



THE LOVE LONDON GUIDE N. 008

Savile Row Tailoring

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The name itself is a measure of time: a true bespoke Savile Row suit is cut from a paper pattern drafted for one body alone, sewn largely by hand, and typically built across three or more fittings over many weeks. The street in Mayfair has dressed admirals, prime ministers and film stars, and the word "bespoke" is said to come from cloth being "spoken for" by a single customer. The tailoring houses here still cut and sew on the premises, often in basement workrooms below the shop floor. This is Guide 008 in The Love London Guide series.

Where the Street Is and How It Began

Savile Row runs for a few hundred yards through Mayfair, parallel to Regent Street, on land developed by the Earl of Burlington in the early 1730s. Tailors began arriving at the end of the eighteenth century, drawn by the wealthy residents and the nearby military clubs. [Henry Poole & Co](#), widely credited as the founder of the

Row's reputation, opened its back entrance onto the street in 1846 and is traditionally said to have created the first dinner jacket for the then Prince of Wales. Many of the houses hold or have held royal warrants, and the street's long association with military uniforms and court dress shaped the structured, formal cut it became known for.

What "Bespoke" Actually Means

Bespoke on Savile Row means an individual paper pattern is drafted from scratch for the customer and kept on file, the cloth is cut by hand, and the garment is built up and adjusted across a series of fittings - commonly a basted fitting, a forward fitting and a finish. A great deal of the construction, including the canvas interlining that gives the chest its shape, is stitched by hand. This is distinct from made-to-measure, where an existing block pattern is adjusted to your measurements, and from off-the-peg tailoring. The [Savile Row Bespoke Association](#), founded in 2004, sets a standard that includes a minimum number of hand-sewing hours per garment and the requirement that the work be done in the Savile Row area.

The Houses You Can Visit

Several long-established firms still trade on or beside the Row. [Anderson & Sheppard](#) is known for its soft, lightly structured "drape" cut; [Huntsman](#), at No. 11, for a sharp, strongly shaped silhouette with a signature one-button coat. Dege & Skinner remains family-owned and cuts military and civilian tailoring as well as shirts. A newer generation arrived in the 1990s, including [Richard James](#), who helped bring brighter cloth and Saturday opening to a street that had been quietly traditional. Most houses welcome enquiries, though a first bespoke commission is an appointment, not a walk-in purchase.

What It Costs and How Long It Takes

A full bespoke two-piece suit from an established Savile Row house generally starts in the low thousands of pounds and rises considerably with cloth, detailing and house. First orders usually take two to three months because of the fitting sequence, and your pattern is then retained so later commissions can be quicker. The price reflects hand labour, English and Italian cloth, and the fact that alterations and adjustments are part of the relationship rather than an extra. Many houses will travel to regular clients in other cities for "trunk shows", carrying cloth and taking fittings away from the Row.

Seeing the Craft Without Commissioning

You do not need to order a suit to appreciate the trade. The windows and ground-floor shops along the Row are open to browsers, and the [Victoria and Albert Museum](#) in South Kensington holds menswear and tailoring in its fashion collections that put the Row in context. Walking the street itself, between Conduit Street and Vigo Street, you can often see cutters and tailors at work through basement windows. Treat it as you would any working workshop: look, ask politely, and book an appointment if you want to talk cloth seriously.

Myths Worth Retiring

Myth: Everything sold on Savile Row is bespoke. In reality, several houses also offer made-to-measure and ready-to-wear lines, which share the address and house style but not the individual hand-cut pattern. Always ask which you are being quoted for.

Myth: "Bespoke" is just a marketing word for expensive. It has a specific meaning - an individual pattern, hand cutting and multiple fittings - and the Savile Row Bespoke Association exists partly to defend it against looser use.

Myth: Savile Row only dresses older, conservative men. The houses cut for women as well, produce casual and coloured tailoring, and have long dressed musicians, actors and designers alongside bankers and soldiers.

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I need an appointment to order a suit?

For a bespoke commission, yes - the first visit involves measurement, cloth selection and discussion, so it is best booked in advance. You are welcome to visit the shops to look and ask questions before committing.

How many fittings will a bespoke suit need?

Typically three or more for a first order - often a basted fitting, a forward fitting and a final one - spread over roughly two to three months while the pattern and fit are perfected.

Is made-to-measure worth it if I cannot afford bespoke?

For many people, yes. Made-to-measure adjusts an established pattern to your measurements at a lower price and shorter wait, giving a better fit than off-the-peg while stopping short of a fully hand-cut individual pattern.

Official websites mentioned

Henry Poole & Co: henrypoole.com

Savile Row Bespoke Association: savilerowbespoke.com

Anderson & Sheppard: anderson-sheppard.co.uk

Huntsman: huntsmansavilerow.com

Richard James: richardjames.co.uk

Victoria and Albert Museum: vam.ac.uk