

# Belle Of The Bespoke

**One couture connoisseur tells us about her passion for retro tailoring and a desire to get her measuring tape around a certain Mr James Corden....**

By Amanda Nicholls

Let me introduce you to a woman boldly dipping her toe into the pool of couture with her first UK venture, comprising a collection of beautifully cut bespoke shirts and a superb service to boot. AG Bespoke Couture has thrust itself onto the fashion scene with aplomb and with 28 year old, South-African born Anoesjcka de'Lorenzo at the helm, as face of the enterprise and brains behind it, the company has certainly made an arresting entrance.

"When I met Mr Armani I didn't realise how fortunate I was and how that meeting would change my life. There is still a part of me that is awestruck; I look at him with admiration and respect for what he has achieved", says Anoesjcka. "The more my company grows, the more awestruck I become, actually. When you begin, you take chances and you are fearless, as you have nothing to lose". It is Mr Armani's advice that she has found most valuable: "He told me to start with one thing only and make sure to do it well before doing anything else. So, for the moment we are focusing on shirts, but we have the bigger picture in mind and would love to branch out into the entire corporate wardrobe."

She's clearly found her niche in the high-fashion landscape; shrewdly choosing to concentrate first on the staple item of every professional. It does seem harder to find a well-cut shirt these days; Anoesjcka agrees that high-street stores have compromised on quality in recent times in order to broaden and maximise production. "We all want to keep up with fashion and express our individuality at a cost we can afford, but we should not make the mistake of buying something we can only wear once".

Anoesjcka believes the biggest compromise has been on fit and feels standardised garments prioritising frills and bows at the expense of the basic cut, do not flatter the female frame. She describes her approach as a hybrid of classic style and solid, quality tailoring; conveying true craftsmanship. There is much European influence in each garment; shirts are handmade in Italy with French tailoring techniques. With all the work that goes into one piece, purchasing an AG Bespoke Couture shirt is undoubtedly an investment. Since the recession, de'Lorenzo says she has noticed a change in the way people buy high-fashion. However, she feels the majority of her target market still appreciate quality over quantity and consequently, prefer to buy from AG over companies that mass-produce.

Another major focus for the brand revolves around the idea of empowering women in the work place. According to the impressive South African, this is still a problematic issue in the majority of working

environments. She believes the way women dress impacts on their confidence and in turn, affects success in the work place. While the Straight & Curvy range aims to make women feel beautiful, the classic style with defined collar and cuffs adds strength and professionalism to the look.

She also appreciates the difficulty in maintaining a good working wardrobe and feels her shirts complement many outfits, moving effortlessly from day to evening wear. For her, it is the focus on women's body shapes, at long last, that is most exciting in fashion at the moment. "We are being educated on what we can wear, but the standard block sizes of the industry still need to change.

In terms of design, the recession has helped designers focus on creating pieces women can actually wear, rather than works of art for the catwalk. We are back to basics and I love the minimalist approach". However, Anoesjcka points out that tailoring for men is just as important. "A good tailor can trick



the eye and change the appearance of a man's physique by using skilful tricks and cuts. It requires a combination of several techniques and an intense study of the human body!"

Already she's secured the confidence of royal bank Coutts & Co and benefited from a few of their coveted commercial tips. Like Mr Armani, they have recognised the potential in this blonde bombshell with a bright business head. The emphasis on the bespoke, integral to the brand's marketing, has also helped de'Lorenzo gain a corporate and celebrity clientele, all keen to get their hands on her smart threads.

I wonder who might be her next celebrity project. She confesses her love for sleek tailoring and salutes A-listers like Kate Moss. "I love it when she steps out in a tailored suit. Nothing can be sexier. I also admire the understated elegance of France's first lady, Carla Bruni. My dream project is to be James Bond's shirt-maker but I would love getting my measuring tape around James Corden. That would be a very funny experience and I think he would look fantastic in one of my shirts."

Anoesjcka's catalogue of contacts includes Harold Tillman, owner of Jaeger, whom she has her eye on to collaborate with someday. "He's definitely the best-dressed man in

town and his knack for the fashion business is phenomenal. He has given me great advice over the years and always has time for everyone", she says fondly, highlighting a rare quality in this fast-paced industry. "I would also love to work with Chanel and learn their fundamentals. Karl Lagerfeld knows every curve in a woman's body".

Evidently a natural in front of the camera herself, I wonder whether de'Lorenzo prefers being in the spotlight or behind the scenes. With a smile, she reveals that as a model and trained actress, she's not the least bit camera shy. Although, her main reason for modelling the collection has, of course, smart business logic behind it. As the face of the brand, customers are able to see her confidence in the product she is promoting. "I do not want to be a brand delivering pieces that people cannot relate to. I want customers to be comfortable giving their opinions, so we can constantly improve my designs".

On vanity sizing and the size zero debate still raging in the fashion world, de'Lorenzo has clear views. As the name of her women's collection suggests, she feels the variety of the female shape is something to be celebrated. "I think we need to be open-minded about this issue. It may affect a minority, but if someone's daughter dies of anorexia because she wanted to be like her

icon, or if children grow up thinking they will only make it if they are thin, then we have a huge problem. My sister had this illness so I understand the implications it has on loved ones. Eat, exercise and be happy!"

This is a woman with a wise head on her young shoulders. In fact, many of Anoesjcka's incisive attitudes seem to hark back to those of previous decades, including her thoughts on tailoring style. I ask her what her favourite bygone era is, in terms of fashion. 'The fifties for sure; especially Italian fifties glamour. Men's tailoring was sharp and clean-cut and Chanel showed women how to create their own waist, as high or low as they wanted, by means of a belt. So, whether you had an easy or difficult figure, you were in control. Women oozed confidence because they were comfortable in their own skin. After that, I think relaxed shaping and mass production took over."

Anoesjcka de'Lorenzo plans to expand her empire beyond the Regents Park Road store and is currently in talks with House of Fraser to make her shirts available to a wider audience. 'Our female clients can now e-mail us their measurements and we will deliver their shirt right to the office. Soon, you will see the AG team running all over London delivering boxes wrapped in bows. It will seem like Christmas everyday". It certainly is refreshing to see a young company putting quality at the centre of tailoring policy. As is de'Lorenzo's enthusiasm for creating styles to suit a range of shapes, rather than one generic cut that only flatters its coat-hanger.

Her greatest challenge so far? Being a little fish in a big pond...with the occasional shark! She's learned a lot during her meteoric rise to success and perhaps the most in fashion's capital, Milan. There, she discovered the difference between fashion and style and realised that a confident, stylish woman will never be out of fashion. That and to beware of the Italian charm...

For more information, visit  
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