

The slim, the snug and the custom fit

In Manhattan's answer to Savile Row, tightly tailored is the prevalent trend, says **David Kaufman**

The US male may be among the heftiest on the planet but you would never know it by looking at the latest home-grown men's wear. From Tom Ford on Madison Avenue to Thom Browne at Brooks Brothers, men's fashions have never been further from the wide waists and pleated chinos so prevalent in recent years.

Taking its cues from the traditional tailoring of England and Italy, America's new tightly tailored trend may not yet have achieved critical mass but it has found a home base: Manhattan's ascendant NoLita neighbourhood. Wedged between the grungy East Village and touristy SoHo, this quarter just north of Little Italy houses a clutch of designers creating hand-made garments as finely fitted as they are fashionable. Call it Manhattan's answer to Savile Row – “only with a true New York sense of spirit”, according to James Jurney, owner of the Seize Sur Vingt boutique, “and a far more international sense of how business gets done”.

In 1998 Jurney left his life as an investment banker to launch Seize sur Vingt (SSV) on Elizabeth Street with his wife Gwendolyn. “We're like the granddaddy of the neighbourhood,” declares his long-time manager Karim Manuel Fresno, who has watched the brand evolve from men's shirts and sweaters to suits, shoes, a women's and children's line and, soon, a new shop in the lavishly renovated Plaza Hotel.

would eventually call neighbours – Duncan Quinn, Lord Willy's, shoemaker Barker Black and Lugo – SSV became known for the custom-made shirts and suits that helped define the NoLita aesthetic. Slim-cut and cleverly patterned in checks and stripes, the Italian-made garments have fans such as Leonardo DiCaprio and Jake Gyllenhaal. With prices for shirts beginning at \$140, “They're not inexpensive,” says one client. “But the fit, the quality, the silhouette is the best available.”

The designers were drawn to the district's mix of culture, commerce and affordability. “It's one of the most diverse areas in the city, a place where low meets high,” observes resident Trent Fraser, a 30-year-old expat Australian wine merchant and fan of shirts from

SSV and newcomer Lugo. Populated in equal measure by veteran Italian-Americans and hipster arrivistes, NoLita mixes the traditional – local butchers and wine-shops – with the kind of seasonal-menu restaurants, avant-garde pubs and up-and-coming art galleries

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needed to lure Gotham's free-spending creative class.

“The area has this intimate, off-the-beaten-path, Euro kind of vibe,” observes barrister-turned-clothier Duncan Quinn, who opened

his NoLita boutique on Spring Street five years ago after scouring Manhattan for nearly a year. Offering both bespoke and off-the-rack suit and shirt collections, Quinn's colourful, close-fitting designs are popular with clients ranging from actor Hugh Grant to rockers Green Day.

“The area still feels underground,” says Derrick Miller, who chose NoLita two years ago to launch America's first outpost of Barker Black, a 126-year-old Northampton, England-based shoemaker that specialises in “subversive but particular” wingtips, cap toes and boots. “They're the best this side of the Atlantic,” says BB devotee and hotelier Rafael Micha. “The craftsmanship of their soles and outrageous designs of their ties are unique in a world where luxury is becoming ever-more standardised.”

Lugo, which opened on Mott Street last autumn, conveniently next to Eurohaunt Café Gitane, specialises in Italian-made pieces that are thoroughly continental in styling – inspired by the Roman button-downs owner Walid Abuhaidar discovered while visiting the Eternal City. The shirts elegantly evoke the NoLita look: broad at the shoulder, slim at the waist, with wide collars, mother-of-pearl buttons and both French or button cuffs. They're similar to what you might find at Thomas Pink or Charles Tyrwhitt “but, unlike those brands, you won't see Lugo on everyone else”, says

client Joseph Angelo, who has eight Lugo shirts. Starting at \$150, Lugo's shirts are deliberately priced to feel aspirational yet accessible, says 27-year-old Abuhaidar.

Accessibility is the last thing on the minds of Lord and Lady Wilcox, the duo behind Lord Willy's, also on Mott Street. Though Lord Willy's, too, excels at shirts, with both an off-the-rack capsule range and a seasonal collection of 70 custom-made designs, they are close-cut and boldly colourful, “nurturing the inner peacock”, explains Alex Wilcox, a former advertising executive and expatriate Briton, whose wife Betty was once a creative director at Chinese luxury brand Shanghai Tang.

Having recently outfitted staffers at downtown restaurant-of-the-moment Tailor and opened a solely ready-to-wear outpost in the West Village, Lord Willy's is expanding beyond its core constituency of uptown bankers and downtown dandies. Still, “In the end, we are really just a mom and pop operation,” he adds, “in what may well be the last true New York neighbourhood.”



Cutting it close: Lord Willy's excels at shirts

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www.16sur20.com

www.lordwillys.com

www.barkerblack.com

www.lugonyc.com

www.duncanquinn.com