



# Armand de Baudry d'Ausson

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Exclusivity is a much maligned concept. When street kids in Bangkok scrawl poignant tributes to Chanel and Dior on their tees in magic marker it's no longer possible to believe that buying a label makes you anything more than a victim. Chav-chic (think footballers' wives head to toe in Burberry or Dolce) is the objective correlative of the statement that fashion is for people who don't have style. Thankfully, there are still a few independent artists who care more about beauty than branding, even while the white coated workers in the great couture ateliers slave over never-worn garments which only function as commercials for lipstick. Armand de Baudry d'Asson has been keeping the faith for the last seven years with his tailoring service.

A tall, vulpine French aristocrat-though he's way too cool to use his title-Armand has consciously eschewed the flimsy dazzle of the Paris fashion circuit to concentrate on building a service that is very, very personal. He cites his own grandfather, many of whose clothes he still wears, as his inspiration. A friend of the infamous playboy Porfirio Rubirosa, the Marquis de Baudry d'Asson epitomised a way of dressing that requires both knowledge and a certain sensual intelligence..

Armand can be messianic on the subject of the gentleman's way of dressing. Bespoke requires



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aesthetic education, and

he's happy to provide one, albeit at a hefty price.

Oddly, given the price tag, there's something anti-aspirational about Armand's pieces. So much fashion attempts to project an image of what the wearer would like to be, a desire to affect, if not deceive, the perceptions of others. Armand's clients actually have the lifestyle the brands play on they have no need of clothes as status objects, which frees Armand to concentrate on beauty rather than commerce. One is tempted to consider an 'ontological aesthetic', but that would be pushing it for someone who sells jackets, even if he is French. All clients are fitted personally, with Armand dividing his month between London and Paris, where he covers about 20.000 km a year on his BMW motorbike; though some customers have been known to send the jet if they have a moment of crise about the cuff-buttons. He uses three ateliers, French for shirts, Italian for "semi-traditional" suits, and, naturellement, Savile Row for the full bespoke bonanza. More Montesquieu than McQueen, Armand is quaintly self-effacing when it comes to discussing both his clients and his prices—if he dresses celebrities, he's not saying who, and if you think about asking, you certainly can't afford it.

Armand hates advertising. His strictly confidential phone number is only known by word of mouth recommendations that have nevertheless swiftly made him a byword amongst the couture cognoscent in Paris and London. He's more likely to be found hosting a book launch in the Marais, or squeezing in a fencing bout between fittings than liggig on the canapé trail. Like all the greatest dandies, he's utterly unconcerned with fashion, relying on a combination of classical tailoring expertise and boldness of colour, cut and line to render his clients, rather than their clothes, individual.

What makes Armand's work truly exclusive is that it requires an investment of time as well as cash. The swinging blinging Nineties were big on the self-aggrandizing cliché of 'cash rich time poor', a sap to any overpaid drone who wanted to believe they had taste but were too busy being important to exercise it. Time is a more amusing way of measuring status than money, and bespoke, particularly the Baudry' d'Asson way, requires it. Hand-fitted, hand-made, hand finished and hand delivered, whether to St Tropez or St Moritz, an Armand suit is exquisitely personal, and practically priceless.



