

September / 2016

LUXURY



MEN'S
STYLE
SPECIAL

The Empire Builder:
How Farfetch founder José Neves
is politely reinventing the boutique
for the digital age

The Telegraph

You'd be forgiven for thinking that the term 'stealth wealth' first appeared shortly after the fall of Lehman Brothers and the start of the global financial crisis - a necessary hold-step for the still-successful keen not to inflame envy in others. In fact it was born at the height of the go-go noughties, when bling finally replaced heritage or rarity (henceforth known as 'brand equity') as the most important factor in choosing an item or outfit. Stealth wealth was the response of all those who wished to appear a little more under the wire; well breached, sure, but able to demonstrate this fact subtly with a series of nuanced choices in their personal armour only recognisable to those fellow travellers curious about matters of taste and style.

The concept of stealth style is considerably older of course, rooted in the outwardly reasonable, yet inwardly ratifying world of bespoke; literally 'bespoken' for clothes exclusively designed for the individual. Savile Row pioneered suiting that pronounced little of its good breeding in its choice of cloth or cut, preferring to let the little details betray its rarefied status: a subtle nipping in at the waist, or the slight bellowing of a lapel is all it might take to denote a customer of 'The Row'.

Today these house codes are being pushed further, to produce a wardrobe that sits remarkably well within the context of contemporary clothing, but maintains its aloof (yet never reproachful) distance from the high street. How? By using signifiers readily identifiable to those in the know. Carlo Brandelli at Kilgour has long pioneered this approach, first with his classic unstructured collections identified more often than not by the presence of polka-dot linings, and now

Knowing Looks

STYLE NOTES

The construction of a shoulder, the closure of a jacket, the buttons on a cuff... Today's signifiers of style are stealthy to the point of silence and only identifiable to those in the know

Words: Bill Prince

with a series of lapel designs that indicate the wearer is part of a Kilgour tribe (the close of a jacket even creates a subtle 'K' for all - or at least all those aware of its resonance - to see).

If stealth style is the means by which uberluxury tribes recognise one another, then a particular mode of dressing is the manner in which each differentiates itself from the other by adopting a particular set of rules. The unifying factor, however, remains the way that individual house codes have been repatriated by each tribe into its own silent uniform, identifiable at a priority-boarding queue at any world city airport. But which tribe do you identify with?

Stealth style is the means by which uberluxury tribes recognise one another

Sharp Suitor

This does what it says on the tin: a single, or double-breasted two or three-piece that marks out the wearer as an adherent of a house on Savile Row (and its surrounding streets). The details reveal exactly which: is it the loose-fitting, soft-shouldered style of Anderson and Sheppard, or the modernist-derived Kilgour silhouette? Or perhaps it's the signature one-button design of Huntsman? It's a sartorial semaphore taken through the shirting (perhaps the three-button barrel cuff that whispers Turnbull & Asser), ties (readily identifiable in the minuscule, repeated motifs to be found at Hermès, although true stealth advocates Charvet), or shoes. Here you will spot the characteristic bezel toe of a G. J. Cleverley, similarly recognisable by the convex, 'fiddle-back' waist at the heel of its chestnut sole, the corner edge of which is discreetly sheared off.

Right: the signature 'fiddle-back' detail of a G. J. Cleverley Derby shoe, 1995; gicleverley.co.uk
Far right: The 'K' closing detail of a baby alpaca wool Kilgour jacket, £1,900; kilgour.com

