

Why sustainable menswear is never out of style

These brands have maintained integrity in a fashion world that's increasingly unsustainable.

BY EMILIE HAWTIN
August 10, 2020 9:00 AM EDT



Manchester, England's Private White V.C. specializes in locally woven cotton, as with this rainproof jacket in Ventile. Courtesy of Private White V.C.

COURTESY OF PRIVATE WHITE V.C.

Sustaining things over time is one of life's great joys: relationships, good health, suit measurements. Now more than ever is the time to reflect on what we have and maintain fewer, better things. The most admired chefs of our time, from Alice Waters to Eric Ripert to Dan Barber, compose seemingly simple dishes of impeccably sourced food that support an entire ecosystem. An indulgent meal at Barber's flagship restaurant Blue Hill at Stone Barns captures this perfectly: It's natural food on the highest level, sourced from the farm that is right outside.

We pay increasing amounts of attention to the sourcing of our food, but what about our attire? The ethos of farm-to-table dining mirrors one that is generations old but still practiced by a coterie of designers, tailors, and fabric mills who are fighting the good fight against the problematic manufacturing of fast fashion. These brands achieve sustainable style in its truest form: with respect for everyone, and everything, in the process. Aesthetics are at their height. Integrity is a given. And while sport coats, cashmere knits, bomber jackets, and made-to-measure trousers may be unassuming contenders for the future of clothing, many pioneering small brands around the world are quietly redefining it.

The two are based in Manchester, England, in the same building where Private White V.C. began as a raincoat factory 150 years ago. Now they evolve an archive of 11,000 patterns and specs into modern classics for their London shop and with a rotation of collaborators including online clothing destinations Mr Porter and Permanent Style.



Racing green cotton-nylon vest (\$795), glen check tweed jacket (\$1,415), and "fun" Oxford (\$235) by Drake's.

COURTESY OF JOHN SPINKS

"We still weave our own cotton in Lancashire," says Stoll—the same source used for the jacket linings that kept pilots warm in World War II. Sixty percent of Stoll's textiles come from within 50 miles of his design shop in Manchester. "Our team improves garments with a gentle nudge," Stoll says. He keeps things natural and local with the exception of a seasonal highlight from Loro Piana, an Italian firm specializing in cashmere. Despite its heritage, Private White V.C. brings a refreshingly cool approach to every belted safari jacket, summer bomber, and linen shacket. The ideal, Stoll says, is for people to buy seven items over seven years—slowly and over time.

"We still weave our own cotton in Lancashire," says Mike Stoll—the same source used for the jacket linings that kept pilots warm in World War II. Sixty percent of Stoll's textiles come from within 50 miles of his design shop in Manchester.

Michael Hill is a world-class host. It's no surprise that as its creative director he's evolved **Drake's**—a brand that captures Britishness in the same way [Ralph Lauren](#) taps into Americana—from a well-respected tie and scarf maker into a red-hot menswear brand. All while preserving long-term relationships established by founder Michael Drake. That's exactly what Hill is in it for. "To be in it for the long run," he says, "we need to work with specialists whose product continues to stand the test of time." Drake's has two of its own factories in East London, where it's been since the 1970s. Its partner suppliers are nearly all family-owned enterprises with a rich history in their specialty, from printing near Manchester to indigo dyeing in Okayama, Japan. "In so many cases we've stuck by each other, right now more than ever. You want to work with people who love what they do and are dedicated to that."



Stöffa's asymmetric jacket in plongé leather. (\$2,200).

COURTESY OF STÖFFA

Stöffa founders Agyesh Madan and Nick Ragosta do a lot to make less and do it well. The young duo keep things simple. They launched with three outerwear styles and two fabrics, a precise offering they have maintained for nearly two years. Their made-to-measure, made-to-order approach is beloved by the discerning creative set they dress. It applies the exacting style they developed while making tailored suits at Neapolitan label Isaia to refined clothes customized for clients' more casual endeavors. Their prevailing sensitivity to water usage and traceability from the makers they work with—all based in Italy—give them the confidence to produce less and originate more. It also builds the trust of those who wear Stöffa. "We thought it was a better way and made a difference in the enjoyment of clothes," Ragosta says. "Real luxury is about the most personal things and the specialness of materials. It's working with smaller mills and creating unique fabrics." The fabrics are highly specialized and edited, in naturally dyed colors that sit well together in a wardrobe. This helps clients feel confident when choosing their custom shirt jacket or a woven scarf that was knit on century-old looms. Whether it's during a visit to Stöffa's artful showroom or through principled collaborators like Drake's, there's an unspoken certainty each brand conveys—the kind you feel with a seasoned sommelier.



Patterns for Stöffa's wool-based products, which are made in Biella, Italy.

COURTESY OF STÖFFA

"In order to make a delicious meal we need the best possible ingredients," says Matteo Bozzalla of Valstar. The brand's sartorial approach to handmade outerwear has earned it a place in the wardrobes of elegantly understated men. For Bozzalla, sustainability means respect: for raw materials, for mills, for current and future generations. Circular production of natural fabrics is cemented in Valstar's process. While few heritage brands feel so modern, it's a quality he attributes to mixing older, experienced craftsmen with a younger generation of designers to bring the excellence his clients and family expect. His enduring recipe is undoubtedly a successful one, prepared thoughtfully and without a rush.

A version of this article appears in the [August/September 2020 issue](#) of Fortune with the headline "Fewer, finer."