

Robb Report

FALL FASHION ISSUE

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WELL-TAILORED WHEELS

MASERATI'S ZEGNA-DESIGNED LIMITED EDITION QUATTROPORTE

THREADS TO TREADS
Zegna suits both car and driver
in classic Italian style

SEPTEMBER 2014



PARADISE SUSTAINED

THE ROCKEFELLER LEGACY LIVES ON AT SIX ECO-FRIENDLY RESORTS

THE ART OF THE SOLE

Berluti's artistic footwear inspires the brand's design team to dress clients from toe to head. **BY JILL NEWMAN**



ON A RECENT morning visit to Berluti's London shop, the company's artistic director, Alessandro Sartori, observed a well-dressed man sitting barefoot in a leather club chair reading his iPad; the following week, he noticed the same man seated again in the same position. Further investigation revealed that the British businessman has such an affinity for Berluti's artfully polished footwear that he visits the store weekly en route to his office to maintain their lustrous patina through a service known as *glacé*.

Such devotion on the part of its

clients is nothing new for the brand, which was established in 1895 and boasts a long list of prominent loyalists including Andy Warhol, Yves Saint Laurent, and a wide variety of fastidious international personalities with an appreciation for exceptional craftsmanship. One of these admiring individuals is LVMH's chairman, Bernard Arnault, who—enamored of the company's quality, classic style,



Berluti's boutiques are appointed with comfortable club chairs (top). Artistic director Alessandro Sartori (bottom).

and whimsical touches—acquired the family-owned Parisian company in 1993. Arnault tacitly acknowledged that owning Berluti shoes is an important rite of passage for the discerning gentleman when he gave his son Antoine his first pair at age 17;



Berluti's Paris boutique (top) opened on the rue de Sévres in the same space as the 100-year-old tailor shop Arnys (bottom), through which Berluti now offers its Grande Mesure bespoke clothing service.

the young man, for his part, demonstrated his own reverence for the brand by waiting until after he had completed college to wear them—a point in time when he felt he had earned the privilege. Last year, the younger Arnault was given the opportunity to put his own stamp on the company when his father appointed him to oversee Berluti's expansion from footwear specialist to supplier of a full range of deluxe menswear.

Berluti now applies to its clothing and accessories the same level of

a topcoat, or the elegant cut of a suit—that signal that it is anything but an off-the-rack purchase. "Our client isn't a fashionista, but he also doesn't want to wear the same suit all the time," says Sartori, an Italian-born designer who honed his skills at Z Zegna before joining Berluti. Wary of trends, Sartori prefers to define his apparel through the use of exceptional fabrics (most of which are developed exclusively for the company) and extraordinary construction that enables the wearer to

move freely and comfortably yet still project a sophisticated image.

Inevitably, footwear informs the overall philosophy of the clothing's design. Sartori describes the Berluti style as "sharp, clean, and simple," but behind the brand's distinctive footwear finishes, which have the appearance of painted wood, lie grueling hours of hand layering pigments on leather and laboriously polishing the surfaces—sometimes for days. This air of artistic simplicity carries into the clothing, yet here



nuanced artisanship that has long induced clients to spend thousands of dollars on a pair of shoes or wait up to a year for bespoke footwear. While the clothes are not obviously attention grabbing, each garment possesses subtle attributes—the rich, saturated color of a cashmere jacket, for instance, the fluid line of





A handmade leather portfolio on the runway at Berluti's fall show in Paris (top). Shoes are sewn by hand at the company's Paris workshop (bottom).

too the results are illusory: What appears effortless is in fact complex in its construction. "There is a constant evolution of tailoring," says Sartori, who finds today's very narrow suits too constricting. His jackets have slightly roped shoulders and higher armholes that permit a greater range of motion and a perfect drape on the body. Fabric innovations contribute to the comfort and durability of the garments, but he eschews materials that seem too thin or flimsy to be durable and retain their shape. One of his new concepts for fall is what he calls a cashmere-wool-cashmere sandwich—a three-ply, bonded fabric that holds its form yet remains surprisingly light and pliable. In addition, he has introduced a sturdy boiled-cashmere bomber jacket with a technical membrane that makes it waterproof and windproof. "We are



using fabrics that will last forever and are functional but aren't gimmicky," he says.

In keeping with Sartori's push for modernity, the fall collection emphasizes roomier silhouettes with distinctive elements. An oversize topcoat without buttons, for example, can be worn belted or like a cape on the shoulders, while a double-faced, versatile cashmere version features a rich burgundy hue on one side and camel on the other. An otherwise classic double-breasted suit jacket is enlivened with slanted pockets—"an interesting twist," notes Sartori, "that creates a new take on menswear."

Because greater global demand for

sartorial clothing and accessories has increased the need for highly trained cobblers and tailors, two years ago LVMH purchased Arny's, a 100-year-old Parisian shop specializing in bespoke suiting. Berluti now offers its bespoke tailored clothing service known as Grande Mesure through the shop. Master tailors take 50 separate body measurements to create each client's personal paper pattern, and spend more than 75 hours sewing each suit to seamlessly fit the wearer's body and adapt to his habits of movement. Bespoke suits start at about \$9,000.

Berluti's growing number of stores—which includes new flagships in New York, Paris, London, and Tokyo—reflects not only the brand's growth

but also its evolving persona. These art-filled locations are outfitted with comfortable furniture, offbeat objects, and custom shoe-shine bars that lend the interiors a clubby ambience. "Berluti isn't just another product; we have a history, a craftsmanship, and a passion," says Sartori. "When you are in the store, you want to stay a while and enjoy the experience."

Doubtless this desire to linger explains why visitors to the London location may notice barefooted businessmen contentedly awaiting their freshly shined shoes. ■

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