

*“Men wear a suit because it’s the gear
of the gentleman the world over.”*

*Hardy Amies, *The Englishman’s Suit**



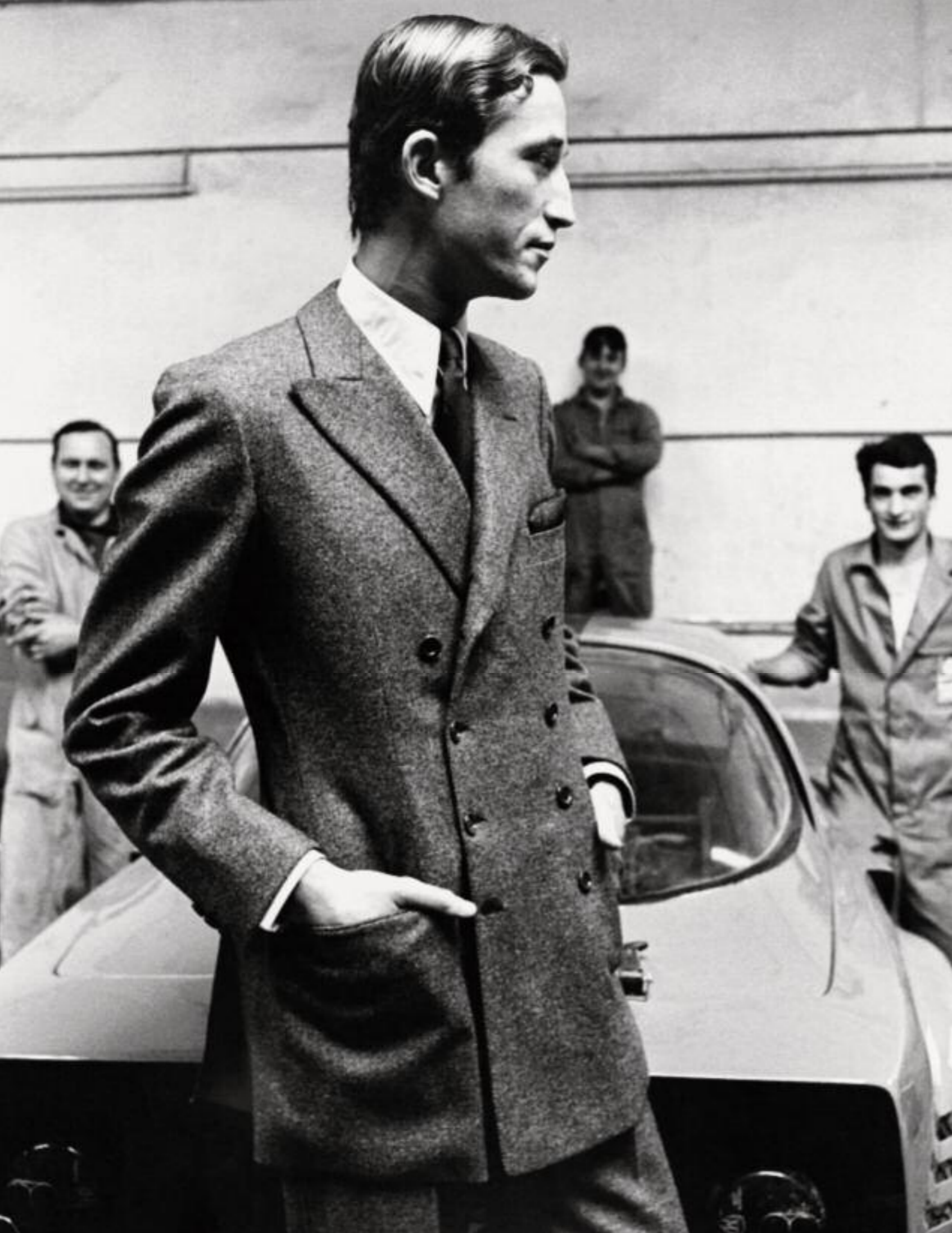
SHARP SUITS

Eric Musgrave

Foreword by Richard James



PAVILION



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Cover: (Front) From 1966, this high-fastening six-button suit by Ted Lapidus, worn with all the right accessories for a gentleman, displays the passion of Paris. (Back) Cary Grant radiates class in a 1940s double-breasted suit.

Endpapers: Scenes from the Brioni hand-tailoring workshop in Penne, Italy.

Page 2: Steve McQueen reaches the pinnacle of style in *The Thomas Crown Affair* in 1968. His fabulous suits for the movie were styled by London showbiz

tailor Douglas Hayward. Usually a casual dresser, McQueen wore the suits for several weeks before filming began to get used to the feel of fine tailoring.

Left: It takes a lot of height and a lot of personal style to carry off an eight-button double-breasted suit, no matter how well cut. Spanish nobleman Don Jaime de Mesia Figueroa shows us how it's done while striking a pose next to his Matra sports car in about 1967. The photographer was Patrick, Lord Lichfield.

Foreword

Like most men of my age, my attitude to suits has changed over the years and I have all sorts of memories of the ones I've owned. I remember my father, an oil salesman in the West Country of England, always wore a dark suit from Burton's. All the suits were dark in those days. Around 1970, when I was about seventeen, I got my first suit, a hand-me-down from my Uncle Jack, who was an interior designer in London, which was a very exotic job. It was a pale grey suit from Daks and, living in Bristol, I'd never seen a pale grey suit before.

When I was at Brighton Art College in the 1970s, I might wear a suit to attend a wedding, but like everyone else, I was more likely to be in loon pants and a scoop-neck T-shirt. After college I wanted to be a fashion photographer, so, to get into the fashion business, I started working in the menswear department of Browns, the hugely influential boutique on London's South Molton Street. Suddenly I was travelling the world as a buyer and surrounded by fabulous clothes. I remember in 1982 being given a wonderful three-piece, reddish brown suit in satin by the brilliant Italian designer Walter Albini. It was great, but I never wore it.

I went to the early Armani and Versace menswear catwalk shows in the 1980s. Armani was fantastic. Even though we didn't realise it at the time, he changed the face of men's fashion for ever. After Armani, rather than fathers introducing their sons to their tailors in Savile Row, the sons were introducing their fathers to Armani.

I wore Armani for years, along with other Italian labels such as Basile and Cerruti, and then the Japanese label Comme des Garçons.

I was never into sportswear fashion or streetwear. When I started my own business in the late 1980s with my business partner Sean Dixon, we began with a belief in classic clothes. We took a tiny shop at 37a Savile Row in 1992, at a time when big international fashion labels like Gucci and Yohji Yamamoto were dominant. But our approach was to be different, to be English and to be a little eccentric. Men who were wearing our clothes, bespoke or ready-made, were noticed and complimented. We started a trend in which men wore clothes because they fitted well and looked good, not because of the label in the jacket.

We soon earned a reputation for our suits because we thought about them and what they should do. A good suit makes you look better, move better and feel better. We became recognised for making classic suits that were flattering. Our success enabled us to move to our large shop on Savile Row in 1994 and add our bespoke shop across the road on Clifford Street in 2000. We are now really well-known for our tailoring, and, as a designer, I see my suits always evolving. Classic doesn't stay classic very long.

As *Sharp Suits* illustrates so wonderfully, suits as we know them today have continuously evolved for well over a hundred years. I really enjoyed seeing so many great, stylish photographs of suits in the book, many of which I hadn't seen before. It is interesting to note how many of the vintage suits look modern. I also learned a lot about the history of suits that I didn't know. I'm sure that anyone who enjoys suits will enjoy *Sharp Suits*. This is a lovely book.

Richard James
Savile Row, London, 2009



Introduction

If clothes maketh the man, then the most masculine outfit of them all is the suit. Oh, how well a man can express himself – and impress others – with his suit! *Sharp Suits* is a celebration of a century or so of marvellous tailoring and the men (and occasionally women) who produced it and wore it.

About three metres of fabric, some clever unseen internal shaping elements, lining, buttons and several metres of thread are the simple raw materials that are required to produce the jacket-and-trouser combination (enhanced, in its most sublime form, by a waistcoat) that will be seen wherever men gather, from boardrooms to bawdy bars.

The suit is versatile. When a man wants to look anonymous, he can wear a suit. When he wants to be noticed by his peers or a prospective mate, he can wear a different suit. On every continent, the sober suit is the chosen dress code of presidents and diplomats, business leaders and lawmakers. At its most classic, the suit embodies respectability. Yet it also provides effective camouflage. Not everyone who puts on the uniform of a gentleman *is* a gentleman. Some of the most notorious villains on the planet have been renowned for the quality of their tailoring.

As the bedrock of a stylish man's appearance, a suit defines what his shirt and tie, even his shoes, will look like. Despite the greater acceptance of casualwear as everyday apparel, the suit remains the universal choice of those who want to dress for success. It is a masculine status symbol, especially in the true bespoke version, hand-tailored by artisans using methods that have changed little in a hundred years. Most men today buy ready-made, 'off-the-peg' suits and the excellence of the best of these has never been higher, the result of more than a century of refinements in production methods and fabric quality.

So many subtle nuances make the suit a quite amazing piece of three-dimensional design and engineering. How does the shoulder of the jacket fit? How deep is the armhole? How much 'fullness' is there in the chest? Is the waist defined? Single-breasted or double-breasted? How many buttons? Wide lapels or narrow lapels? Peaked lapels or notched lapels? Flapped pockets or patch pockets or jetted pockets? Flat-fronted trousers or pleated trousers? Wide leg or narrow leg? Turn-ups or no turn-ups?

The suit offers endless stylistic possibilities before we even start to factor in that most essential ingredient, the fabric itself – fine wool or heavier wool, cotton, linen, silk, mohair, polyester mixes, velvet, corduroy, stretch fabrics, jacquard weaves, 'performance fabrics', stripes, checks ... And so the list goes on. Who now can dare say that the suit is boring?

The chapters in *Sharp Suits* are not an exhaustive history of the suit, but rather eight separate essays on aspects of the outfit and its rich heritage. Retro or modern, bold or discreet, the suit remains the ultimate centrepiece of a stylish man's wardrobe. Movie stars and rock stars, heroes and villains, philanthropists and gangsters – all these men and millions more know that suits will suit them very well.

Eric Musgrave

Right: Careful, you could cut yourself on those lapels. A study in English bespoke tailoring expertise from about 1956. Alas, the creator has not been recorded on the photograph, but he certainly knew how to use a covered button and a jetted pocket.





“A man should look as if he had bought his clothes with intelligence, put them on with care and then forgotten all about them.”

Hardy Amies, *An ABC of Men's Fashion*

Above: In Tokyo in June 1966, Paul McCartney samples some local tailoring skills in an idiosyncratic suit with strong naval or frock-coat overtones. A ten-button double-breasted jacket is a rare treat indeed. Compare this one to the white option on page 16.

Left: The British aristocrat at rest: Robin Sinclair, 2nd Viscount Thurso, wears his splendid Aquascutum suit well in about 1985, as he brings a sporting look into the lounge. And with a check that bold, it's no wonder the whippet looks startled.