

FINANCIAL TIMES

how to spend it

38-PAGE MEN'S STYLE SPECIAL



DINING WITH
BILL CLINTON,
LEONARDO DICAPRIO
& MAURICIO MACRI

THE FRIDAY EDITION APRIL 22 2016

soft focus

Category-defying soft jackets align a tailored fit with the comfort of a cardigan for a smart but laid-back aesthetic, says **Mark C O'Flaherty**



There are times when you need to boil your wardrobe down to the bare essentials: that short-haul flight for a business trip that involves an overnigher but no check-in luggage, for instance. This is when the concept of the capsule wardrobe comes into play, and the “jacket that goes with everything” is what is needed. It should be smart and comfortable, and you need to be able to squeeze it into an overhead locker and be confident it won't come out creased.

For years, Tokyo has been the place to turn for such a thing: the boiled wool and soft jersey offerings at Comme des Garçons and Yohji Yamamoto are go-tos, season after season. But recently we have seen more European luxury brands creating interesting hybrid pieces – sometimes it's difficult to categorise them as either a cardigan or a jacket. On the one hand, luxury knitwear labels are moving into tailoring; on the other, designers known for their tailoring are

Clockwise from top left:
Loro Piana cashmere and goat suede jacket, **£3,005**. **Issey Miyake** polyester pleated jacket, **£455**. **Kilgour** wool/cashmere **Stand Shawl** jacket, from **£1,900**



experimenting with softer, unstructured silhouettes. There's also a strong sportswear influence.

"We are seeing the cardigan/jacket hybrid coming through in spring/summer collections, from both avant-garde and classic labels," says Selfridges' menswear buyer Jack Cassidy. "Pieces have the look of a tailored jacket but the feel of a sweater. The shape combines formality with ease. Alongside Issey Miyake's beautifully cut jacket with pleats [£455, pictured on previous page] we have versions from British and Italian tailoring experts, including Kilgour, Oliver Spencer and Etro in high-spec fabrications with a sportswear-inflected focus on easy comfort."

At Kilgour, Carlo Brandelli is doing more than most to push the boundaries of luxury menswear. Under his direction, the Savile Row tailor has become a crucible for new-style menswear (Brandelli is a sculptor as well as a fashion designer, and heavyweight aesthetes Nick Knight and Peter Saville are part of the Kilgour inner circle). One of the brand's biggest-selling jacket shapes right now is the wool/cashmere Stand Shawl (from £1,900, pictured on previous page), which for spring now comes in a silk, open basketweave, a jersey piqué and a merino knit. It's dressy, functional and absolutely modern. "I started looking at the Nehru collar-style jacket and thinking how badly designed it has been for so many years," says Brandelli. "I raised the collar at the back, because it's natural to turn up your collar for warmth, and also the lapel, pulling it around. Tailors often cut a shawl along a ruled line, which gives a poorly proportioned shape. If you abandon that and do it freehand, as an architect would, it's more pleasing to the eye. So that's what I did."

Another successful and influential British brand embracing the hybrid jacket is Casely-Hayford (see "Best Casely scenario", page 32), designed by the father and son team of Joe and Charlie Casely-Hayford. Like Brandelli, their core offering is bespoke business suits, while the ready-to-wear collection is more directional. This season there are "completely unstructured" jackets: the Aston in navy check cotton (£580, pictured above centre) and the Koston in gingham crinkled check cotton (£635). "The sportswear details on the pieces, such as high underarm points, are hidden, so they still look formal," says Charlie.

"The soft jacket started with Giorgio Armani, truly the master of the relaxed silhouette, and has now become incorporated into nearly every menswear designer's collection," says Tom Kalendarian, executive vice president and general merchandise manager at Barneys menswear in New York. "The majority are lightweight, unlined or partially lined. We have really accelerated our offering with new brands, including

"They can be teamed with a tailored shirt for a relaxed work look or over a rollneck for a sleek evening piece"

Harris Wharf London and Barena Venezia. The latter's wool mélange sports coat [\$695, pictured top far left] is an exclusive that we sell year-round."

Harris Wharf London's aesthetic is based almost entirely on the hybrid cardigan/tailored jacket look. Its light wool blazer (£284, pictured bottom far right) for spring would be perfect for that aforementioned short-haul overnight trip, with a white shirt and chinos. "We personally test our prototypes," says Aldo Acchiardi, who designs the label with his sister Giulia. "I have worn our jackets in the desert in Rajasthan and also to a winter Alpine retreat. They feel like a cardigan, so you can travel easily in them." All are made at their grandfather's factory in Turin, with pleasing attention to detail. Many include raised seams that give them a directional edge. "It's a subtle detail," says Giulia, "but it helps shift focus to the high-quality fabrics we use."

While Harris Wharf London's approach is urban and quietly edgy, for more traditional styles in the finest woollen textiles there is no more powerful name in Italy than Loro Piana, which remains the place to go for the ultimate classic sweater jacket. This spring's incarnation comes in a variety of new styles and fabrics, including one mixing twill, cashmere and silk (£2,145) or cashmere with a suede goatskin trim (£3,005, pictured on previous page).

Back in Britain, John Smedley has long been the go-to knitwear brand for the perfect grey or black wool V- or poloneck jumper. It's a heritage label that has gently modernised but stayed true to its Derbyshire manufacturing principles and core product. The brand has, however, added the knitwear and tailoring hybrid Oxland (£299, pictured near right) to its range, in extra-fine merino wool. "It has a boxy, slightly shorter fit," says Jess McGuire-Dudley, head of design and marketing at John Smedley, "which gives it an initial point of difference from

From far left: Barena Venezia wool-mix sports coat, \$695. Casely-Hayford cotton Aston jacket, £580. Homecore cotton/Lycra Gummy Lamo jacket, £179. John Smedley Oxland merino wool, £299. Harris Wharf London boiled-wool blazer, £284

traditional tailored blazers. The 24-gauge fabric has a great fluidity, which adds a really flattering flow to the piece when worn unbuttoned. And when it's done up, it sits completely flat, so it's incredibly versatile. We've seen it teamed with a tailored shirt for a relaxed work look, and over a knitted roll-neck, making it a sleek evening piece."

This versatility makes the soft jacket a new wardrobe staple that really shows how dress codes have shifted in the past 20 to 30 years. One of the first pieces designer Alexandre Guarneri created for streetwear brand Homecore, which was launched in the 1990s, was the soft Lamo Palerm jersey jacket in 2000, which took its cues from sportswear. "The fabric was stretchable and moulded easily to the body," says Guarneri. "It was

used for tracksuits at the time, so it really made a statement. But now it's something of a classic, and most people don't even think about that aspect." A variety of new pieces (example pictured near left, £179) are on the racks of Dover Street Market in its new London location on Haymarket. As Guarneri points out, whereas once creating a tailored jacket out of jersey would have been seen as avant-garde, now it's just sensible. ➔

COMFORT ZONE

Barena Venezia, www.barenaveneziam.com and see Barneys. **Barneys**, 660 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10065 (+1212-826 8900; www.barneys.com) and branches. **Casely-Hayford**, www.casely-hayford.com and see Dover Street Market, Mr Porter and Selfridges. **Dover Street Market**, 18-22 Haymarket, London SW1 (020-7518 0680; www.doverstreetmarket.com). **Farfetch**, www.farfetch.com. **Harris Wharf London**, 19 Camden Passage, London N1 (020-7243 8194; www.harriswharflondon.co.uk) and see Barneys, Dover Street Market and Farfetch. **Homecore**, 9 Rue de Marseille, Paris 75010 (+339-8625 3408; www.homecore.com) and see Dover Street Market. **Issey Miyake**, 10 Brook Street, London W1 (020-7851 4620; www.isseymiyake.com) and see Selfridges. **John Smedley**, 24 Brook Street, London W1 (020-7495 2222; www.johnsmedley.com). **Kilgour**, 5 Savile Row, London W1 (020-3283 8941; www.kilgour.com) and see Mr Porter. **Loro Piana**, 47-48 Sloane Street, London SW1 (020-7235 3203; www.loropiana.com). **Mr Porter**, www.mrporter.com. **Selfridges**, 400 Oxford Street, London W1 (0800-123 400; www.selfridges.com).

