MENSWEAR, TORONTO STYLE

Talented local designers, top-notch bespoke tailors and coveted international labels—now’s the time to shop Canada’s men’s fashion capital.

By Chadner Navarro

A stroll around the chic neighbourhood of Yorkville or the hip district of West Queen West reveals a promising sartorial vision: Canadian men’s fashion stereotypes (hockey jerseys, “denim tuxedos” and plaid all over) are things of the past in the stylish city of Toronto. So savvy is the Toronto menswear scene that guys from established fashion capitals like New York are coming here to do their shopping. They’re scouring the racks of luxury standards, from independent favourites like Nicolas to department stores like Holt Renfrew, for the latest from marquee designers. They’re patronizing smaller retailers to discover up-and-coming local talent. And they’re exploring concept boutiques in hopes of snagging that exclusive piece from a difficult-to-find international label—proving once and for all that this city is no high-fashion hinterland. Whether you’re looking for a bespoke suit or hunting down a rare pair of jeans, make your way to these top shops.

Below: Sydney’s ambience reflects its fashion philosophy: minimal, simple, thoughtful design.
KLAIXON HOWL

When Canadian designer Matt Robinson (left, centre) launched Klaixon Howl in 2005, he started with fewer than 10 pieces and a solid fashion philosophy. Robinson values made locally-by-hand quality. For example, he used raw, untreated denim for his first pair of jeans. This firm foundation still serves the brand today, but it has grown to include sharp sports coats in her-ringshone, check tweeds and camouflage, and nylon-but-strumelanded trousers—all hefting a wide range of occasions. 694 Queen Street West; 1416/920-6628; klaixonhowl.com

UNCLE OTIS

This 24-year-old shop in Yorkville has a knack for spotting up-and-coming menswear talent producing timeliness cool clothing and accessories. You’ll find perfect-fitting jeans from a-Stow, designer Horitosh Nakatani’s label from Beware, Japan, and Oliver patchwork shirts from New York-based Rough & Tumble. This season, Uncle Otis offers a limited number of the chill-defying coats it created with iconic parka-maker Canada Goose—the button half is constructed of quilted wool from Loro Piana. 26 Bellair Street; 1416/920-2288; uncleotis.ca

ISAAC ELY RESPOKE

Born into a family of textile merchants, Isaac Ely grew up with an appreciation for fine cloth and design, which eventually led to a career as a tailor. His atelier in North York focuses on bespoke services, customising every shirt and suit to his client’s exact fit and fabric specifications. Take your pick from an enviable selection of materials, including fabrics from Ermenegildo Zegna on the delicate Royal Oxford, made of linen from the Canada musk ox. 485 Champagne Drive; 1416/440-8999; isaacely.com

WORKING TITLE

Founded in 2010, this off-the-beaten-path boutique is now managed by Paul Sheffold and Michael Pang, who have an affinity for ahead-of-the-curve, rare-to-Canada designers like New York’s Patrik Ervell, Russian up-and-comer Gosta Ruchinskiy and U.K.-based Margaret Howell. The inventory of contemporary pieces is so tightly curated that items sell out quickly. In the basement, the book section presents a similar sense of discovery. OSA Davenport Road; 1416/591-1018; workingtitleshop.com

STUDEY’S

This high-fashion destination is wildly popular for its vast catalogue of heritage designers, including Maris and Velka Swan, most of whom are not available anywhere else in Ontario. There’s also an impressive shoe wall, showcasing brogues and boots from the likes of Officine Creative and Alden Edmonds.

In 2010, owner/qnfiller Sydney Gerhards was offered a made-to-order operation that produces no more than 1,500 pairs a year. The ambitious self-starter was especially keen on made-in-Canada merchandise like sportsewear by Reigning Champ, which operates out of Vancouver, and vintage-looking shirts and pants from Toronto-based 18 Waits. But you’ll also find products with international provenance, such as leather high-tops from Italy’s Buttero. 2949 Dundas Street West; 1416/979-1290; gerhardsupply.com

LEATHERFOOT

Langton Wilms opened this sleek retail operation in The Junction in 2015 when he was 24 years old. The ambitious self-starter was especially keen on made-in-Canada merchandise like sportsewear by Reigning Champ, which operates out of Vancouver, and vintage-looking shirts and pants from Toronto-based 18 Waits. But you’ll also find products with international provenance, such as leather high-tops from Italy’s Buttero. 2949 Dundas Street West; 1416/979-1290; gerhardsupply.com

NOMAD

Previously in two locations, Nomad consolidated its entire collection of upscale foul casual designer goods into an industrial-looking outpost on Queen Street West. The store, which celebrates its 10th birthday this year, carries the kind of stuff men today want to wear, like military-inspired jackets from John Lobb and Camina Shoemaker, both of whom make anything from black-keen ready-to Oxfords to casual-Friday suade loafers. 24 Bellair Street; 1416/967-3668; leatherfoot.com

VIA CAVOUR

This casual elegance of Italian style inspires co-owners Santu DiRose and Fabio Pata, so it comes as no surprise that their Yorkville boutique teams with tailor-made Barba Napoli shirts, cashmere sweaters from Neapolitan shoemaker Pasto Scafati, Halpin and Scarpa are Toronto exclusives for Via Cavour, and the shop is the only Canadian carrier of Pal Zileri, which specialises in handcrafted modern suits. 87 Avenue Road; 1416/920-1686; viaucovar.ca

OLIVER SPENCER

A cozy wood-floored storefront, this shop is the only stand-alone address outside the U.K. for Oliver Spencer, a British tailor who turns his attention to contemporary takes on classic menswear. The Toronto store has limited stock but carries the essentials: cardigans with coconut buttons, Oxford jackets, crisp trousers in a range of flax, and Elton-collar Button-front shirts. Other brands here for stylish gentlemen include Filson and Aesop. 694 Queen Street West; 1416/920-8772; oliverspencer.co.uk

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Chadner Navarro is a travel & food stylist, writer whose work has appeared in Du Jour, Ultratravel Anthology, IN GOOD TASTE and more. His blog CharmingSavages.ca is a travel, food and style site. STYLIST OF THE MONTH