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MEN'S WEAR

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ITALY'S BEST-KEPT SECRETS

THE MOST
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TAILORS
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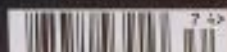
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THE ITALIAN JOB

DISCOVER ITALY'S SARTI, THE AMAZING TAILORS WHO
CREATE ONE-OF-A-KIND CLOTHING WITH SINGULAR STYLE
AND CRAFTSMANSHIP. THEY KNOW WHAT SUITS YOU BEST.

BY COURTNEY COLAVITA / PHOTOS BY DAVE YODER

On a recent Sunday evening in the Northern Italian city of Turin, Alessandro Martonetti, a stylish young tailor, received an urgent phone call from a businessman in Kazakhstan. His request was simple: a new wardrobe.

Martonetti, who had grown up spending summers in London with his uncle, a tailor on the Upper East Side, packed his Louis Vuitton Clémence trolley with hundreds of swatches and flew the next morning to Astana for a fitting with his new client. Two days later he returned to his Turin atelier with an order for 40 hand-made suits.

His Kazakh client, like so many men across the globe today, could have bought a suit from a myriad of instantly recognizable luxury labels, but he opted instead for a highly personal one.

To a growing number of sup-rich affluent men, true luxury translates to extremely rare, or one-of-a-kind. They no longer question whether they can afford it; they just want to know where they can find it. And when it comes to tailored clothing that exclusivity isn't often found on the busy metal streets of the world's capitals, it is tucked away in the small, uncelebrated sartorial or tailor workshops that dot the map of Italy.

Esoteric dressing has roots that go back centuries, but in Italy it remains a dynamic part of contemporary life. The art may lack the widespread recognition of global luxury brands, and their output—typically limited to several hundred suits a year—is relatively meager, but that's one of the reasons for their appeal.

From grand masters like Domenico Bombino, 84,



Domenico Bombino and Count Federico Ceschi: Santa Croce, Milan

STYLE Bombino favors "a traditional, conservative look, never straying too far from the classic line." Ceschi is more of an "old-school" dresser, favoring "well-tailored, well-made suits."

INTERIORS Bombino likes "classic and traditional" interiors, while Ceschi is more of a "modernist." He says, "I like to mix old and new, with a touch of '70s and '80s." He also likes "contemporary art."

CLUBS TO GO Bombino likes "the classic, traditional clubs, like the Club de Golf de Capri, the Club de Golf de Capri, the Club de Golf de Capri." Ceschi likes "the modern, contemporary clubs, like the Club de Golf de Capri, the Club de Golf de Capri, the Club de Golf de Capri."

WEDDING PRICES Bombino's wedding cost \$100,000. Ceschi's wedding cost \$150,000. They both say they were "very happy" with the results.

to new-generation takers like Martorano, 35. These tailor-craftsmen who truly care about personal style. And their craft—cutting and manipulating fabric to the shape of one individual—depends so much on instinct as it does on training.

As a result, Italian tailors are often better at showing than they are at telling. Questions that require quantifiable answers—like how many hours does it take to make a suit or how many stitches are needed to attach a sleeve—are better left unasked. The tailor's mind is sharp but not analytical in the conventional sense. He would never debate his work by reducing it to numerical facts and figures.

"Every suit is really a test," says Ceschi, an expert Neapolitan craftsman who has been making the city's classic soft-shouldered suit for more than 40 years. "Every time I make a suit it is like the first time... I can't really explain it."

It is easy, the process—which starts with the all-important cut, followed by several fittings, and lots of stitches, a fierce pressing and countless trade secrets, sometimes involving a damn spoon—may defy words, but the results do not.

Carla's Buccarello, curator of contemporary art at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, recently commissioned a lightweight summer suit by Solito. "It's cliché to say it, but it fit like a glove—and felt like a glove. It was really remarkable." Buccarello says, using the Italian word for soft. "Giovanni was able to give me a silhouette that was really fitted and, at the same time, absolutely comfortable. In a way it was life-changing."

The British were first to lay claim to the tradition of bespoke tailoring, but the Italians mastered it, then refined it, and today they continue to exercise it in remarkable precision.

Although Italian tailors had from various parts of the country—Abruzzo, Naples or Puglia, among other regions—they have made it their own. They look to the word "fabulous" (perfecting it, talk in terms of "style.") They seem to be rigorous, charismatic and thoroughly obsessed with their craft.

"I wake up in the middle of the night thinking about the stitch I need to make the next day to finish a jacket," Solito says, laughing, though he's clearly quite serious.

Those over the age of 50 share similar backgrounds. Most started young—very young. Bombino, head tailor at the storied N.H. Barberis in Milan, began stitching at age nine. Solito, at 10; Rosario Ferrarini, a Palermo-based tailor, at 11. All three men endured years of meticulous training, often at the hands of strict, no-nonsense masters.

Solito's father, also a tailor, made him practice row upon row of microscopic stitches. As boys, all three men would bed every night with an index finger and loop. The leading, angled machine the proper way to hold a needle and thread.

"If you don't know how to work a thimble, you're done," Ferrarini says.

"Before you can begin to sew, you need to spend lots and lots of time at a workshop watching and observing and learning," says Domenico Ceschi, boss of Ferrarini's or otherwise at his well-appointed shop in Rome, just down the street from the Vatican.

For Italians, tailoring is not a job—it's a calling.