

TIMOTHY EVEREST: SUITS YOU, PRIME MINISTER April 2007

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The door to the Georgian house in Spitalfields is opened by a well-built looking man with designer stubble. Or maybe it's just that he's had a very late night, as he later admits. He is Adrian, a former bouncer and Welsh Guardsman, who is the sales manager in this wonderland of interior design and bespoke clothing. We are in the house that the young tailor Timothy Everest chose eleven years ago as a discreet hideaway for his influential and affluent customers, among whom is the man who might be the next Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, and his Conservative opponent, David Cameron.

Everest's is a fashionable, friendly and stylish place to buy your suits, and a fair number of politicians go there, although not Tony Blair. "I'm told that Tony Blair asked Gordon Brown where he shopped for his suits, and Brown wouldn't tell him," says Everest mischievously. Timothy Everest, like Richard James and Mark Powell, is an exponent of the so-called New Tailoring movement which is, put simply, a more modern approach to tailoring, making it more accessible to men of any age. Suits are once more becoming fashionable amongst the young, who are reacting against the casual look of their fathers and grandfathers. "We're tailors who design; we're steeped in the spirit of bespoke but the idea is to de-mystify it. The exciting thing is to find out about a person and articulate what they want as an expression of themselves," says Everest, who is clearly a man with strongly individual ideas, though he claims to have once been a shy person who dressed up in different 'personas', at one time sporting a different hairstyle every day. Born in Wales, he first wanted to be a racing driver, and later raced for "poll position" in tailoring.

Among his customers is the former England captain David Beckham, whose wedding outfit he made, and he has recently won a three year deal to design the current England football team's official outfits, as part of a partnership he has with Marks and Spencer. The team had their fittings a couple of weeks ago and Everest is putting the boys in petrol blue mohair three piece suits worn with a white shirt and pin-dot navy blue tie and handkerchief. The team numbers are embroidered on the shirt sleeves, and each jacket will have a label saying, 'Specially made for' with the player's name and number. The deal will take him up to the World Cup and he's following in the footsteps of Armani and Paul Smith. He sees the look as Michael Caine-ish, sharp and modern, but jokes that "the nightmare is stopping them tying huge knots in their ties!"

Everest himself is wearing a spotted scarf loosely tied outside his shirt collar and a windowpane-check jacket in silver grey with a laid-on velvet collar. Neckware is clearly of importance. He got some notoriety recently when he sold the Conservative leader David Cameron a lime green tie, which became associated with Cameron's environmental stance. A year ago, Cameron was fetchingly on the cover of *GQ*

magazine dressed by Everest with the headline billing *Mr Ambition*. “He’s now moved on to mauves and lilacs,” remarks Everest. “But you’ve got to be careful with blues.” He won’t be drawn on what colour he’d recommend if Brown asked for advice on how to dress for success. “When people have a position of authority and are more visible... it’s about giving them a sense of *feeling* successful. If you are on television, you have to be careful about colour and pattern so that it doesn’t strobe, and you need a bit more lustre.”

Gordon Brown looks like someone who needs a bit of lustre. He has the air of a man who buys off-the-peg and wears the same suit every day, but his tailor reveals that, surprisingly, “Brown is interested in clothing. His favourite shop in New York is Bergdorf Goodman.” Everest admits that, unlike the glamorous Beckham, who is exceptionally clothes conscious, and a superb model, the Chancellor “can look a bit dishevelled at times, but that’s the way he wears his clothes.” Maybe it’s a Chancellor thing. The former Cabinet Minister Ken Clarke is also famously rumped and refuses to disclose his own tailor’s identity for fear of ruining him.

Everest’s customers feel they’re in control but they are gently guided, nevertheless. “We don’t bully people into things but our job is to make sure they wear something we’re proud of.” He’s even proud of a pink gabardine suit he made for his first famous client, Suggs, the singer from Madness. Now his customer list – running into a thousand or so – reads like a showbiz *Who’s Who*. He dressed Tom Cruise for *Mission Impossible* and among his regulars are Rolling Stones drummer Charlie Watts, the Kaiser Chiefs, the actor Kevin Bacon. Everest is disappointed that the new James Bond, Daniel Craig, went to a competitor, Brioni, but he’s generous about it: “I was most envious of [the dinner jacket in *Casino Royale*] which was particularly nice.” Now he’s begun to design women’s clothing, with tailored suits based on a thirties look, with pencil skirts and nipped in waists, so maybe he can attract Vesper Lind instead.

Timothy Everest learned his craft when he was 16 at Hepworths, the high street outfitters, first with his uncle in Milford Haven and later as an apprentice to Tommy Nutter in London, who dressed stars such as Elton John and the Beatles. He was forced to get his first job because he had spent money earmarked for his university education on a motorbike. Although he had always been interested in clothes, even as a young boy, he spent his wages on motor-cross. These days, he nips between work and his west London home on a Vespa. He makes most of his own clothes – “I tend to wear things to death” - and does alterations for his two daughters, though it can take him months to get round to it, which irritates his wife. Their elder daughter, who’s 13, is also handy at sewing; she’s fond of making rag dolls, which she hides in her father’s luggage when he’s travelling; and she recently sold a dozen of them in Hollywood to raise money for the *Childline* charity.

One of the attractions of buying at Everest's is his location in what was formerly a run-down part of east London but now a very sought-after residential area, whose listed shop signs are one of the attractions. It was once inhabited by French Huguenots who brought silk weaving to the area, and their 'Spitalfields flower' design is now one of the trademark Everest tie patterns. The three-story terraced building is within shouting distance of the old Spitalfields Market, and has been lovingly restored in a no-frills 'retro' style likely to appeal to men. It is home to an 'atelier' style of business where everything from the initial consultation to the cutting and finishing takes place – except that the offices are elsewhere.

Everest likes the fact that people have to seek him out; and his customers like the fact his premises are more discreet and anonymous – at least externally – than Savile Row. "I wanted people to have to discover us and most of our business comes by word of mouth." The house is certainly individual and, as with a suit, you really have to be inside it to notice the attention to detail. It was at one time occupied by the Bloomsbury artist Mark Gertler, and Everest's own artistic streak is evident. The house has a carefully designed retro look, with a subtle – even wartime - colour scheme, stripped and creaky floorboards, old iron radiators, distressed leather sofas, wooden schoolbenches (where the Beckham children like to sit), brass light-switches recovered from a disused institution, and naked light bulbs. Nakedness also features in a series of explicit erotic prints (involving snakes and oral sex) by Welsh artist Kevin Sinnott which adorn the walls, and which customers, however prudent, cannot fail to notice as they climb the stairs for their fitting.

The bespoke process is personal and labour-intensive, taking 13 stages and about six to eight weeks for a suit, with a team of people from sales manager Adrian to the specialists who fit, sew and finish the suits. All customers, whatever their fame, all end up as packets of brown paper pattern-pieces which hang from a rail ready to be brought to life by the highly trained cutters. Every whim can be catered for: there are special pockets for Blackberrys and even an i-Pod 'feed-through', and men who use their jackets as handbags can have specially reinforced pockets. Some of the expensive cloths feel too fine for suiting, but most of Everest's customers are not the sort who are going to be wearing their two pieces in the morning rush hour on the tube. "Many clients have two pairs of trousers for each jacket; trousers are the first to wear out." Fine tailoring doesn't come cheap, however. Suits start at £1,895 and, as Gordon Brown is well aware, there's VAT on having a suit made, too.

So if Britain's probable next Prime Minister wants a fashionable image, what are the trends he should look out for? Everest's forecast is "a British look: very sharp, a strong feeling of nostalgia, with the return of short back and sides hair, with partings, and also scarves and cravats – which I've already noticed around Spitalfields." Gordon Brown should also consider 'tailored denim' – using material woven specially in Japan

– not to mention eighties-style sunglasses. According to Everest’s Spring 2007 press release, ice cream colours are in – lemon, lilac, pistachio, candy pink and coral cream - along with the three piece suit with the waistcoat look. Prime Ministerial or what?