



Knatchbull wears a three-piece, made-to-measure suit

# New Kid on The Block

The Deck is cutting a pattern for women's suits on Savile Row

By Jill Newman

Men have long appreciated the transformative power of a custom-tailored suit: the air of confidence it conveys, the authority it implies, the attention it commands. But that sartorial clout has largely eluded women, who find themselves relegated to off-the-rack clothing in cookie-cutter sizes that often don't do justice to their body.

Daisy Knatchbull, founder of the Deck on Savile Row, is tailoring her modern pieces to fit that forgotten half of the population—curves and all. Her team performs all the customization that men's shops offer, but they also instill body positivity, enhancing what clients love about their figure and tactically disguising what they don't.

According to Knatchbull, her clients' most common grievances are "My legs are too short, my waist is too thick, or my breasts are enormous." It was about time, she says,

to infiltrate the old boys' club with the first women's-only storefront on London's most famous fashion street.

Since opening on Savile Row in 2020, the Deck has dressed women from age 16 to 94. Whether they're chief executive officers or celebrities such as Jodie Whittaker, Elizabeth Hurley and Gillian Anderson, they all desire the same thing: elegant, well-fitting clothes that make them feel confident and beautiful.

Sounds simple, but Knatchbull says women have been expected to fit into a limited range of standard sizes, and, unlike men, they face ongoing issues, from "menstruation to menopause to mastectomies," that trigger fluctuations in their shape throughout their life. "The relationship women have with their bodies is complicated," says Knatchbull on a recent visit to her London store. "Their shape is always changing, which is why nobody has bothered with this in the past."

We haven't seen more custom women's options, because this type of hyperpersonalization hasn't been scalable before, says Oliver Chen, managing director and retail analyst at TD Cowen. "But there's a greater demand for this higher-echelon service among women in leadership roles," he says.

In comes the inherently charming and warm Knatchbull, who, at 30, has mastered the art of tailoring a solution for every issue. Want the illusion of a narrower waist? Try a single-breasted jacket with slanted pockets. Longer legs? Wear high-waisted trousers. Longer torso? A slightly extended jacket will do the trick.

Roughly 40% of the Deck's business is repeat clientele, and business is growing. This year, Knatchbull expanded into a larger, 2,000-square-foot space on Savile Row that, unlike the traditional wood-paneled, tweed-covered shops lining the rest of the street, is bright and airy, with walls adorned in custom brown silk de Gournay floral wallpaper and oversize antique gilded mirrors. Clients meet with their tailor, review fabric swatches and plan their wardrobe on a cozy chocolate-brown velvet couch.

Knatchbull offers only four made-to-measure house patterns (the number of suits in a card deck, hence the shop's name): single-breasted, double-breasted, boyfriend or safari jackets, and straight-leg, cigarette, wide-leg or flared trousers.

"Daisy offers a modern take on a very traditional idea," says Antonia Ede, the Savile Row-trained cutter who opened Montague Ede, a men's shop in London, in 2016. "Women's tailoring has had a bad rap. It's been thought of as frumpy or boxy, but Daisy has shown women you don't have to look matronly or like Bianca Jagger. Her house cut speaks to a modern woman's wardrobe."

The process—which can sometimes feel a bit like therapy—begins with a three-hour meeting with one of the Deck's four female tailors, led by Joline Simister (who served as Queen Elizabeth's personal tailor for many years). The tailors take measurements, make recommendations based on body type and cut patterns for each woman's shape. Clients select fabric and lining as well as details such as buttons and monogramming and return for two more fittings. The final



Knatchbull consults with Uniacke, a regular, in the Savile Row shop



garment is ready in 12 to 14 weeks.

The suits are fabricated at an atelier in Porto, Portugal, which allows Knatchbull to keep prices competitive; a two-piece starts at £2,800 (\$3,550). The Deck also offers bespoke dresses, coats and shirts, and it's created several bridal suits.

Savile Row's old guard has even taken notice, giving credit to Knatchbull's novel approach. "Many

women are looking at tailoring for the first time, and Daisy's made tailoring approachable," says Anda Rowland, managing director for Anderson & Sheppard, the heritage Savile Row shop. "Men's tailored jackets are designed to hang on the shoulders, but with women, there are other things to take into account, like the breast area, waist and hips," she says.

Most Savile Row tailors will make a woman's suit, but understanding the body of a woman is more nuanced. Knatchbull isn't making men's suits for women. Rather, she's creating custom, elegant suiting for the modern woman. (Even Rowland, a leader on Savile Row for 18 years, is a customer; among her favorite purchases is a double-breasted green velvet suit that she says always draws compliments.)

Narinder Uniacke is another client who came to the Deck after enduring decades of off-the-rack disappointment. "Length is an issue for me," says the 5-foot-9-inch Londoner. She was recently in the store for the final fitting of a three-piece pinstriped suit, ordered for Wimbledon. "I'm also quite broad-shouldered and slight everywhere else. If I size up in the chest, the sleeves are too wide or too long." All that's been resolved at the Deck.

"When you wear a custom suit, it lifts you, and you just feel better about yourself," says Uniacke, who owns four suits, as well as an electric-blue velvet blazer, from the Deck. She prefers to wear hers dressed down with a pair of trainers or flat shoes, and she appreciates the little details that can come with a custom suit, such as her three sons' initials embroidered under her jacket collar.

"All you need is one great suit and a few staple items, like a great white shirt, statement earrings, stilettos and a pair of Levi's, and you've got five or six smart looks," Knatchbull says. The "buy better, buy less" philosophy speaks to some consumers' mindfulness of sustainability and longevity. For the Deck's part, its suits are made in natural materials such

as worsted wool, silk, cashmere, velvet and linen, and they're finished with seams that can be let out or nipped in over time.

Even with clients such as beauty executive Aerin Lauder and *Bridgerton* actress Adjoa Andoh, Knatchbull is the Deck's most convincing spokesmodel. Tall and slim, she's effortlessly elegant in a white three-piece suit the day I see her

meeting clients. She learned an appreciation for fine tailoring while working as communications director at Huntsman, one of Savile Row's oldest bespoke tailors. During that stint, in 2016, she made history as the first woman to turn out at Royal Ascot with a top hat and tails, rather than a dress. The next day she was bombarded with inquiries from friends looking to have a suit made. That was the catalyst for her business.

"I love tradition, and I like to challenge it," says Knatchbull, who was born and bred into tradition as the great-granddaughter of Lord Mountbatten (Prince Philip's uncle, and a great-grandson of Queen Victoria). But she's quick to point out she never leveraged that legacy in business. "There is an amazing history to my family, but it doesn't define me."

To get the Deck off the ground, she raised \$150,000 in seed capital and, following the pandemic, an additional \$500,000, most of which went into the store. Since she started the business in 2019, annual sales have doubled each year.

Accordingly, word has spread from London to New York and Palm Beach, both locations for pop-up tailoring events she's held. Last year, Lauder hosted a four-day event in her New York showroom, which quickly booked up with 130 client appointments. The American market has since accounted for 30% of the Deck's annual revenue.

Knatchbull plans to enhance her services with an artificial intelligence program that will allow her tailors to take measurements remotely, but the in-person moments at her shop are still her favorite part of the business. She acknowledges that AI will never replace the emotions that come when a woman puts on her first custom suit. "I love seeing women have that sense of confidence," she says. "When they see themselves in the mirror for the first time, they stand taller, and you know they are thinking, 'I look good.'" **B**