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The distinctive double-breasted suit



David Hayes MAY 8 2010



If the past month of election campaigning in Britain is anything to go by, change is a slow process when it comes to politicians' sartorial style. The rhetoric may have varied; the candidate's backgrounds may have differed; the colour of their ties may have clashed. But the suits? That's where the differences ended. Sober, dark, mostly navy, always two-button and single-breasted, this particular garment seems to have become the current benchmark of political fashion.

And not just for the Brits. From Barack Obama to Nicolas Sarkozy, Dmitry Medvedev and China's Hu Jintao, on the global political stage the plain, dark single-breasted suit rules supreme. But if science, as opposed to political science, teaches us anything it is that every action has an equal and opposite reaction, so step forward Tom Ford.

"I have always loved double-breasted suits," says Ford, who has two such styles in his current collection (prices from £2,200). "They are more dramatic and glamorous than a single-breasted suit. Double-breasted works especially well on young men as they have the bodies and style to make it feel fresh."

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And Ford isn't alone in his admiration: celebrities spotted wearing the "DB" recently include Jude Law, Tom Cruise, Ed Macfarlane of cool Brit band Friendly Fires, and *Heroes* actor Zachary Quinto.

Meanwhile, other fashion brands are upping their DB offering: it comes spare, modernist and two-button at Prada (£1,010); as classic pinstripe with a pocket handkerchief at Dries van Noten (£810); and six-buttoned, sharp-shouldered and slate grey at Bottega Veneta.

Even the high street has taken note, from Reiss (£425 for the Romeo style used in the brand's summer campaign) to Agnès b (Prince of Wales check tan jacket, £345, and trousers, £175), Aquascutum (£495 for the Soloman double-breasted jacket), and online store Asos (Designworks suit, £425). In other words, politicians are out of touch in their attitude to tailoring as well as towards big banks.

"Sadly, aside from royal standard-bearers such as the Prince of Wales, Prince Michael of Kent and the Duke of Edinburgh, there are fewer and fewer good dressers in the public eye," says tailor Patrick Grant of Norton & Sons and E Tautz on Savile Row. "But the double-breasted suit has now become the choice for the man who understands his own style and takes pains to seek it out. Personally I think that a double-breasted suit has more gravitas than a single-breasted style."

For Jeremy Langmead, editor of British Esquire magazine, political image is crucial: "Strangely, the double-breasted suit can smack too much of tradition, authority and power for politicians," he says.

But what doesn't work for public office may be just the thing for the office. "Double-breasted suits remind us of a time when rules were stricter," says Langmead. "That wouldn't normally be seen as alluring, but the banking crisis reminded us all what happens when people ignore rules completely."

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Still, says one financier, a double-breasted suit "can look too reminiscent of 1980s 'Captains of Industry'".

"On the right person it can look confident and young, giving you a certain swagger that sets you apart," responds another.

That is if it fits correctly. Perhaps more than its single-breasted sibling, the double-breasted suit demands exacting tailoring. "I think double-breasted suits look best on someone tall and thin, and it is important to fit the waist so that the wearer doesn't look like a box," notes Ford.

Langmead agrees: "Many of London's top tailors are finding that more of their bespoke customers are ordering them. When fitted correctly, a double-breasted suit can look truly amazing: smart, sharp and lean. Just look at the tailors at Thom Sweeney in Mayfair in their double-breasted styles."

"A man wearing a double-breasted suit today has made a very distinct stylistic choice," says Patrick Grant. "To wear it takes confidence and style, and those that do wear it, in my experience, tend to wear it very well."

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