and Zegna to Canali, offer it anywhere between ₹1.5 to 3 lakh. Bringing international standards of quality custom shirts to Indian consumers at affordable price points, no two Vitruvien shirts are alike – as each is imprinted with the customer's personalised style statement. "With the help of revolutionary 3D technology, our customers can pick from an extensive range of style options in terms of collars, cuffs, buttons, and visualise how they will look in a particular fabric online in real time, thus designing their own perfect shirt. Apart from style, our focus on fit sets us apart from others," says Rajesh Goradia, Co-founder, Vitruvien.

Experiments with elements

Each piece designed at Akshata's boutique is regarded as a creative expression as opposed to merely a product. It is an amalgamation of rich global textiles, sharp tailoring, buttons hand-picked from Mumbai as well as Jaipur, exquisite Indian embroidery developed by local artisans in Kolkata and accessories from London.

The entire collection at Vitruvien is composed of Egyptian Giza cotton fabrics—extra-long staple cotton so rare, it accounts for less than 10 per cent of the world's cotton production. "We provide over 30 different customisations to our customers. We go beyond just offering style options and also enable them to view how their styling preferences will change the look of their shirt in real time with the help of our 3D shirt designer.

"The intention is to make bespoke clothing an affordable luxury across all segments of customers within the price range of ₹1,299 going up to ₹2,899," says Goradia. Designer Paresh Lamba incorporates an assortment of textile weaves, prints and textures in his work. "Personally, I like working with fine fabrics from England, Italy and Turkey for western wear and Banarasi weaves, *chikankari* from Lucknow and silks



THE IDEA OF BUYING 'WHAT I EXACTLY WANT TO BUY' IS THE DRIVE BEHIND THIS SERVICE CATEGORY. IT REQUIRES SOURCING OF LOWER METERAGE OF FABRIC PER DESIGN AND ELABORATE PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT FOR EACH CUSTOMER.

for Indian wear. I am inclined towards shades of white, tan, oxblood, navy, grey and black. I also refer to Pantone shade cards and mainly opt for hues as per the season, mood and theme of our collection. My work selects rare and precious fabrics made from the finest thread as my customer's desire. I then ensure that my team cuts cardboard templates for each section of the final suit or shirt followed by cutting the fabric with my own hands to avoid errors. The effort is experienced by the wearer as it allows a fit that is just right, with greater movement, especially around the shoulder and collar," comments Ahmed Khan, who runs a tailoring unit in Jaipur.

Owner Mohan "Michael" Ramchandani and his nephew KJ Singh can add anything from hidden pockets to a built-in iPad carrier to your suit. Even though the garments are created by a team of tailors in Hong Kong, expedited designs can be executed as quickly as one week (the average time

frame is three to four weeks). While there is currently no bespoke tailoring for women, ladies can have their favorite pieces of clothing replicated, including jackets (\$500), shirts (\$100) and pants (\$175). Brioni and Zegna are also available in India along with Indian High Street retailers. While they offer the best raw materials (finest fabrics, shell buttons, exclusive packaging), they may not match up to the international product specifications.

Craftsmens edge

Amit Gugnani – Senior Vice President, Fashion (Textile & Apparel), Technopak Advisors says in his article, "The idea of buying 'what I exactly want to buy' is the drive behind this service category. It requires sourcing of lower meterage of fabric per design, elaborate product development for each customer and then the application of high-end manufacturing technology and process to





@Paresh Lamba



@Paresh Lamba

create every single garment. This exceptional level of craftsmanship does not come in 3-4 years of education from a school or working for big names. It is honed through a long and rigorous process. International label, Kiton, trains its tailors at their school for two years before they work as apprentices for the brand". "We may not be employing the best of the machinery, but our oldest tailors have been working with us for almost 30-40 years now and they understand cuts and fits minutely," says Mr Mohan, who works for a famous tailor in Mumbai. International players, many times, have to arrange special appointments with master tailors during specific times of the year, to meet the clientele and revert on design.

Vitruvian shirts are in the safe hands of experienced craftsmen who have experience of over 80 years in tailoring. "Every shirt is checked twice before it leaves our factory and to maintain consistency in our workmanship, we have SOPs that guide our tailors on how every Vitruvian shirt should be stitched," says Goradia. "We work with a skilled team of pattern cutters, tailors and artisans who intricately execute embroidery, take detailed measurements of clients to understand body specifications and structure, followed by fittings. Each piece that I design is extremely close to my heart, because of the subtle detailing, sharp tailoring and time that goes into it," says Bhojania.

Market potential beyond metros

Research shows tier II and III customers are far more experimental in their purchases and demand

a wider range of choices, be it fabric designs or customisations to choose from. In metros, shoppers are driven by the aspiration of owning custom-made clothing and are aware of the customisation they are looking for in bespoke shirts, while in tier II and III cities, purchases are driven by value. "We deliver across India and while a majority of our customers are from metros, we have been noticing growth in the number of customers from tier II and III cities as well," says Goradia. The customer profile is very subjective – businessmen, bankers, artists, actors make up for most of their customers. "As a brand, we focus on understanding these requirements, fusing them with our sensibilities and yet retaining their individuality and making it a seamless experience. We aspire to be a global brand and reach all possible corners," says Bhojania.

According to *Technopak Advisors*, currently, the highest penetration of bespoke services is in men's apparel. Hong Kong-based Ascot Chang is one of the largest bespoke service providers along with Italy-based Brioni, Borelli, Zegna, Fray, etc. Bespoke in women's apparel still remains largely unorganised and luxury is becoming more and more synonymous with bespoke. It can be as high as more than 50 per cent of the total luxury men's wear apparel market. At the same time, there is a potential for exponential development of bespoke services in the upper mid-market and the affordable luxury category. ■

