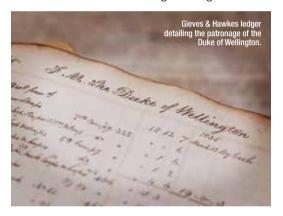
FEELING THE NEED FOR TWEED

Inpursuitofthekindofrusticthree-pieceoncewornsolelyforgamelypursuitsinbucolicenvirons, therake'sEditor-in-Chief—aterminalurbanite—enjoysadidacticfittingexperienceatSavile Row's Gieves & Hawkes.

Like to think that James Watson Gieve invented the firstever sartorial app. His father, James Gieve — the first tailor in the family whose name would eventually join that of Thomas Hawkes above the door at No. 1 Savile Row was a man of entrepreneurial derring-do who once converted a small vessel into an atelier, then voyaged from Portsmouth to the Black Sea during the Crimean War to ensure that British naval officers laying siege to the Russian fleet at Sevastopol were impeccably clad for the task (the family's link with the British navy had been firmly established, with both Admiral Lord Nelson and the Duke of Wellington being former customers).



James Jr., though, was a less swashbuckling, more studious soul, who made his name in the '30s with innovative homespun endeavours such as his 'Dress Indicator', a handy pocket reference dial that informed naval officers which formal attire to wear on which occasions, and which uniform elements — cap, tunic or sword, for example — were required with, say, a frock coat dress with epaulettes, in order to comply with dress regulations.

Were the younger James alive today, I'm confident he would create a modern iteration of this handy guide — one that would enable a man to prod and poke his way to sartorial correctness via his tablet or phone. And, beyond enlightening him as to which accessories to pick out for any given outfit, it would probably advise him on all aspects of any new tailoring venture. Factors such as existing wardrobe, forthcoming social engagements, emotional versus physical comfort, and the degree of flamboyance that the user is feeling at the time of the first fitting would barely scratch the surface.

One factor he might choose to omit from his application's algorithm altogether, though, would be practicality. Modern men will think nothing of buying a four-by-four vehicle capable of shunting a giant cheese grater across the surface of Mars, then subjecting it to nothing more unforgiving than the gravel carpark outside little Jemima's pony club — and this quixotic lunacy tends to continue when he's at his favourite tailor. James Watson Gieve would have understood this. He would have grasped the contemporary male's fondness for whimsy over common sense; for making expensive purchasing decisions that have little to do with when and how he might use the commodity he is acquiring, and everything to do with the cultural, social, historical or literal power it packs.

I mention all this because, today, I - a perennial urbanite whose idea of shooting grouse is downing double measures of the Glenturret distillery's finest in some cosy metropolitan retreat – am on the hunt for the kind of tweed three-piece that was once the preserve of ruddy-jowled, rifle-toting members of the pastoral elite. It's something that I require to fill a lacuna in my wardrobe – the Editor of The Rake not owning a tweed suit is liketheEditorofRollingStonenotpossessingacopyofSgt.Pepper – so I'm glad to be in the very capable hands of one Lee Webb, a Senior Bespoke Cutter at Gieves & Hawkes and a man with a well-earned reputation for his keen eye and technical excellence.

On the day of the first fitting, Webb takes me through the tweed pattern books, offering extensive insights into their origin and texture. He's encouraging about my general material intentions — "The 13oz coarser cloths," he says, "are the most conducive to tailoring. You put an iron on them and you can stretch and mould them" — and my specific choice comes with a flash of what amateur psychologists call 'thin-slicing decision-making' and real ones call 'rapid cognition'.

It's a green fabric with powder-blue checks, reminiscent of a bottle-green tweed jacket worn by Anthony Eden in a shot recently reproduced in this magazine, that leaps out and begs to be chosen. Wonderfully coarse yet undeniably elegant, it's the material antithesis to shiny broadcloth woven in sweatshops (or, these days, enslaved orphan marmosets in the darkest depths of the Amazon — who knows?). It's the type of fabric that is happiest when pressed flush against the deep-red leather seats of a vintage Bentley; a cloth that would be a veritable second skin (or, come to think of it, nude suit) for that most rakish of anthropomorphic bounders, Mr. Toad.

The textile in question is a twist cloth named Hartwist, created by Porter & Harding. Weighted at 18oz (Webb describes it as 'bulletproof') in order to withstand the climatic rigours of the grouse moors, it's long been a popular choice for farmers, gamekeepers, country sportsmen, and now, metropolitan jessies from the media who are more at home debating the categorical imperative over deseeded olives than cleaning the barrel locknut on a bolt-action deer-hunting rifle. There's a moment's hesitation —

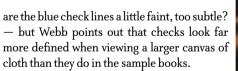






the bespoke process at Gieves & Hawkes.





With the measuring done and all my anatomical quirks — I'm pleased to announce, I have a 'flat back' — and foibles noted down in

Lee's own shorthand, he begins to outline the kind of ingredients that combine to create the perfect three-piece for the metropolitan gent with at least the faintest aspirations that he might, one day, indulge in country pursuits other than driving fast cars through it.

Single-breasted is essential for authenticity, while the presence of a waistcoat dictates a two-button jacket ("Besides," Lee explains, "[a] three-button [jacket] would look boxy with this cut"). A tab collar, enabling the wearer to button up the jacket right to the chin - a vital feature on those tempestuous nights that the little roofed thoroughfare leading to Ye Grapes, Shepherd Market, becomes a wind tunnel - is, we decide, a must, along with untreated bull-horn buttons (when polished,





they look a little plastic, according to Lee).

Four pockets would go on the waistcoat, which should also feature two small pleats to work in tandem with slightly higher trousers, according to our resident expert: "Think back to people like Fred Astaire," he explains of this tailoring trick. "He'd have a snappy little waistcoat, tucking him in a little, then two pleats protruding slightly beneath — it's a really nice effect."

The jacket pockets, including a small ticket pocket on the left, would be slanted and flapped in deference to the style of the traditional tweed hacking jacket. Traditionally, these prevented belongings from falling out when the wearer vaulted an obstacle on horseback. In another nod to the equestrian-influenced hacking



jacket, a centre vent would force a flattering shape when the wearer is seated in the saddle and, as Lee points out, remove any lingering hint that the suit would be worn for business purposes.

A few final details are decided on: a tonal lining with the same fabric used for the back of the waistcoat; four buttons on the cuff; a flower loop at the back of the lapel; turn-ups on the trousers, which, Lee assures me, will add a bit of weight and ensure each leg perches neatly on the shoe while helping with the way the trouser hangs. Then we part company with a glowing sense of a job well done.

Thanks to living overseas at the time, it was almost half a year before I got a chance to return to No. 1 Savile Row to try on the baste version of the suit. Six months is a long time for any tricenarian man's physique. When that man's job involves the kind of dining that eventually induces gout, cognitive decline and a significant bulging of a chap's midriff, it's an eternity. My dimensions around the middle have changed to a depressing extent, but Lee sportingly picks up the proverbial gauntlet thrown down by my recent lifestyle, takes a few fresh measurements then notes down other nips and tucks that will be required — the back neck being taken in a smidgen, the shoulders narrowed slightly and the chest reduced a tad.

Luckily, Lee always makes the first iteration of a suit slightly large - partly so that it will slip onto the customer nicely without the lining yet, but also because "letting out at a fitting is harder than bringing in, and involves more guesswork", as he puts it. Interestingly, the checks on the jacket, he says, also help

— indeed, shouldn't — have fretted. ℝ

the tailor in situations like this. "Checks are harder to strike and cut out because all the lines have to be matched up between sections," he explains, "but, at the same time, [check suits] are easier to fit because they act like a grid, like graph paper. You can see whether they are level to the ground or straight up and down on the customer in an instant."

Somehow, Lee remains stoic throughout two further fittings - not only does that Homer Simpson paunch grow and shrink with fickle abandon between the visits, but my shoulders seem to drop and rise depending on the seasons - and, eventually, a year after that initial fitting, I exit No. 1 Savile Row with a remarkable ensemble that almost completely negates these capricious physical anomalies.

In fact, thanks to centuries of Scottish expertise in coarseclothmaking, Gieves & Hawkes's slick bespoke operation and Lee Webb's fine eye – he truly has the tailoring equivalent of a sharp musical ear — the suit does much more than that. I recall recently traipsing across the rugged landscape of a Tasmanian sheep farm in a superfine city slicker's two-piece, and feeling woefully self-conscious despite the only sentient beings in the vicinity being bovine and therefore oblivious to sartorial nuance. Of course, country garb will never look completely ex situ on 🔬 the streets of Mayfair these days, yet I still feared that an \ge inverted version of the above experience Down Under might take hold when I first took the streets in this three-piece creation. As with most qualms of a stylistic nature, I needn't