



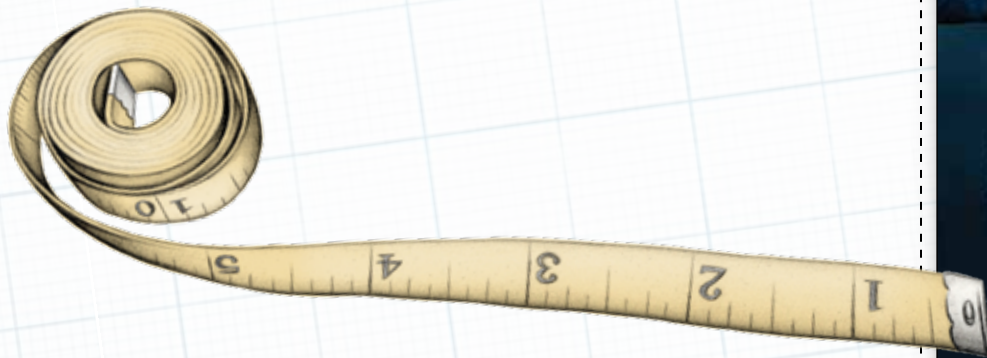
Perfectly

Suited



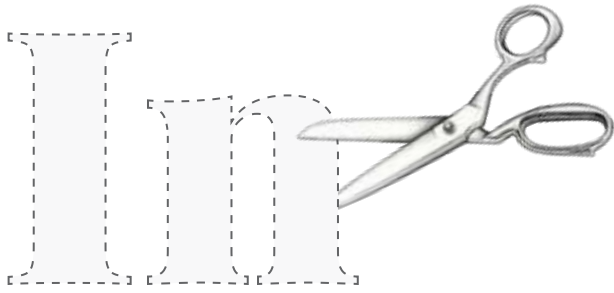
Juhn Maing dabbled in law, academia and IT, but nothing ever fit quite right—until he began to revive the dying craft of Sicilian tailoring.

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the taxi from the airport, the driver asks Juhn Maing and Claudio Italiano if they are famous. Both men are impeccably dressed in Sicilian suits, an unusual sight in San Francisco, whose uniform is the hoodie. But their clothes are their business: Italiano is a second-generation Sicilian tailor and Maing an authority on men's bespoke suits who has spent nearly a decade building global awareness of Sicilian tailoring—a craft that, until his intervention, was nearly dying.

The taxi drops them off in the financial district, and they climb five floors to the office suite that Maing, '93, has rented for two hours. Their client, 29-year-old Ethan Klivans, joins them for a second fitting, which, like the first one months earlier, required

that Italiano fly from Sicily and Maing from Orlando. Italiano helps the client put on a jacket that is basted together with loose white stitching. Using chalk, he marks adjustments on the cloth while discussing the fit with Maing, who snaps photos that they can later study.

Maing has a quiet, alert manner and comes across as soberly fashionable, without the faintest whiff of dandyism. His posture is relaxed, conveying an air of ease not usually associated with a man in a suit. It's hard to know whether his bearing is influenced by the jacket's cut or how he feels in it, or is simply the way he carries himself in general. One might call it casually dignified.

His business, Sicilian Reserve, intends to change perceptions of how suits should look and feel. He describes offering an “experience,” one that for him long preceded any notions he had of globetrotting with Sicilian tailors. He started off as an enthusiast and began a blog in 2005—among the very first for menswear—that he called *Sleevehead*, a name that has become his online persona. But though *sleevehead* refers to where the sleeve attaches to the shoulder, it represents far more.

“That part of the jacket is distinctive,” he explains. “It’s an unmistakable icon for an entire tradition of tailoring. If you know your sleeveheads, you can instantly tell what kind of suit it is.”

But Maing admits that he wasn’t averse to the word’s playful, faintly punkish ring.

Gearhead. Deadhead. Metalhead. Pothead. Sleevehead.



“I didn’t want to go with something overly serious,” he says.

Despite his commitment to Sicilian couture, when Maing tells how he came to it, he describes decades of exploring, considering his options while moving from one career to the next.

And yet people with eclectic tendencies more often than not call to mind hobbyists and dilettantes rather than true connoisseurs, which raises the question: How did a Korean-American generalist become the maven of Sicilian suits?

The Quest for a Good Fit

Maing was born in 1971 in Madison, Wis., where his father completed a PhD in food science. His parents had immigrated from South Korea three years earlier, and the family moved often—to Chicago, Germany, the suburbs of New York City, northern Virginia and finally Honolulu for a job with General Foods. While Maing’s mother stayed home to raise him and his older sister, his father researched Jell-O.

In 1989, Maing enrolled at Stanford. He sampled classes in literature, history, politics, philosophy and computer science. “I was the classic generalist,” he recalls. “That actually probably



IN STITCHES: Italiano (opposite, center) and Maing conduct a second fitting for Klivans in San Francisco. Italiano will take the suit back to Sicily to finish the garment.



MAING ON MENSWEAR

An expert breaks down the three categories of clothing.

READY-TO-WEAR

Off-the-rack clothes, sold in department stores or online, generally catering to the usual sizes and sometimes to men's big and tall.

MADE-TO-MEASURE

What is typically called custom clothing, or, in Maing's words, "Well, sort of customizable." A client is fitted with the suit on hand that is closest to his size. The salesperson records the adjustments required to make it fit and sends them to the factory, along with the client's choice of fabric, buttons, lining, color and lapels.

BESPOKE

"Fully, truly custom." Creation and production are unified in the work of the tailor, not separated as in post-Industrial Revolution manufacturing. The tailor designs a pattern specific to the client, builds a garment from scratch, and does two or three fittings to create an organic match. "In the first," Maing says, "the client might have been measured in the morning. His waistline might be less than after lunch, and this discrepancy is caught in the second fitting."

helped me in the end. It didn't comfort my parents much, but they were supportive."

After graduating in 1993 with a degree in political science and German, he bounced between jobs—first an international nonprofit, then a law firm. He flirted with the idea of becoming a lawyer but started a PhD in political science instead, only to stop after his master's.

"The road to success," he explains, "was to be extremely specialized." He preferred to explore—and explore he did, living in D.C., Chicago, L.A., and

New York. He worked in a variety of IT development roles until 2015, when he started what he calls "the sartorial track."

Behind his unusual career turn were two motivations: one stemming from being ready for new experiences and the other from his intention—or rather difficulty—in dressing well for the office. It is no stretch to say that Sleevehead was the solution to a problem that faced him since his first days in the workforce: He was skinny.

More elegantly put, he was slight of frame—so much so that

clothes cut for the majority of American men didn't hang well on him; they simply hung.

"I always had an incentive after college to dress decently," Maing says, "but I wasn't interested in becoming a fashion person. The need was strictly professional, but I had a heck of a time trying to find something that fit me."

If visits to the alteration counter could be described as Sisyphean, his were. He returned over and over, spending too much time and money.

"I thought, maybe there's a



TUXEDO JUNCTION

How the bespoke suit begat black tie.

One of Britain's earliest suit-makers was James Poole, whose business still exists on Savile Row as Henry Poole & Co. Whereas in 1806 he set up shop focusing on the production of military uniforms, by 1846 his son and the company namesake, Henry, catered to a wealthier crowd and moved the store's entrance to Savile Row—home to the military officers and politicians who were soon displaced by the artisans who clothed them.

In 1865, Henry Poole received an order from the teenaged Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII). Poole was to make him a short celestial blue smoking jacket for casual dinner parties. Twenty-one years later, as the story goes, New York millionaire James Potter visited the prince, was told that he could have a similar jacket made at Henry Poole & Co, and returned home to show it off in Tuxedo Park, an upstate vacation spot for Manhattan's elite. Thus began the rise of the penguin suit whose descendants we see year after year at the Academy Awards.

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better solution. I heard about something called custom, so I tried custom clothing in L.A.” He had discovered made-to-measure—a suit produced in a factory based on measurements taken in a showroom. “It fit somewhat better,” he acknowledges, “but was still far from satisfying.”

He asked around and heard about a bespoke tailor who translated measurements of the chest, shoulders and arms into a two-dimensional paper pattern. “That got me intrigued,” he says.

From Enzo Caruso, an Italian tailor in Santa Monica, Maing learned that many years are required to become a tailor—seven as an apprentice in some cases. He liked how Caruso sized up his client, measuring him and observing him but also asking questions about fit. (“The visual and verbal should sync up,” Maing says.) If one of a client's shoulders was lower, as is often the case, the tailor translated this asymmetry into the jacket so that it didn't droop on one side.

The more Maing learned, the more his respect and interest grew. Meanwhile, he'd landed on a solution to his clothing conundrum.

“It wasn't inexpensive,” he recalls, “but it was worth it.”

As Maing traveled for work, he began visiting tailors along his path, in the United States, Europe and Asia. But though he finally had jackets for his frame, he wasn't fulfilled.

“With the modern suit and jacket,” he explains, “it all started

in London, in Savile Row in the 19th century.” Those tailors were the originators of men's business dress and still make a suit that, in tailoring, is referred to as structured. (“Some call it stiff,” Maing adds.)

It was on Savile Row that the word *bespoke* gained prominence. Though originally meaning “to speak,” “to accuse” and “to complain,” by the 16th century, *bespeak* came to mean “to order in advance.” Today, *bespoke* is generally uttered in the context of tailoring. (A parallel bespoke tradition exists for women's fashion.)

Maing's discontent with Savile Row lies in its military origins. The suit as we know it began to take shape in the early 1800s, influenced by the Napoleonic Wars—which brought favor on a stiff, linear silhouette, with padded shoulders and high armholes to facilitate lifting weapons—and by the notorious dandy George Bryan “Beau” Brummell, whose fashion sense made disciples of Lord Byron and the prince regent (later King George IV). Styling his casual dress after that of his former regiment, the Light Dragoons, Brummell moved men's fashion away from knee breeches and stockings, instead championing meticulously fitted suits with dark coats, full-length trousers, linen shirts and white knotted cravats. He also popularized daily male hygiene and bathing, a social revolution that should have resulted in women today wearing T-shirts

emblazoned with his head à la Che Guevara.

For much of the past two centuries, the Savile Row tradition dominated—its high, squared shoulders and linearity as familiar in the silhouette of Dick Tracy as in the press photos of Ronald Reagan. But around 1930, Gennaro Rubinacci, the owner of London House in Naples, urged his tailor Vincenzo Attolini to reinvent the jacket for the city's wealthy, who dressed like British gentlemen despite the heat and humidity.

The new jacket was lighter and was distinguished by certain features, among them a boat-shaped chest pocket. “The Neapolitan sartorial revolution,” Maing explains, “is removing all



ROBERT DIGHTON (WATERCOLOR)

of the internal structure.” Visually, Neapolitan jackets stand out because of their unstructured shoulders, but their mark of mastery is the stitching of the sleeveheads. Without the stiff fabric and padding of Savile Row, the soft shoulders must be perfectly placed, lest they deform the suit front. This was the jacket’s success. It was light enough for lounging in the heat and yet kept its form. It wasn’t designed for financiers or businessmen but for nobles whose mark of status was leisure, and it perfectly captured the spirit of *la dolce vita*.

Although the Neapolitan jacket was initially considered alternative in the United States and Europe, it came into vogue in the 1990s. It could easily be folded, required less material, and was light and casual—appropriate for the times.

Maing had not yet begun his own blog, but he remembers the blossoming of enthusiasm for the Neapolitan suit in the pre-Instagram world of online forums. “It was so easy to wear,” Maing recalls people writing. “Today,” he says, “if you go to a window display and see a men’s jacket, more likely than not it is Neapolitan.”

Though Maing owned both Savile Row and Neapolitan suits, he was still waiting for his Goldilocks moment. “I didn’t feel entirely at home with Neapolitan tailoring or Savile Row, and I tried many tailors.”

Call it the intuition of the explorer or the creative dissatisfaction of the perfectionist, but he kept looking until 2011, when he saw mentions of a third option.

“A friend of a friend of a friend had his clothes made in Sicily. If I heard this from a random person, I wouldn’t have gone. But in online forums, people knew what they were talking about. There was no other reason you would be

on those forums.”

Maing’s curiosity was piqued. He had some vacation time, but he knew as much about Sicily as the average American who has seen *The Godfather*.

He walked to an Italian café a few blocks from his apartment in Gramercy Park and put up an ad for an Italian translator. The next day, Elisabetta D’Avenia responded. She was Sicilian and lived on the same street as he did. She called ahead to Sicily, found addresses and prices, and arranged meetings with tailors as well as local translators.

The weeklong trip took him through the three largest cities: Palermo, Catania and Messina. “Worst-case scenario,” he recalls telling himself, “I would enjoy the food.”

An American in Sicily

Maing’s first impressions of Sicily recalled Southern California—the yellow and green scrubland and rolling hills. In Palermo, he went to Giuseppe Zacco’s shop and, seeing the suits on display, noticed that the sleeveheads were less structured than in English tailoring but not fully unstructured. He held the jackets, manipulating the fabric as he examined the canvas—the lining that provides structure but is absent in Neapolitan suits, replaced by piping on the seams.

Though the originality and skill of the tailoring were clear, he didn’t yet know whether they were representative of Sicily. “By the end of the week, it sank in that I had found something new, though at that point I was still thinking in terms of my personal wardrobe.”

He put in his first order and then a second and third with subsequent tailors. He returned to Sicily four times that year and has since made more than a dozen visits.

Know Your Sleeveheads



English Military



Sicilian



Neapolitan

The Sicilian jacket may lack the copious archives of Savile Row and even the modest accounts of Neapolitan suit making, but Maing has become its chronicler. He sees it in the context of Sicilian history—“a mélange of cultures, a fusion going back at least 3,000 years.”

According to Thucydides, the island’s earliest inhabitants were the Sicani. Their cave art dates to 8,000 BCE—millennia before the arrival of the Elymians and the Sicels, for whom Sicily is named. In the 11th century BCE, the Phoenicians established settlements, followed by Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans, Vandals, Ostrogoths, Byzantines, Arabs and Normans. In 1130 CE, the Kingdom of Sicily became self-governing; it didn’t join Italy until 1861.

“So many influences created a culture that is resistant to extremes,” Maing says. “The Neapolitan jacket is an extreme in terms of being unstructured. I don’t think that Sicilians are that extreme. Look at Sicilian architecture. It’s a fusion of different styles. Norman, very linear. Sicilian baroque, an

explosion of curvature. The Savile Row tailor pays more attention to the line. The Neapolitan tailor focuses on the curve. Sicilian tailoring is both the curve and the line. The tailor is looking for balance.”

In the course of his travels through Sicily, Maing learned that in the mid-1900s, its cities housed hundreds of tailors. Siracusa, which was then home to fewer than 100,000 people, had 200 tailors. Today, Manhattan, with its 1.66 million inhabitants, doesn’t have that many.

“Postwar Italy was very poor,” Maing says, “with very few options for families to make a living. Many went into tailoring since it was one of the few things they could count on. Back then, everyone wore bespoke clothing, including underwear.”

But as ready-to-wear prices dropped, tailors who spent 40 hours on a jacket couldn’t compete. Formality also decreased, with many people turning to jeans or athleisure. And for those who still wanted suits, the division in global fashion between Savile Row and Naples—Maing calls it

“very tribal”—obscured other options even among Sicilians. Today, at 34, Claudio Italiano is the island’s youngest tailor, and most in the previous generation have closed shop, though with growing interest in Sicilian tailoring, new apprentices are honing their skills. On one visit to Siracusa, Maing met the city’s last remaining tailor and listened to his stories—years painstakingly bent over a table sewing and cutting or instructing apprentices.

In 2011, Maing wrote *Sleevehead’s Guide to Sicilian Tailors*, with a second edition in 2017. Called “the definitive guide to the subject” by Bruce Boyer, a former fashion editor and writer for such magazines as *Town & Country*, *GQ* and *Esquire*, the book places Sicilian suits within their larger, historical context. Then, in the form of a travel guide, it introduces the island’s major cities and tailors, enabling aficionados to independently follow Maing’s path.

Alternatively, he can bring Sicilian tailoring to them. Through Maing’s website, Sicilian Reserve, clients can order suits ranging in price from \$3,000 to \$5,500, or a jacket alone, \$2,500 to \$4,500. (Those who prefer to supply their own cloth, as some of his vintage-loving customers do, can have a suit made for \$2,500 or a jacket for \$2,000.) Once an order is placed, Maing travels with a tailor to meet the client. Before the company’s launch, there were no traveling Sicilian tailors, even though Europe has a long history of well-known tailors making trips to the United States. This is not simply for the client’s convenience, he explains: “It’s also a question of optics.” Spouses are not always magnanimous about being left stateside while their husbands traipse off to Italy for suit fittings.

For Ethan Klivans, the customer Maing and Italiano



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met in San Francisco, the draw of Sicilian Reserve was the handmade, artisanal aspect of Sicilian tailoring.

“I had always associated formal menswear with boring, poorly fitting, uncomfortable suits: the off-the-peg Brooks Brothers suits of my father. Exacerbating that, the media’s portrayal of men who look sharp in suits, such as James Bond or David Beckham, seemed very remote from who I am. I do not consider myself stylish; I was simply looking for clothes that would make me feel my best.”

Though Klivans considered tailors closer to home, he didn’t like their house styles, and he saw little appeal in the online men’s formalwear services run by what he calls “Instagram dandies”—“men with gelled hair and flamboyant pocket squares”—who would send his measurements to the Far East. Maing’s approach was a welcome contrast. “Juhn’s ability to share and apply his expertise and knowledge in a patient manner is invaluable for the sartorial novice,” Klivans says.

Sicilian Reserve now handles 20 customers each year, ranging from descendants of Sicilian-American immigrants interested in heritage, to bespoke cognoscenti looking for something new, to neophytes in need of guidance. “I have many clients who know what they want,” Maing says. “I only step in if the choice they are making may not work as they think it will.”

As for Maing’s own love for couture, its origin—beyond his personal needs—is unclear. “I meet people who were interested in watches and ties when they were 10,” he says. “I went to a public school without a serious dress code. I was pretty much a normal kid who liked model airplanes and toys. But I needed to dress professionally, and one thing led to another.”

His parents, who have retired to Orlando (he moved there to be close to them), don’t recall him having a childhood interest in clothing. They were puzzled by his career swerve. Though his mother’s father was a dress-maker in Korea and had a workshop there, Maing never saw it. He muses that in a Korean immigrant family, many things were implied, among them presenting well. “They didn’t have to say that you have to look good or be serious about your studies. This was the way things were done.”

But the suit, as Maing experienced it, wasn’t just about looking and feeling good; it was an embodiment of history.

“For me, clothing is more cultural. It’s about how these things came to be used, designed and created. I’m basically an anthropologist in the supply chain of menswear.”

Perhaps the most gratifying aspect of Maing’s work is reintroducing the lost craft of Sicilian tailoring to members of its own culture. His readers (“aside from a few seamstresses”) are an international mix of men—a surprising number of whom are Sicilian. “This was one of the unexpected pleasures,” he says. “Within Sicily there isn’t a level of appreciation for their own artisans.”

Once, a Sicilian shirt-maker, Lillo Scarantino, offered to drive Maing around the southwest of the country. When they stopped at Scarantino’s shop in the small town of Caltanissetta, Maing met his son, who was wearing a Neapolitan jacket while at work in the showroom. After speaking with the son for a while, Maing pointed to his own Sicilian jacket and said, without a hint of sarcasm, “The tailors here are great.” ■

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