

MAKING THE CUT

Paul Jheeta has broken into the tightly knit world of Savile Row, the Mecca of bespoke men's tailoring

BY ANUPMA MISHRA

PAUL JHEETA HAD an unusual ambition. He wanted to be a men's tailor — but not just any old men's tailor. He wanted to be a star on Savile Row, where the rich and famous from around the world head for bespoke suits or jackets.

The odds were against Jheeta when he started out as Savile Row has always been a bastion of conservatism and nurtured a positively snooty image. Inevitably, it didn't have room for outsiders. But Jheeta overcame all the hurdles and has today established his own eponymous brand at 12, Savile Row.

Also, Jheeta has recently set up a lounge at Mill Street, another prestigious address near Savile Row, where he interacts with his clients.

"Savile Row is a close-knit community and it's almost impossible for an outsider to fit in here unless you have an exceptional set of skills," says the 43-year old who has been in the industry for two decades.

Jheeta has measured up the best in recent years. Sachin Tendulkar has stopped by between matches and is a great fan. So are other celebrities like Virat Kohli, actor

A PERFECT STITCH

Paul Jheeta claims it takes an exceptional set of skills for an outsider to make it to Savile Row



FIT AND FINE

(ABOVE) Jheeta has a host of celebrity clients including cricketer Virat Kohli; (ABOVE RIGHT) Jheeta's newly opened lounge at Mill Street in Mayfair where he meets clients

Farhan Akhtar, photographer and movie producer Atul Kasbekar, Hollywood director James Gray and even the Prime Minister of Dominica, Roosevelt Skerrit.

"I was introduced to Sachin by Kasbekar and later met him at Lord's where he was practising at the nets," says the master tailor who has done over a dozen suits for the cricketing legend.

On Savile Row, making a suit can be a lengthy and intricate process. You start by picking the fabric and the style, and getting measured up. Be prepared to answer a long list of specific questions like whether you experience major weight swings, how often do you look at your watch or if you prefer boxer shorts over briefs. "A consultation is important since I need to know my client and sometimes it takes a full day as people take time to open up," says Jheeta whose clients include entrepreneurs, bankers and even Asians, Russians and Arabs living in London.

Once that's done, the pattern's drafted onto a piece of paper and then chalked onto the cloth. These are sewn together loosely but only completed after a third fitting. The entire process can take 10-12 weeks.

Born to a father in the Indian Navy and a home-maker mother, Jheeta always had a strong eye for clothes and fashion. Even as a five-year-old, the only thing he liked about his school uniform was a pair of socks that fitted perfectly. By the time he reached high school, all he wanted to do was learn embroidery, crochet work and doodle.

Initially, he trained to become a pilot but ended up working as a designer at Kachins, a bespoke menswear brand in Mumbai. "I wanted to join the Indian Air Force but since I couldn't, I joined Kachins," says Jheeta. "In hindsight, I think it was the artist in me that made me take decisions that I would have never taken otherwise."

Jheeta recently opened a lounge at Mill Street, near Savile Row where he interacts with clients





SUCCESS STORY

(**FAR LEFT**) The Prime Minister of Dominica, Roosevelt Skerrit is one of Jheeta's star customers; (**LEFT**) Jheeta likes to work with fabrics like wool, cashmere and even vicuna, a rare soft wool from the South American camelid

with the suit trousers," says Jheeta.

Ask him about the latest trends and his reply comes quickly. "Savile Row is all about classic style," he says. "So it doesn't matter what's in fashion, the style never changes."

Still, he doesn't advertise or use social media to spread the word about his label. "When a high-profile client like Tendulkar tweets a picture of himself wearing my suit, it becomes like an advert for me," says Jheeta proudly.

Jheeta's now looking at making an Indian comeback via a tie-up with Mumbai's Amy Billimoria House of Design. "India's a huge market and ready to embrace luxury bespoke services," he says. "So I now have a base in Mumbai and will come to India four times annually for measurements and fittings. The garments will then be hand-stitched back in my studio."

And he's ready to get it all stitched up. **E**

cashmere and vicuna — a rare and soft wool from the South American camelid.

This apart, he also makes custom separates. "From shirts to jackets to ties to three- and two-piece suits and dinner suits, I do the whole lot," he says.

Adding an Indian twist to his repertoire, Jheeta has now started making Nehru jackets with dinner suits. "I was a bit apprehensive about this as Savile Row has a very niche reputation of creating only classic pieces but thankfully, it was received well," says Jheeta.

He recently delivered a velvet dinner suit with a velvet Nehru jacket. "If you don't wish to wear a bowtie then pair the Nehru jacket



In 1996, after a year with Kachins, Jheeta headed to London to do a post graduation degree in Industrial Pattern & Cutting from the Central School of Fashion in Foley Street.

"Designing wasn't my cup of tea," says Jheeta. "Your job is restricted to scribbling on paper which you pass on to the technical team. I wanted to create menswear as it's a challenge to spice up a garment with limited options."

At the school, Jheeta learned about paper patterns, fittings and draping and even made illustrations for their textbooks.

Jheeta, however, knew he was racing against time. He joined the school at 23, which is considered very late by Savile Row standards. "They like to catch people young and nurture them," says Jheeta. "So, I finished the course in four months flat but had

MASTER STROKE

(**ABOVE**) Jheeta met Sachin Tendulkar for the first time at Lords and has now made over a dozen bespoke suits for the maestro of the cricketing world; (**LEFT**) Bollywood actor Farhan Akhtar is a Jheeta fan and is seen here walking the red carpet in one of the master tailor's creations

to stay put since I had paid for the full term."

But finishing the course early meant he could do a placement with Philip Kanwal, a prestigious freelance designer and couture tailor in London.

In 1998, Jheeta joined Antony Price, a noted British designer. He became Price's chief assistant and worked as pattern cutter and fitter, who creates paper patterns and cuts the garment for fittings.

Next came a big move, to H. Huntsman &

Sons, one of Savile Row's star names. It was here that he perfected the craft of making men's bespoke suits." By then, I was already 27 and so, I had to move up the ladder really fast."

Four years later, Jheeta's hard work bore fruit when he became a bespoke tailor at Chittleborough & Morgan, the two star tailors who had taken over the legendary firm Nutters founded by Tommy Nutter, who famously revived the fortunes of Savile Row tailoring and whose greatest moment came when three of The Beatles wore his suits on the cover of the album, Abbey Road.

"From being a designer, to pattern cutter and fitter, I had done it all with the best in business and that gave me confidence to set up my label in 2008," says Jheeta.

His signature style is a classic single-breasted jacket with a single button and peak lapels. "Waistcoats and classic pieces are also in demand," says Jheeta who likes to work with velvet in shades of burgundy, navy or dark forest green. Jheeta is also fond of wool,



MEASURE FOR MEASURE

(**ABOVE LEFT**) Celebrity photographer Atul Kasbekar is a great fan of Jheeta's and so is (**ABOVE RIGHT**) American movie director James Grey

The master tailor is all set to have a base in Mumbai via a tie-up with the Amy Billimoria House of Design