

FASHION FUTURES

For this month's Fashion Futures, Karen Alberg and I decided to split up the writing. Comparing notes, we discovered we'd both chosen to cover an emerging jewelry brand and a young custom tailor.

In the current menswear zeitgeist for a reason, men's jewelry (from pearls and beads to signet rings) is more popular than ever. As a new generation discovers the self-expression of custom clothing, existing bespoke customers seek something new to enliven their wardrobes. - Michael Macko



HEADED TO BOOT CAMP

Standing toe-to-toe with sneakerheads in their passion for product, boot enthusiasts share an obsession for seeking out exceptional materials and superlative craftsmanship. Like coffee or fine wine, this group is dedicated to seeking out both the artisanal and the esoteric. On two crisp fall days at Brooklyn, New York's Industry City complex, a gathering of fine footwear makers and their fans came together for Stitchdown's Boot Camp, a celebration of all things boot-iful. Stitchdown is "an independently owned, passion driven media company devoted to cultivating community via a shared love of fantastic leather footwear." Ben Robinson, founder and editor-in-chief of the Stitchdown website, leads the group.

Although consumer-facing, Boot Camp itself was set up much like a trade show, including setups from the iconic Horween leather company, Detroit's College for Creative Studies (with a shoe making program), and around 15 of the very best boot and shoemakers from the United States, Canada, Spain, Italy, the U.K., Guatemala and more. Besides the opportunity to meet the actual bootmakers and try on boots you might otherwise only see online, there were also boot making demonstrations and a sample sale. Two panel discussions and an after-party at Big Alice Brewery rounded out the days. For more information about Stitchdown's next events, see Stitchdown.com or follow @stitchdownbootcamp on Instagram. —JRJ

BEAD READ: AUTHENTIC, SUSTAINABLE, STYLISH

Stephen Sotnick has long been a celebrated artist and menswear designer. His brand new venture, a collaboration with menswear veteran David Rush, is much more than fabulous jewelry. Says Sotnick, "The look is contemporary, but the beads are not. They're old trade beads: Ghanaian, Ethiopian, Yemen, Cameroonian, Venetian, Bohemian, French, Moroccan, and Indian. Some of the Bohemian beads come from companies more than 500 years old in what is now the Czech Republic. The American Indians used them..."

These authentic trade beads can be 50 to 5,000 years old. The more modern beads, 50 to 100 years old, are universally traded for their beauty. In both categories, each necklace/bracelet is distinctive and gender-neutral, adding much personality to the elevated casual wardrobes now dominating the fashion scene.

Suggested retails on finished pieces run about \$150 to \$250 for limited edition necklaces and \$65 to \$95 for the bracelets. For more information: Drush0117@gmail.com.



PAOLO MARTONARO: A RISING STAR AT 31

"I've never met anyone at any age with Paolo's knowledge of fine tailoring," says clothing aficionado Tom Mastronardi about the young man to whom he's just introduced me. We're in Paolo's intimate 57th Street NYC studio, surrounded by an assortment of the finest fabrics in the world. Paolo's parents are both therapists, but his grandparents were tailors so it's safe to say that Bespoke clothing is in his DNA.

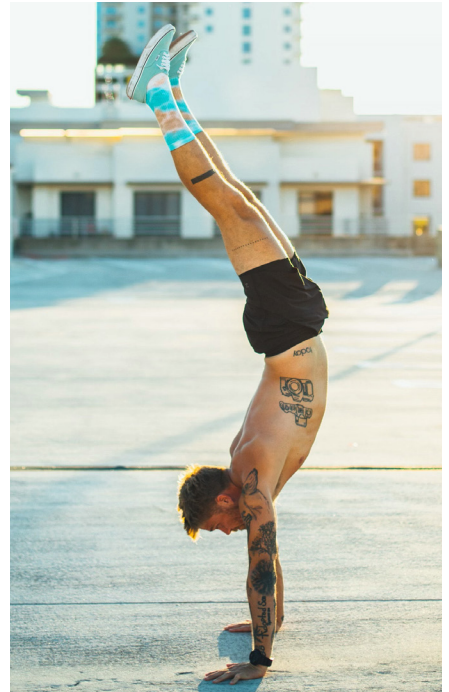
His career began interning with Alan Flusser, where he learned the clothing business stitch by stitch (and devoured cover to cover Flusser's *Dressing the Man*). He then put his skills to work at Paul Stuart and Dunhill. Six years ago, at age 25, he dared to venture out on his own.

Paolo's describes his take on Bespoke as "New York Refined." This involves a very soft shoulder that he developed about a year ago, still padded but razor-thin—about an eighth of an inch. He eschews the no-shoulder look, insisting that Bespoke clothing needs structure, as do most men. He champions a sloped shoulder and natural fibers, showing me a range of garments in luxury fabrics from a super soft 16-ounce lambswool to a seven-ounce Loro Piana silk/wool denim.

"Young customers choosing bespoke are looking for conservative elegance," he explains. "Most go very traditional: three-button or double-breasted, side vents, braces, pleated trousers. A classic navy blazer is often the first item I make for them."

His customers range in age from 30s to 80s (not many 20-somethings can afford the \$7500 opening price tag). Most discover him via personal referrals or social media and have fully vetted him before contact. (Renowned actor George Hamilton reached out to him on Instagram.) "Customers come for the experience of working with Paolo," affirms marketing guru Mastronardi. "In addition to his technical expertise and taste level, he's one of the nicest guys in the business."

While most transactions start in his studio, Paolo often meets with customers where they live: Palm Beach, Beverly Hills, Houston, Boston. "I never ship the first try-on: I deliver it in person so I can better get to know the client. Once that happens, the process is pure magic."



TIE DYE FANTASIES

When your sales floors start looking a bit dark and dreary post-holiday season, brighten them up with a basket or two of colorful, gender-neutral, hand-dyed cotton socks. Machine-washable, (with similar colors, turn inside out), these made-in-America impulse items (\$28 suggested retail) created by By My Grace are sure to ring registers just when you need it most. These socks are designed to match back to the latest sneakers, slides and loafers of the season, available in a large array of colors.

Fashion and fitness exec Ali Grace Kolbe (with a little help from her mom, Grace Kolbe) started the Brand in 2019 tie-dyeing socks in the basement of her East Village apartment. She now works with master dyers to create high fashion elevated tie dye socks and athleisure wear. Retailers including SoulCycle, Blink Fitness, Free People and better specialty boutiques have picked up on By My Grace, a female founded brand out of New York City.

Check it all out at [@by.mygrace](#) + [www.bymygrace.com](#) —KAG



FOR MEN NOT AFRAID TO COMMIT

Recently invited to attend a pop-up for Banter, a division of Piercing Pagoda, I was pleasantly surprised to learn that men are bringing girlfriends, daughters, partners and bffs to have 14K gold chains permanently sealed around their wrists.

This Banter pop-up was held in a bright orange, vintage VW bug wagon that would look more at home parked outside Coachella than across from The Soho Grand on West Broadway. The van and canopy were decked out with the faux grass, vines and flowers currently covering the entrances of all the cools downtown stores. Water and treats were offered, giving a cool picnic vibe while waiting.

While waiting my turn, I chatted with Nicole Weber, District Manager of Banter Dallas, who flew up to oversee this event. She told me that more men, both single and in couples, are getting matching permanent jewelry. Couples are treating it as the new friendship ring, solidifying a budding relationship.

The first image that came to my mind was Jennifer Beals from Flashdance, acetylene torch in one hand, gold bar in the other, melting a teeny-tiny drop of gold onto the chain on my wrist. The reality is that it's all done with an electric charge to the gold, which creates a tiny, but very bright spark that can only be viewed with goggles or through a shield.

The whole experience is fun, made even more enjoyable by the Banter team, on hand to answer any questions. While they currently offer only bracelets and anklets, (\$80-\$160 retail), they're working on a technique to safely weld necklaces. If your chain accidentally breaks, Banter will weld it back for a nominal fee. Should the relationship falter, they're happy to add a clasp.

For a great event to host at your store: <https://www.banter.com/contact-banter>