

Style [+ Add to myFT](#)

The urban squire



David Hayes MARCH 18 2011

There is a new breed of smart young man around London's Square Mile. He's identifiable via his perfectly turned-out suit, pristine shirt and tie, polished brogues and briefcase, all topped off with a coat more suited for a weekend trudging through a muddy field than the short walk from Monument Underground station to the office.

You know the kind of thing; those quilted nylon jackets in navy, mud brown or olive green with their neat corduroy collars and brass popper fastenings – jackets, that not so very long ago, were the sole preserve of Sloane Rangers.

“We have seen a real increase in demand for country-style clothing over the past few months,” says Lee Douros, menswear buyer at online fashion outlet [my-wardrobe.com](#). “Country jackets have become phenomenally good sellers for us, with a massive 320 per cent increase in sales of Barbour jackets alone against last year. And it isn't just about stressed-out city folk pining for a piece of the country. This is a movement among cool trendsetters taking traditional ‘country squire’ items into a very urban environment.”

Advertisement

Search for “jackets” at my-wardrobe and you are faced with a wall of waxed and quilted styles, from updated versions of the classic olive waxed cotton Barbour jacket by To Ki To (£329), to “Japanese” patterned quilted jackets (£139) by that other proudly British label, Lavenham.

“The whole ‘heritage’ look – clothes that are both practical and proven – has become the very essence of fashion for men right now,” says Topman's design director, Gordon Richardson. “No-nonsense clothes have taken centre stage, and country clothes have become the natural focus. Being both durable and timeless, they are hitting just the right note.” Topman offers classic brown cord collar, navy quilted jackets aimed at its twenty-something, urban customers for £50.

Just when did the country look – and in particular that essential signifier of 1980s Sloane Ranger style, the quilted jacket – get so cool? “‘Heritage’ became a strong theme in men's wear a few seasons ago and is still going strong this spring,” says Sam Lobban, a buyer of contemporary brands at Selfridges. “We have seen a desire for products and brands that evoke quality, tradition and integrity – brands such as Barbour, Lavenham and Hunter. These successful ‘heritage’ brands are also the ones that have tweaked their products to accommodate the more fashion-focused markets. Lavenham in particular has done this extremely well and has found itself at the forefront of the trend.”

Nicky Santomauro, owner of Lavenham, says, “We have been working with some big fashion brands in Japan for the past 10 years, while at the same time keeping the traditional equestrian market going in the UK.” The country outfitters still produces all its quilted jackets and accessories in Suffolk, only a few miles from the village that bears its name. “To begin with, the quilted jacket has been a trend, but I am sure it will become part of our staple wardrobe over here in the next few years, as it has in Japan.”

Santomauro adds: “Our jackets are still based on the traditional riding quilted jacket that we've been making from quilted horse blankets since 1972. Most of our styles still have two back vents, which were traditionally to fit over the cantle [high back] of a saddle. Even with the slimmer blocks we use now, they are worn by both the country set and city dwellers, as well as those that dabble between the two.” The age group of Lavenham's new customer base spans from 25 to 45 years-old.

“It's shower-proof and warm but not too bulky on the train for my daily commute,” says one Suffolk-based City broker of his Lavenham quilted jacket. “The brand name caught my eye in Selfridges as Lavenham village is not far from where I live. And it looks a whole lot smarter for the office than my old North Face anorak.”

Advertisement

The quilted jacket has become such a men's wear style essential that even brands reinventing themselves to enter the luxury market are putting it at the heart of their strategy. “The quilted jacket is quintessentially British, something that young people are buying into right now,” says Antonio Marsocci, head of retail at Lotus Cars which has just relaunched its Lotus Originals label as a luxury online brand, with a flagship store set to open in London later this year. Lotus Originals' leather-trim, black quilted jacket retails for £298.

“There is a real feeling of British euphoria building, with the success of [The King's Speech](#) and the global excitement for the [royal wedding](#). The timing was right to make a piece that would reflect the Lotus brand's particularly British history, and the quilted jacket felt like a perfect fit.”

[www.my-wardrobe.com](#)[www.barbour.com](#)[www.topman.com](#)[www.selfridges.com](#)[www.lavenhamjackets.com](#)[www.lotusoriginals.com](#)

.....

Country classics

Quilted jackets aren't the first garment to add a *rus in urbe* flavour to the city wardrobe, **writes Carola Long**. Cally Blackman, author of *One Hundred Years of Menswear*, says: “Country wear started being worn in town in the 18th century. In a letter to his son written in 1748, Lord Chesterfield complained that young ‘men-about-town’ were adopting the dress of ‘grooms, stage-coachmen and country bumpkins.’” Since then country wear has continued to influence fashionable dress, so what do experts think the next rustic garment to cross the green belt could be?

Peter York

Co-author of ‘Cooler, Faster, More Expensive: The Return of the Sloane Ranger’

The tweed waistcoat seems to be coming back. I am the most urban person in the world but I have a Donegal tweed waistcoat and I'm thinking it could find employment again. Giant country-ish knitwear in heathery or green shades with flecks of russet could pose a response to the small, tight knits we've seen for so long. I just bought a huge black pullover, thinking I was going to be Jack Kerouac but in green it would be much more rustic.

Mansel Fletcher

Style editor, Esquire

Perhaps the return of plus fours is not that unlikely. They're currently sold by Rapha to trendy cyclists and now men are used to exposing some ankle, why not display a honed calf? Also, velvet jackets are more popular than they deserve to be, so why shouldn't a matching riding hat find its place in modern wardrobes? All that's holding it back is the chinstrap, which is hard to carry off.

Richard Johnson

Head of men's wear buying, Harvey Nichols

The great outdoors has seeped into City wardrobes through Prince of Wales check tailoring at Etro and Duchamp, blanket check shirts at Ralph Lauren and the ultimate urban hiking boots from Visvim. Many a City gent has been rolling up his trousers to navigate the murky London winter, a knowing nod to his plus-four donning, rural counterparts. If Riccardo Tisci at Givenchy has any say, hunting hound-inspired riding hats are next.

Claire Malcolm

Head of design, Hardy Amies

The gilet is quite a versatile item, has some pedigree in suiting and is fun to wear.

Peter Smith

General manager of H Huntsman, Savile Row

Tweed caps are seeing a strong comeback and are no longer relegated to country squires or Hovis adverts. Our caps are worn increasingly in the City by customers of all ages and prove a warm alternative to a Fedora and give more clout than a woolly hat. Tweed suits too, are seeing an increase in popularity.

Advertisement

Sign up to the weekly FT Weekend email[One-Click Sign Up](#)

Copyright The Financial Times Limited 2020. All rights reserved.

[Share this article](#)[Reuse this content](#)**stories you missed**

Latest on Style

Style
From ceramics to life drawing: millennials are getting crafty

Fashion
Why the knitted tabard is a new wardrobe staple

Fashion
Does streetwear have a future?

Comments have not been enabled for this article.

Follow the topics in this article

Meemi Ltd [+ Add to myFT](#)

David Hayes [+ Add to myFT](#)

Lavenham [+ Add to myFT](#)

Life & Arts [+ Add to myFT](#)

How easy or hard was it to use FT.com today?
[Leave feedback](#)

Support

View Site Tips

Help Centre

About Us

Accessibility

myFT Tour

Careers

Legal & Privacy

Terms & Conditions

Privacy

Cookies

Copyright

Slavery Statement & Polici...

Services**Tools****More from the FT Group**

Markets data delayed by at least 15 minutes. © THE FINANCIAL TIMES LTD 2020. FT and 'Financial Times' are trademarks of The Financial Times Ltd.

The Financial Times and its journalism are subject to a self-regulation regime under the [FT Editorial Code of Practice](#).**A Nikkei Company**