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THE ESSENTIAL COLLECTIONS: (from left to right) Pringle of Scotland; Tom Ford; Kent & Curwen; Gieves & Hawkes; Burberry; Richard James; Casely-Hayford; Thomas Pink; Agi & Sam; E Tautz



NOW IN ITS FOURTH SEASON, LONDON COLLECTIONS: MEN HAS FIRMLY ESTABLISHED ITSELF AS AN INTERNATIONAL SHOWCASE FOR THE BRITISH MENSWEAR SCENE. ZOHEY GOTO TOOK A RINGSIDE SEAT LAST MONTH





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FROM THE BOWLER hat to the trench coat, Savile Row tailoring to the Wellington boot, Britain has long been the centre for innovative menswear. London Collections: Men is now offering menswear designers a global platform, with a packed three-day schedule that has more than 130 labels previewing their latest collections.

For Autumn/Winter 2014, the designers all seemed to be applying themselves to the difficult problem of creating a unified wardrobe. They offered up a variety of innovative solutions that married tailoring with luxury sports and casualwear. Coats and trousers are oversized, vibrant red will be a key colour, and layering up is the name of the game.

Making a surprise appearance on the catwalk were chic jogging pants, string vests and silk scarves. As menswear increasingly becomes about montage, it is no longer about what you wear, but how you wear it. ►

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BURBERRY

FINDING INSPIRATION IN an eclectic mix of British artists, Christopher Bailey presented a collection that was seeped in bohemian masculinity. Sheepskin jackets were teamed with oversized artist shirts and fisherman vests. The classic bone trench was of course present and this time it is reversible. If you invest in one item to update your wardrobe next season, make it a printed scarf. Burberry's statement scarf had cityscapes printed onto delicate silk, thrown over the shoulders and loosely knotted at the front. There were also geometric patterned blanket scarfs, worn long with the hemline reaching below the coat.

AGI & SAM

HAVING RECENTLY WON the British Fashion Award for best emerging menswear designers, all eyes were on the promising design duo for London Collections: Men. Having initially used a riot of colours and prints, this is the second season that Agi & Sam have stripped their vision back to monochrome. The result was a mature collection that married traditional British tailoring with a loosely layered silhouette, inspired by the designer Agi Mdumulla's recent travels in Africa. As we have seen elsewhere on the catwalks, hemlines were low, with the Masai check overcoat just grazing the calf.



CASELY-HAYFORD

SINCE STARTING THEIR fashion label five years ago, the father and son duo of Joe Casely-Hayford OBE and Charlie Casely-Hayford have gained notoriety for combining English heritage with a healthy dose of British anarchy. For their latest collection, they raided the sub-culture closet, finding inspiration in the styles of the 1960s skinheads, 1990s grunge and the rudeboys of the noughties. Having initially carved out a reputation for sharp tailoring, it was refreshing to now see the strength of their casualwear showing through. Tailored trousers were teamed with vibrant, Hawaiian print knitwear and oversized grunge jumpers; it sounds an unlikely combination, but somehow it really worked.

RICHARD JAMES

THE SHOWMAN OF Savile Row cast his mind back to British street style of the 1950s, referencing the New Edwardians, or Teds as they were commonly known. Original Teds took inspiration from the Edwardian dandy and added a splash of colour and influences from across the Atlantic to create a cultural hybrid. This somehow seems an appropriate theme for Richard James, a tailor who has revived and shocked Savile Row with his modern silhouette, bold colours and floor-to-ceiling windows, showcasing his celebrity clients. Richard James's Ted wears his slim-fit Seishin jacket and ankle-swinging trousers in distinctively British tweeds and West of England flannels. Slick back your hair and embrace the rock'n'roll revival.



E TAUTZ

ART AND LITERATURE are often cited as a fashion designer's inspiration. It's rare, however, to read a clothing collection in the same way that you would a book. E Tautz, designed by Patrick Grant, has managed to achieve this by using Hogarth's *A Rake's Progress* as its inspiration; an episodic series of paintings which chart the rise and fall of a young heir, against a backdrop of Covent Garden brothels and the gambling dens of Soho. The E Tautz dandy is initially presented in a sober black flannel riding coat, homburg hat and field trousers. As the collection unfolds, jacquard bomber jackets and a riding jacket in siren red are introduced. For the finale, hand embroidery is strewn across formal suiting and a teal doeskin biker jacket.



GIEVES & HAWKES

GIEVES & HAWKES'S new collection was a showcase in skilful Savile Row tailoring, which has been its enduring strength for the past 240 years. Recently appointed designer Jason Basmajian (formally of Brioni) has taken inspiration from British military tailoring and updated it by using sensuous fabrics such as velvet, cashmere and alpaca. The eveningwear is particularly strong, with jackets in beautiful peacock prints offering a refreshing alternative to formalwear. Its key look for the season is the shawl lapel, used on the double-breasted and three-piece suiting.



PRINGLE OF SCOTLAND

WITH ALMOST EVERY luxury menswear brand now integrating their tailoring with casualwear, it is interesting to see each label's interpretation of this brief. While labels such as Brioni make the pairing appear seamless, brands including Pringle of Scotland are creating a look that doesn't attempt to smooth over the edges. Designer Massimo Nicosia envisioned a country boy escaping to the City, juxtaposing a traditional cashmere coat with kilting detail and a pair of soft-knit jogging bottoms. Sharp, tailored trousers are teamed with chunky soled shoes, all worn with skinny polo necks. Innovation has been introduced into the iconic knitwear range, with cellophane yarns and 3D-effect hand knit. The silhouette was one of balanced opposites.





THOMAS PINK

THIS WAS THOMAS Pink's first season at London Collections: Men and it succeeded in making a colourful entrance. From a scaffolding platform in the Institute of Contemporary Art, 20 models of all ages preened in front of the crowd. For an Autumn/Winter collection, Pink's bold use of colour was noticeable and refreshing. Canary yellow braces, turquoise ties and sweaters and burnt orange shirts were layered with British wools and tweeds. Embossed slippers and satin evening jackets added a touch of sophistication to an otherwise playful collection. It was an edgier, more fashion-forward vision than you might have expected – and all the better for it.



TOM FORD

THIS SEASON WE are expanding our casual/sportswear collection, to give the man who loves our clothes something to wear at the weekend," Ford tells *square mile*. Key items include a snakeskin biker jacket and suiting in pinwale cord, with a wide lapel and straight cut trouser. Shirts and ties reference the 1960s, with their use of small, intricate pattern. For eveningwear, there are smoking jackets in black Jacquard silk. This is the first season that Tom Ford will be introducing its own trainers, in black and white velvet and leather. "We are finishing them in the same way as our bespoke shoes, which take three days to hand polish," Ford explains.

KENT & CURWEN

THIS IS THE first season for Kent & Curwen's new creative director Simon Spurr, who has produced a highly wearable, youthful collection. In keeping with the luxury menswear market, there was a strong focus on combining traditional tailoring with sportswear elements. Its vision saw leather jackets being teamed with sharp two-piece suits in coordinating fabrics. Its iconic cricket sweater is presented in a rainbow of bright colours, worn with military-inspired, hip-swinging Melton peacoats. The Kent & Curwen collection was yet another example of a tailoring house that recognises the boundaries between work and play are blurring, and offers a wardrobe that adapts to this lifestyle. ■

