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Mix and match of the day

Men have started to question the traditional suit



David Hayes FEBRUARY 22 2013

When is a suit not a suit? No, that’s not the opening poser for a Google job interview, but a question that many menswear designers seem to be asking as the new season’s crop of clothes comes streaming into stores.

“Mixing and matching is something women have been doing for years, but finally men have become confident enough to try it for themselves,” says Rake’s founder Clive Darby, who based the company on the concept of offering men a range of tailored separates. “The inspiration for the label came from travelling a lot and not wanting to pack loads of different clothes for every different occasion, like having a jacket I could wear as a suit that would also look good on its own with jeans. Now we present up to 30 suits each season which can be worn as a total look or broken up.”

“Men have started to question what the ‘suit’ means as the line between work and leisure is increasingly blurred,” says Paul Surrige, creative director of Z Zegna. “So it felt right to de-formalise the tailoring in the collection and reconsider it as a leisure suit, a uniform of choice. And mixing up suiting with pattern or colour definitely shakes up those traditional codes.”

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See, for example, Salvatore Ferragamo’s aqua jacket and turquoise blue trouser combo; Alexander McQueen’s contrasting monochrome check blazer and slim pants and Z Zegna’s off-kilter optical print two-pieces. Over at Hackett London, the predominance of subtle – and sometimes not-so-subtle – mismatched top and bottom halves, could almost raise the suspicion that something had gone terribly wrong in the shipping.

“I think that splitting up the traditional suit is a witty way of creating a wholly personal look,” says Jeremy Hackett. “At first glance it may look as though your outfit has been thrown together but, with the right mix of texture and colour, the overall effect can be really pleasing.”



Alexander McQueen’s contrasting monochrome check blazer and slim pants

Jeremy Langmead, editor of Mr Porter, agrees: “Mixing up your tailoring gives the suit a whole new lease of life. There’s a lot of pattern and clashing colours in menswear at the moment and this is a nice way of taking on the trend in an easy, palatable way. Yes, it may sometimes look as if you left the house with the wrong jacket on, but that’s all part of a look that the Italians call *sprezzatura*.”

A man who is no stranger to that particular Italian take on style – which roughly translates as “studied carelessness” – is Lucca Rubinacci, son of Naples-based tailor Mariano Rubinacci. “When I wake up in the morning, I look out of my window and the weather inspires me,” says Rubinacci. “I don’t think long and hard about what I am going to wear, I just wear it. Anyone who really knows himself, always knows what to wear,” he continues. “I think that a well-dressed man wears something not because it catches the eye of others, but for his own pleasure. But it’s best not to go beyond your own limits. I mean, if someone is not used to ‘the mix’, he should start with accessories to give a touch of colour and texture and add more, little by little.”

“There is actually something really ‘old school’ about wearing a jacket and trousers that don’t match,” says 36-year-old management accountant James Hartnett. “It’s just like putting a smart blazer with a pair of chinos or grey flannels. Anything that makes my work uniform less formal sounds good to me.”

Just be sure, cautions Z Zegna’s Surrige, that you “never mix too many ingredients in one look. Always let one element of the outfit dominate, either the jacket, the trouser or the shirt. And always check yourself in the mirror before leaving the house.”

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