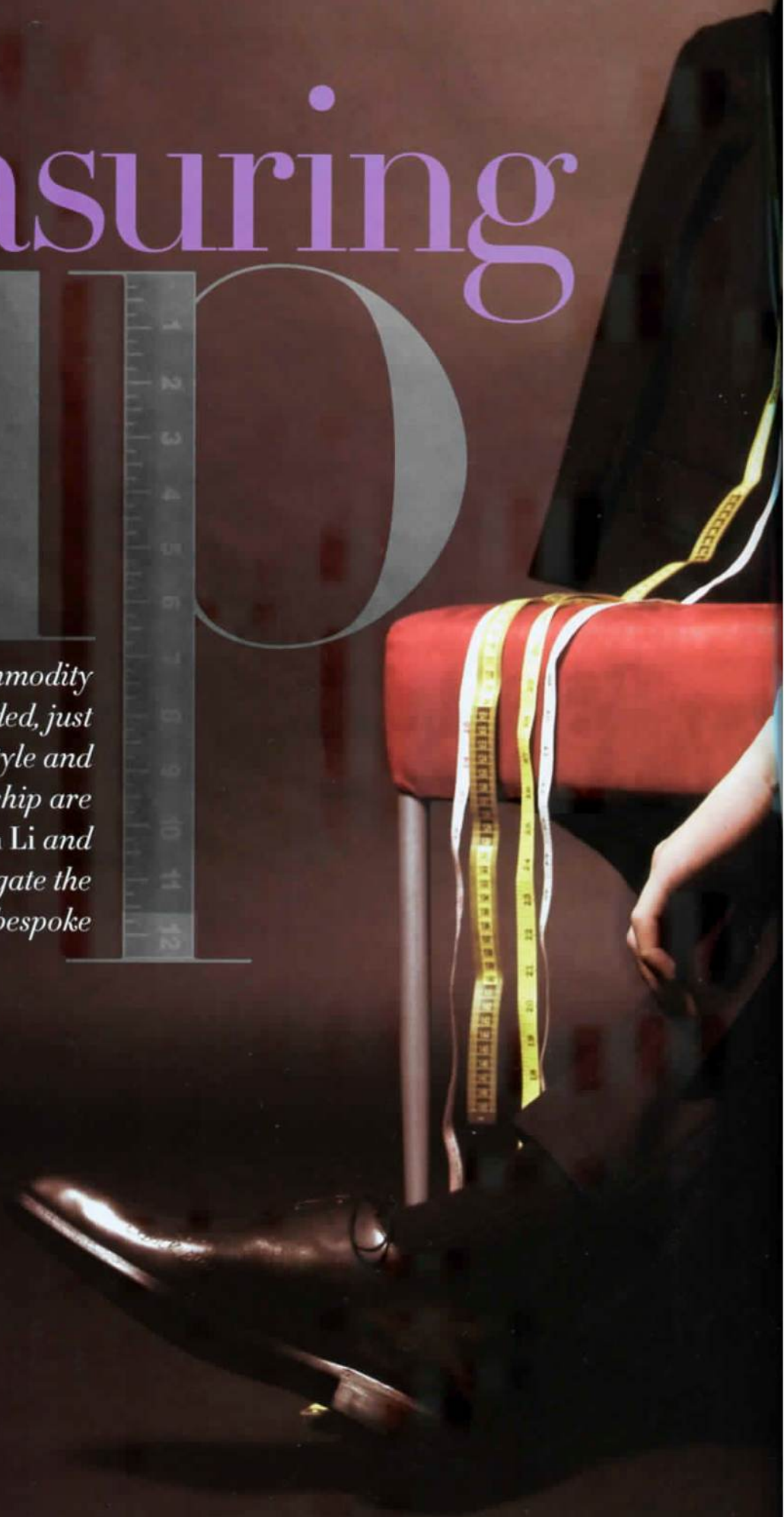


measuring

Rarity is a commodity that cannot be traded, just as inimitable style and exceptional craftsmanship are priceless. Tang Wen Li and Lin Wenjian investigate the business of bespoke



Why buy off the shelf when companies, industry experts and craftsmen offer custom-made, personalised options? The bespoke lifestyle – where you converse with the creator of your desired item which is then made to fit your measurements – is slowly catching on among connoisseurs of good living. Five lovers of luxury share a common thread: their suits, jewellery and accessories are all made from scratch just for them.

SUITS ME FINE

According to Dominic Khoo, 28, editor-in-chief of online luxury goods e-zine, Goldarths.com, “The local crowd are becoming more sophisticated in their taste and more knowledgeable in respect of their passions, so it’s natural that more of them are having their items tailor-made.”

Khoo first dabbled in bespoke acces-

sories when he had his cashmere and kid mohair suit tailor-made by fashion label, Ermenegildo Zegna two years ago. It cost him more than \$7,000. He laughs: “I have funny body proportions and off-the-rack suits don’t fit me nicely.” On a more serious note, the avid photographer says that when-

“Many of my custom-built purchases are so well-made that they will last a lifetime”

ever he buys things, he first finds out the value of the item through research. “I like to make informed decisions,” he says. “So when I go shopping, I ask for the details that I have read about. Sometimes they are not available here which prompts me to go bespoke, or have items custom-made.”

Truth be told, Khoo is not the only one

among his family and friends enamoured with the concept of made-to-measure. “My grandfather had all his suits and shoes made for him by Savile Row tailors in the United Kingdom,” Khoo reveals. His mother also owns several paintings and dresses specially commissioned and made to order respectively, while a close friend owns an exquisite pair of specially commissioned oak-coloured leather shoes from Edward Green.

Lest one thinks that Khoo only wears and uses bespoke, the bachelor confirms he does buy off the rack on shopping trips. “There are many fabulous items available off the shelf that are made to the same exacting standards as bespoke houses,” he says. “I go for quality. It’s important to mix bespoke with mass produced items.”

Khoo goes to great lengths in the maintenance of all his purchases, tailor-made or otherwise, saying he best enjoys his purchases when they are in perfect condition.

so far, he has nothing but praise for the bespoke stores and fashion houses he has patronised. "I have a few pairs of made-to-measure shoes, and the makers gladly replace the soles or refinish the leather when I make this request. But, that said, many of my custom-built purchases are so well-made that they will last a lifetime if given proper care," he explains. "For example, the Berluti shop in Paris where I have my shoes made has given me the best service I have ever experienced. Every customer is made to feel like royalty."

What, then, is Khoo's fantasy bespoke item? "I would love an ultra-slim hand-wound, split second chronograph Carillon Westminster minute repeater by master watchmaker, Philippe Dufour. Just the thought of wearing one makes me all warm and fuzzy!"

BRING ON THE BLING

"I like to be unique, and I like colourful things." This is the basis for John Heng's dazzling collection of specially crafted rings and bracelets. The 60-year-old stockbroker is a frequent traveller and whenever he goes on trips he scours boutiques, factories and roadside stalls for eye-catching diamonds or semi-precious stones which he buys as raw materials for his jewellery.

"It started as a casual hobby in 1985 when I went to Thailand and visited a jewellery factory and immediately fell in love with the colourful stones and gems," he recalls. The jovial married man with two grown-up children says his pastime, coupled with his desire for a signature line of accessories, is the impetus for his swelling collection. At last count he had more than 100 such bespoke rings and bracelets, mostly made in Thai factories.

For the record, Heng's bracelets cost from \$8,000 upwards with the most extravagant (a



John Heng, 60, stockbroker

"I like to be unique, and I like colourful things"

99 carat diamond variety) priced at a whopping \$280,000. His rings cost an average of \$1,000 each, with the most expensive – a 13-carat diamond ring – costing \$170,000. Heng, an avid badminton player, reveals he now has a steady list of suppliers who send him photographs of their latest collections. Heng then takes his pick before having craftsmen work on the chosen stones. "Having items made-to-measure is becoming popular because, deep down, everyone wants their own trademark," he reasons. "When I attend a function, people recognise me from afar because of what I wear!" he says, laughing.

On a more serious note, Heng, who designs the motifs for the colourful silk shirts he wears on a regular basis, derives great pleasure from his creations, arguing that, "I'm the only one who has them. They're not commercialised items that anyone can pick up from the shops. I don't see my own style in shops or boutiques and, as store items are all produced in bulk they lack the individuality I want," he notes.

Given their value, it's no wonder that Heng looks after his prized jewellery collection carefully. "I wear some and keep the rest in the bank safe, taking them out when I want a change," he says.

Wear and tear is rare but, when it happens Heng whips out the certifications he obtains with every purchase and sends the pieces for repair. "I've received offers from friends and strangers to buy my jewellery," he says. "But I turn them down because my pieces are all one-of-a-kind, with no replicas."

TEERING OFF

Twenty-year-old Feldman Tan's ultimate dream is to do business and play golf every day. But for now, the fulltime national serviceman is putting aside his entrepreneurial ambitions to concentrate on the sport he took up five years ago. So serious is Tan about golf that three years ago when he successfully reduced his handicap to a single digit, he had his clubs custom-made to suit his physique and style of play. "The equipment available in retail shops is based on the build of the average person so, naturally, if I use these for my game I won't be able to perform to my fullest potential," he remarks. It doesn't hurt that a close family friend is a club fitter who specialises in taking specific body measurements for golfers before sending them to manufacturers. As a consequence, Tan owns a set of clubs made specifically to suit him.

Perfect Fit

Forget about running off to Europe for bespoke goods. Try a home grown version made to fit your exact requirements

■ **CUSTOM FIT** In the tradition of the highest Savile Row standards, a custom suit by dunhill takes six weeks to be made. Service starts with a London tailor who visits the Singapore boutique twice a year. Requirements are discussed and measurements taken to ensure the pinnacle of fit and comfort. Suits from this service cost 15 percent more than off the rack suits and are in the price range of \$4,000 and above. Custom shirts cost from \$400 and offer three fits. Seven collar shapes and numerous cuff options are available, effectively enabling you to design your own garment.

■ **SUPER-STANDARDS** World-renown Italian

maison, Ermenegildo Zegna offers clients the opportunity to personalise garments through a choice of fabric, style and details. The exclusive Su Misura custom-tailored service is available for outerwear and shirts, leather garments and accessories with a two-piece suit starting at \$3,600. Jackets, suits and coats take about four weeks from the beginning of the process which starts with a choice of more than 450 exclusive fabrics. For discerning clients willing to part with \$4,500, tailored leather jackets sewn to exact measurements can be ordered in three classic styles in a choice of two leathers. Monograms are not the only way of personalising shirts and ties.

Su Misura shirts can be ready in three weeks and cost from \$500. A selection of 200 fabrics in four styles can be personalised by selecting simple or double cuffs and 12 different collars. The Su Misura tie at \$300 and above is entirely made by hand after the client chooses width, length and fabric. Six weeks and about \$2,600 are needed to prepare a pair of shoes in classic or exotic leathers with a choice of lining and sole. Three styles are available and fire branded with the monogram of the owner on the bottom.

■ **BAG IT** Fendi's Selleria Made to Order sector was developed to meet the demand for custom-