

ÉMINENCE GRISE

Mingling with the macaronis at Pitti Uomo or the Goodwood Revival, one might suspect that grey, in 2017, is *exul ero*. But that would be nothing short of sartorial blasphemy.

Special thanks to the Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah Resort & Spa, Oman

by **nick scott** photography **kalle gustafsson**

In the early nineties, the producers of the satirical British puppet show *Spitting Image* painted their rubber effigy of the then prime minister, John Major, battleship grey, in order to emphasise his unfathomable dullness. Psychologists studying the connotations of grey say that humans have come to associate the colour with dampness, depression, hibernation and lack of energy. All in all, let's be honest, grey — the colour of storm clouds, lead, Tupperware, industrialisation and dead pigment cells in hair follicles — gets a bad press.

For a long while, grey lumbered through the realm of men's clothing with this burden upon its shoulders. Being the colour of un-dyed wool, it became associated with the peasantry in the Middle Ages, and has tended to signify abstinence, mourning and repentance in Christianity (Franciscan and Cistercian monks all wore grey to symbolise humility and poverty — an act mimicked, although not of their own volition, by the staff of fast food restaurants to this day). With military uniforms, grey has always been the choice of the bad guys, both fictional (think Imperial Death Star officers) and actual (from the Confederate defenders of slavery to the second world war German armed forces in their austere *feldgrau*).

Things got better for grey during the Renaissance and the Baroque periods, when it became the colour of choice for the nobility of Italy, France and Spain, but it wouldn't be until Britain's heftily embroidered Regency period morphed into the starkly formal tones of the Victorian that grey shot to the top of the tree like a petrodollar-funded football club: enter, stage left, the gentleman's lounge suit. In both its light summer iterations and dark winter ones, grey suddenly found itself packing a sartorial punch like never before (especially when lounge suits were left partially undone to reveal a high-buttoning waistcoat and a watch-chain).

And what of this achromatic shade's status in menswear today? The hoards of popinjays that descend on Florence for the biannual Pitti Uomo festival are roughly as likely to plump for grey as they are bobble hats and crotchless leather dungarees. And there's nothing wrong with that, per se. But it's hard not to feel that *sprezzatura* is prone, at times, to eating itself — that 'studied

carelessness' has a tendency to wake up face-down in a pool of its own incongruity. And when that feeling hits, a resurgence in sartorial sobriety is just the tonic. That's not to say burn all your vivid checks, pastel linens and other garments packing chromatic exuberance: rather, as with work/life balance, never underestimate the value of temperance. And it all starts with a masterful use of the ultimate in subdued elegance, grey.

"It is the perfect colour for men, particularly when it comes to tailoring," says Sean Dixon, co-founder of Richard James, a Savile Row tailor that, lest we forget, in its fledgling years in the mid nineties would collaborate with fabric mills in order to acquire bolder, brighter cloths. "From pale silver to deep, dark charcoal, the shades are limitless, and as a company that enjoys using colour it makes for the perfect backdrop," Dixon adds.

While grey's inherent formality is clear — "It's no coincidence that the majority of morning suits, the most formal and dressy of garments, are cut from medium to dark grey hues," Richard Anderson points out — it is also versatile, hence its appearance on these pages in the form of knitwear, outerwear and casualwear, as well as suiting. "Grey is by far the most formal colour for daywear, yet it can be worn by anyone from an office clerk performing a mundane task to a prime minister meeting the Queen of Great Britain or the Emperor of Japan," Francesco Barberis Canonico, the Creative Director of Vitale Barberis Canonico — the world's oldest cloth mill — tells *The Rake*. "It's the most neutral of all colours, and enables the wearer to be toned down, but also toned up if combined with a subtle or bright shirt, tie or pocket-square."

Simon Maloney, the Product and Marketing Director at New & Lingwood, agrees. "The grey suit is a fundamental basic in any gentleman's wardrobe," he says. "Slightly more severe than a navy suit, a grey suit means business. Whether single- or double-breasted, it is an enduringly sophisticated essential. It can be worn with a crisp white shirt and a black tie or with most shades of blue (a pale blue shirt looks good with a deep burgundy tie or a navy shirt can look great when worn with a matching plain satin tie). Another rakish option is the black-and-white checked shirt — Prince of Wales or Tattersall — again, worn with a simple black tie. Knitted silk looks particularly good."

ASPECT



Previous page:
Light grey hopsack blazer
and ivory silk trousers, both
Cifonelli; cream wool roll-neck,
Ermengildo Zegna Couture;
black leather tassel loafers,
Giuseppe Zanotti; charcoal grey
socks, **Falke**; brown Havana
acetate with brown mirrored lens
0009 sunglasses, **Persol**.

This page:
Grey wool double-breasted
pinstripe jacket, **Cifonelli**; light
grey cashmere tracksuit bottoms,
Ermengildo Zegna Couture;
white and grey pinstripe shirt,
Brunello Cucinelli; green and
cream daisy print cotton tie,
Drake's; white cotton pocket-
handkerchief, **Anderson &
Sheppard Haberdashery**.

Yellow-gold and brown sandstone
boutonnière, property of *The Rake*.

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This page:
Charcoal grey wool trousers and black suede belt, **Giorgio Armani**; grey cotton-jersey waistcoat, **Brunello Cucinelli**; grey and white houndstooth blazer, **Z Zegna**; white cotton shirt, **Turnbull & Asser**; black leather one cut Oxford shoes, **J.M. Weston**.

Opposite page:
Charcoal grey micro check, three-piece suit and cream, burgundy checked shirt and burgundy silk pocket-handkerchief, all **Gieves & Hawkes**.

Burgundy and green paisley print silk tie, *vintage Gucci, property of The Rake*. Gold tie-bar, *property of The Rake*.





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Opposite page:
 Grey wool checked, double-breasted coat, **Salvatore Ferragamo**; grey cashmere waffle knit jumper, **Fratelli Piacenza**; ivory cotton trousers, **Bottega Veneta**; black pony skin belt and charcoal grey and mustard silk neckerchief, both **Pal Zileri**.

This page:
 Grey cotton-jersey double-breasted two-piece suit, **The GIGI**; light grey cotton-jersey shirt and charcoal grey cotton tie, both **Brunello Cucinelli**; charcoal grey socks, **Falke**; navy suede tassel loafers, **J.M. Weston**.



This page:
Charcoal grey wool
herringbone coat and
two-piece suit and
charcoal grey wool
knitted jumper, all
Polo Ralph Lauren.

Opposite page left:
Light grey hopsack
blazer and ivory silk
trousers, both **Cifonelli**;
cream wool roll-neck,
**Ermenegildo Zegna
Couture.**

Opposite page right:
Charcoal grey wool,
chalk striped gilet and
two-piece suit, black
wool knitted jumper
and black leather single
monk strap shoes, all
Polo Ralph Lauren.




The classical menswear expert Chris Modoo, writing for *The Rake*'s website last year, referred to grey's "quiet authority", also pointing out that "dark grey is the correct colour for subfusc at Oxford University and also for a young barrister at court", while Stefano Gaudioso Tramonte, the Style Director at Italian menswear house Corneliani, believes that grey's romance lies in its inherent aloofness: "It doesn't express a mood — on the contrary, it hides emotions, and the darker the more mysterious."

Of course, the plethora of choices when it comes to grey suiting doesn't end with the shade: there's a wealth of fabrics to consider, too. "If there is one cloth that is synonymous with grey, it's flannel," Modoo writes. "My personal favourite is the warm, sepia-toned west-of-England variety with all its subtle colour variations and character. Originally a summer cloth, grey flannel is the modern-day sybarite's choice for cool weather dressing."

Dixon says: "In winter, flannel is the perfect choice. It tailors beautifully and, over time, takes on the unique character of the wearer. For summer we like to use fresco-style wools, open weave and light in colour, which is a particularly good look for weddings, whether it's your own or someone else's. We also like to use linen in all shades of grey — perfect sophistication for the summer." Readers should note, of course, that this applies as much to standalone tailored trousers as it does to suiting.

Anderson, meanwhile, thoroughly enjoys taking grey back to its traditional status as the businessman's battle-wear. "A single-breasted charcoal in a clean-cut worsted — especially when twinned with the palest of blue end-on-end shirting — has an enduring and understated elegance, as has my personal favourite, a double-breasted coat in a medium-weight flannel," he says (the latter, worn with more casual garments in other shades of grey, will, incidentally, pay dividends).

Gaudioso Tramonte is also an adherent to the time-honoured grey-suit-and-shirt pairings: "A mid-grey two-button, two-vent suit with flap pockets and a nice straight-cut pant in a superfine 160s wool, paired with a white or pale blue shirt, is always elegant and sophisticated," he says. But, he warns, men shouldn't see collared garments as the only option to wear beneath a formal grey suit. "Consider a bulky, pure, rich and soft cashmere turtle-neck sweater in grey melange," he advises, while positing a double-breasted overcoat in wool-cashmere as the perfect outerwear.

If none of our experts' sage words convince you, the images on these pages surely will. And remember, one of the great things about going sober sartorially is that you can fall off the wagon as often as you want — as long as you don't let said wagon become a dot on the horizon. 

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This page:
Charcoal grey wool herringbone, two-piece suit, **Canali**; light grey cotton shirt, **Brunello Cucinelli**, charcoal grey, burgundy and mustard silk tie, **Drake's**.

Charcoal grey wool pocket-handkerchief and yellow-gold with brown sandstone boutonniere, both property of *The Rake*.

Opposite page:
Grey wool double-breasted jacket and trousers, **New & Lingwood**; white and charcoal grey striped, contrast collar cotton shirt, **Brunello Cucinelli**.

White pocket-handkerchief, grey paisley print silk tie, and yellow-gold with black onyx tie-pin, all property of *The Rake*.



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