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Patchwork designs for men

Spliced-together suits and sports jackets and jigsaw-cut trousers and coats



From left: Oliver Spencer; Richard James; Alexander McQueen; 3.1 Philip Lim



David Hayes NOVEMBER 15 2013

Prince Charles has always been a polished dresser but when the heir to the British throne stepped out in the summer not once but seven times in a patched grey double-breasted jacket, he wasn't just being natty, he was bang on trend. From Junya Watanabe and Richard James to Alexander McQueen, Oliver Spencer and 3.1 Philip Lim, patchwork is a mainstay of menswear this season, be it spliced-together suits and sports jackets or jigsaw-cut trousers and coats.

Tom Kalenderian, executive vice-president and general merchandise manager of menswear at Barneys New York, says: "In the world of men's designer clothes, patchwork fabrics are seen more as a platform for artistic expression rather than mere cloth. We loved the Junya Watanabe patchwork blazers [from £1,060], shirts [£349] and coats [£1,485]. These pieces are so beautiful and rich in their tweediness; they seem best as standalone pieces, working with neutral underpinnings like chinos or cords. At Alexander McQueen, the red patchwork blazer really stood out as something to be worn for an event."

These clothes are anything but gardening gear; witness the price tags. Savile Row has even got in on the act with tailor Richard James piecing together fine suit fabrics in a mix of earthy shades and country checks to make a show-stopping sports jacket for £4,980. "I don't think any single piece from the autumn collection was talked about quite as much as that jacket," says James. "It's actually made from a patchwork of cashmere. It was technically difficult, as each piece was cut by hand before being sewn together. But it was more about working with patterns and colour than showing off the technical skill involved."

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Designer Oliver Spencer has taken a more wearable, and affordable, approach with suits crafted from broad bands of fabric (jacket £359, trousers £169). "Interesting fabrics, detail and texture are the most important elements in tailoring right now," he says. "We are always looking at turning suiting upside down, be it with deconstruction, colour blocking or mixing colours. Fabric is everything to me."

Mei Chung, menswear buyer at Browns in London, says: "Patchwork is a type of personalisation. Designers manipulate it in their own way. For us, if you find the right piece, the price doesn't come into it because customers appreciate all the work involved."

Indeed, the patchwork trend reflects a desire on the part of designers to add extra interest to traditional cuts, in response to customer demand. "Men are certainly looking for something new and individual, and are keen to experiment more with colour, texture and pattern," says James. "They're certainly interested in new fabrics and different approaches to classic tailoring. We've made a number of bespoke patchwork jackets since our show."

London store Dover Street Market is arguably the home of patchwork, with collections from Junya Watanabe and Comme des Garçons. City fund manager Richard Goode, a regular Dover Street customer, says: "I've bought a couple of patchwork shirts from Comme des Garçons – each is subtly different and adds an unexpected twist to casual dressing. They look great just with jeans or chinos. The workmanship makes the shirts timeless and special."

Stuart Longmore, an advertising account manager, says: "I've invested in a blazer from Junya Watanabe. In the creative industries, Japanese designers have always been something of a status symbol. The patchwork just adds a cool edge to what is, from a distance, a classic piece of tailoring. It always gets favourable comments."

But James adds a note of caution. "I'm not averse to different shades of fabric being used for the same suit but the appearance of a suit does depend to a large degree on what it is for – our customers buy and dress with an occasion in mind," he says. "Different colours in tailoring have to flow and not jar. A suit should be seen as one piece, not a collection of individual garments."

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