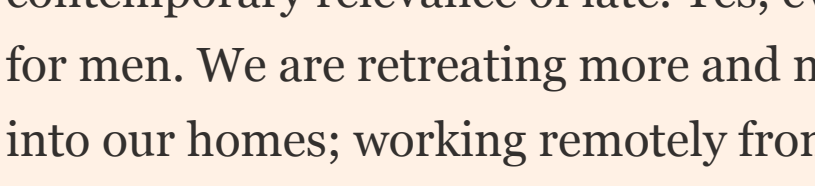


Luxury goods

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Men's loungewear: downtime goes upmarket

Keep stylish while staying comfortable for those curled-up-on-the-sofa moments



David Hayes JULY 4 2014

“Slip in to something more comfortable”: it’s a phrase that echoes the golden age of Hollywood but one that has taken on a contemporary relevance of late. Yes, even for men. We are retreating more and more into our homes; working remotely from home offices, “dining out” on stay-at-home gourmet meal-deals and being entertained by the latest box-sets – watched, of course, on home cinema television screens. And for these private, away-from-the-world moments, we are increasingly putting comfort first.

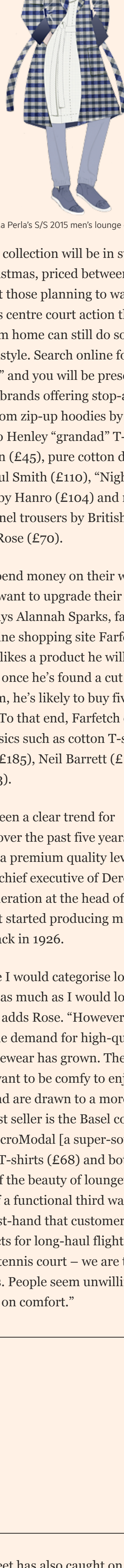
What is now being termed by fashion insiders as the “third wardrobe” – clothes that are neither work-smart nor weekend-away casual, but aimed squarely at those curled-up-on-the-sofa moments – has become a growth area for retailers. It is a section of clothing that is more loosely termed “loungewear” in menswear departments; and it seems that for stylish male consumers, an old T-shirt and a pair of washed-up tracksuit bottoms simply won’t do. Men now want luxury – even when the door is closed and the curtains are drawn.

Step forward La Perla and Tuscan-born Emiliano Rinaldi, the designer charged with creating the Italian lingerie brand’s first men’s runway collection, presented at menswear showcase Pitti Uomo in Florence last month. And naturally enough – give or take an eye-catching snake-print catsuit or two – the La Perla collection was all about loungewear; from kimono-style dressing gowns and pyjama bottoms in bold gingham checks to printed silk shorts and sheer mesh T-shirts, cotton nightshirts, smoking jackets and cosy zip-up hoodies and sweat pants in shades of ecru and burnt orange.

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“It has been a very personal process for me: the pieces I created are a reflection of my life and embody my sense of luxury,” says Rinaldi of La Perla for men. “For the new loungewear collection, we wanted to communicate a lifestyle and a new state of mind; a belief that men will be wearing these pieces. I think that men are rediscovering an appreciation of the importance of life’s luxuries; we have blended that luxury appeal with echoes of streetwear in the form of cotton and cashmere tracksuits worn over 100 per cent cashmere T-shirts.”

“Loungewear holds an important place in men’s style as the home is the place where we ought to be at ease and feel most comfortable, really be ourselves,” he adds.



Sketch from La Perla's S/S 2015 men's lounge collection

The La Perla collection will be in stores in time for Christmas, priced between £90 and £3,200 – but those planning to watch Wimbledon’s centre court action this weekend from home can still do so in comfort and style. Search online for “loungewear” and you will be presented with a host of big brands offering stop-at-home essentials, from zip-up hoodies by Hugo Boss (£79) to Henley “grandad” T-shirts by Ralph Lauren (£45), pure cotton dressing gowns by Paul Smith (£110), “Night & Day” pyjama sets by Hanro (£104) and navy-checked flannel trousers by British heritage label Derek Rose (£70).

“Men who spend money on their wardrobe are likely to want to upgrade their downtime look, too,” says Alannah Sparks, fashion editor of online shopping site Farfetch. “And when a man likes a product he will buy into it heavily, so once he’s found a cut of T-shirt that suits him, he’s likely to buy five of that same style.” To that end, Farfetch offer luxurious basics such as cotton T-shirts from Kolor (£185), Neil Barrett (£122) and Sunspel (£63).

“There has been a clear trend for loungewear over the past five years, especially at a premium quality level,” says Sacha Rose, chief executive of Derek Rose, the third generation at the head of a family business that started producing men’s nightwear back in 1926.

“I’m not sure I would categorise loungewear as a ‘need’ – as much as I would love that to be the case,” adds Rose. “However, sales prove that the demand for high-quality, stylish loungewear has grown. The younger generation want to be comfy to enjoy downtime and are drawn to a more relaxed look. Our best seller is the Basel collection of superfine MicroModal [a super-soft type of rayon fibre] T-shirts (£68) and bottoms (£91). Part of the beauty of loungewear is the notion of a functional third wardrobe. We know first-hand that customers wear these products for long-haul flights, at the gym, on the tennis court – we are told, even for weddings. People seem unwilling to compromise on comfort.”

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The high street has also caught on to the trend. Uniqlo offers lounge trousers from £15 and Topman has a whole loungewear section that embraces everything from tie-dye onesies (£60) to floral-print joggers (£24). “We first introduced loungewear for men as a distinct category five years ago,” says Tony O’Connor, head of menswear at Marks and Spencer – the store’s T-shirt and shorts “loungewear” sets are priced up to £25. “We’ve seen men moving away from traditional smart pyjamas towards more relaxed, leisurewear style pieces. Men want something comfortable to change into when they get home from work to relax.”

And the move to smartening up at home is not just driven by men. “Around 50 per cent of our nightwear is bought by women for their partners,” admits O’Connor. Not surprisingly, the new David Gandy for Autograph collection will offer loungewear when it launches at the high street store in September.

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