

A celebration of the craftsmanship and elegance behind the timeless French brands whose rich heritage is the cornerstone of men's style.

The Parisian Gentleman

Hugo Jacomet

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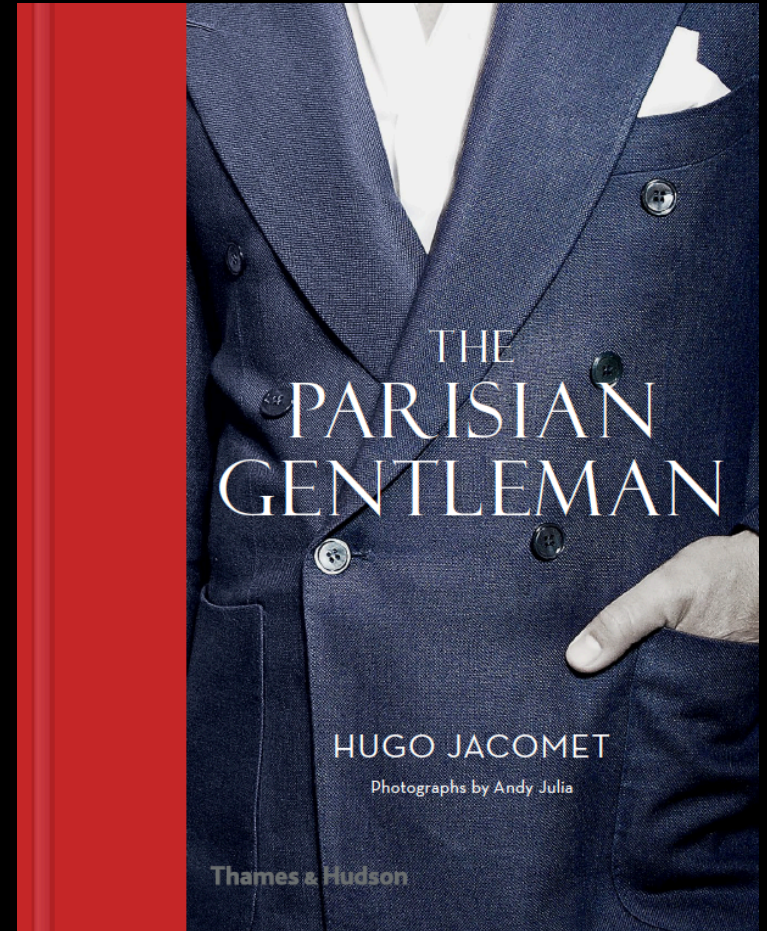
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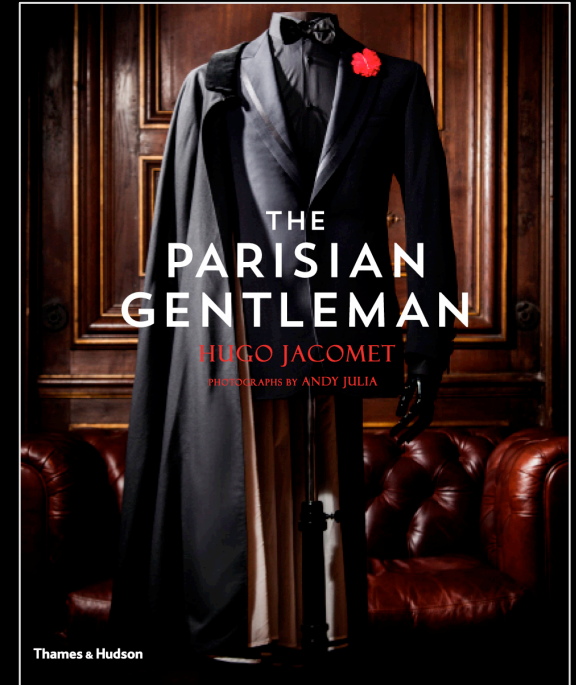
Key Sales Points

- A companion volume to Thames & Hudson's *Savile Row* and *The Perfect Gentleman*
- Written by Hugo Jacomet, French columnist and writer of online men's style magazine *The Parisian Gentleman*, which has influenced hundreds of thousands of enthusiasts and sartorialists around the world
- A rare insight into 25 leading heritage brands and the world's finest craftspeople, from tailors to shirtmakers, shoe makers to leather-goods artisans, the book includes specially commissioned photography and in-depth profiles

Praise for *The Parisian Gentleman* (HB)

‘Sheds light on the histories of famous bespoke houses and little-known studios alike’

The Rake







Two further examples of Smalto's 'second skin' ultra-light wools.

A luxurious Smalto crocodile-skin sports jacket.

many as 170 employees and bearing the Smalto signature were sold globally.

Smalto designed his collections himself until 1991. In 1995 he decided to focus on bespoke tailoring, and put his disciple Franck Boclet in charge of the signature style for the ready-to-wear department. In 1998–2000 the firm returned with two fashion shows that caused quite a sensation. Put on at a time when French sport was at its best, they featured football players and other top sportsmen as models.

In 2007 Boclet passed the baton to the young Youn Chong Bak, who had started out at Smalto as an intern a few years earlier. She took charge of the style that had made the house internationally famous and with a deft touch helped it to grow even further.

Clear Lines for Men

I cannot imagine a better way to describe Smalto's art than to use an analogy from the art of the comic. It seems to me that Smalto was the suit designer who used a *ligne claire*. This phrase—coined by the Dutch cartoonist and graphic designer Joost Swarte in 1977 during an exhibition devoted to Hergé, the inventor of Tintin—is the perfect description for the Smalto style: clean, neat, direct lines, almost geometric and with a fastidious way of isolating each part of the garment and respecting its proportion. Even ready-to-wear Smalto bears the signature style of the firm: a 90-degree lapel notch and a narrow shoulder, slightly curved inwards, its sleevehead wide and high and with a slight cigarette roll.

Francesco Smalto Couture: The Bespoke Workshop

Even though ready-to-wear has been a major part of the firm's business since the early 1970s, Smalto always made sure that a first-class bespoke workshop producing entirely handmade pieces in keeping with the canons of traditional tailoring remained at its heart. This bespoke workshop, which boasts the custom of many heads of state—not only the king of Morocco—has always worked according to the standards and methods set by its founder.

Following his master, Joseph Camps, Smalto worked for many years to devise his own system for taking measurements and producing templates, as well as organizing work according to a thirty-three-part 'step-by-step' process that trained tailors to specialize in a couple of techniques each. Such a system, which can work only in bespoke houses endowed with many workers, ensures the highest level of excellence and skill at each step of the production of a garment. This type of organization has been the hallmark of such houses as Huntsman & Sons in London.

By labouring over his research and fine-tuning these techniques for his own workshop, Smalto ensured that his skill, his methods, his vision and the core of his style were all passed on to the new generations of cutters, tailors, piece-makers and breech-makers. In 2012, as if to prove the success of this process of transmission, Smalto's firm received the label 'Entreprise du Patrimoine Vivant', an official distinction from the French state for companies that possess and promote a rare and historic skill.

The Francesco Smalto Couture workshop is now one of the five most important in Paris. In the face of a new interest in men's bespoke tailoring, it has opened up to a younger clientele, with a more cosmopolitan, less exclusive approach. They come to Smalto to find the suits, jackets, waistcoats and coats that stand out among the most beautiful and most refined in the world.

'A Smalto Suit Will Always Look Better'

Beyond Smalto's flair for the finest cut, his genius was to embrace the ready-to-wear revolution and present well-designed and well-made collections when other tailors stuck to their guns, holding on to traditional ideas and ignoring the assault of the mass industry that was flooding the market. Although Smalto's collections evolved through the years, and he was not immune to changing in response to aesthetic trends, he managed to keep his own style alive, making sure his fundamental signature was recognizable even when someone else was in charge—whether the wild child Franck Boclet or the sensual Youn Chong Bak.

When I mentioned to an old friend—a connoisseur of all things sartorial—that I was writing this book, he couldn't help remarking: 'Somehow, a Smalto suit always looks better than other suits.' Perhaps, then, the man who wanted to be crowned the best tailor of his times succeeded in his goal.



BERLUTI

The Soul of a Shoe

Not many

people can claim to have revolutionized a whole industry, but Olga Berluti is one of them. During the 1980s the going was smooth for her exclusive boutique in the rue Marbeuf, the polite and muted hub of artists, politicians and intellectuals. But wild Olga decided to overthrow the rigid codes of a very conservative – and slightly boring – market. Just as Berluti was getting a lot of attention outside Parisian circles for its exquisite ready-to-wear collections, she came up with a radically new concept, giving new meaning to an old word: patina. Everybody took note.

I remember in the mid-1980s window-shopping dreamily on rue Marbeuf (on quiet Sunday afternoons – it's less embarrassing), hypnotized by the Alessandro one-cut shoe, with its wood-like patina, or by a shimmering, reflective olive-green Warhol-inspired Andy loafer. "Your shoes got soul", said the poster at the back of the splendid window, from the darkness of that special boutique, always reminiscent more of the smoking room of a gentleman's club than of a shoe shop.

At the time John Lobb reigned supreme over high-end and bespoke shoes, while J. M. Weston and Church's, at a slightly lower level, were engaged in fierce and divisive competition, as we have seen. Olga Berluti chose to turn all these codes upside-down, in terms of both consumer habits and style, and introduced a healthy dose of creativity, *chutzpah* and freedom.

From the very beginning, Berluti's motto has been to do things differently, and that includes carefully choosing its words. At 26 rue Marbeuf, Berluti operates not a shop, but a *salon*. It's not about shoes, either, but about *sofaers*. Its employees even teach their distinguished customers how to lace their shoes the way the Duke of Windsor taught Olga – according to company legend.

It is also impossible to fulfil your desires immediately at Berluti's: it just isn't done. Shoes are chosen and sold in the form of raw leather, and so choosing a colour and a type of patina is part and parcel of buying your *sofaer*. This stroke of genius means that customers are asked to come back another day – which can only be conducive to new cravings – and makes every



Olga Berluti: the woman who revolutionized the world of men's shoes.

The Alessandro whole-cut shoe, created in 1984 by the sportsman founder, remains Berluti's iconic model and one of the most famous men's shoes in the world.





one feel that he is buying something unique, customized, meticulously prepared for him alone. Such a concept represents a masterful transfer of the bespoke bootmaking spirit to ready-to-wear footwear, and is surely one of the keys to Berluti's success.

Madame Berluti's ability to elevate with glamorous poetry what had hitherto been a banal purchase, often influenced by men's wives, put Berluti on the shoe-industry map. It helped to recruit an army of dedicated gentlemen ready to regard Berluti as an informal gentleman's club, not just a boutique – another stroke of genius.

Three decades before the concept of 'social networking' had invaded – even saturated – our lives, Olga Berluti created the first men's club in a shoe shop. She even held special nights that have become part of the legend of Paris's high society: the famous annual meetings of the exclusive and influential Club Swann, incorporating the business, political, artistic and intellectual elite united by the art of shoe-shining and the fondness of men for their shoes. In the 1990s rumours and fantastic tales of these evenings ran wild. Legend has it that these secret polishing meetings always culminated with a few drops of champagne (preferably Dom Pérignon) applied as a glaze before the shoes were presented to the shimmering light of the full moon.

But all that is neither here nor there. The main thing is that Berluti was the first bootmaker to enable some of France's top executives to play like children. Olga persuaded members of the upper crust to gather once a year and sit shoe-less at the table of an award-winning restaurant, like kids at boarding school or on summer camp, and spit cheerfully on their shoes. This gave them the sweet impression of belonging to a tradition of distinguished behaviour epitomized by the character of Charles Swann in the work of Marcel Proust – a fine, cultured man, a true connoisseur of literature and the arts, someone who never boasts or becomes subsomed by the world around him. Such a character was, as Proust puts it in chapter three of *Swann's Way*, the opposite of those "boring people" who were to be avoided like the plague, and only asked to the big evenings, which were given as seldom as possible, and then only if it would amuse the painter or make the musician better known'.



It is almost certainly because of that club, with its Proustian name, that the tycoon Bernard Arnault, an unwavering supporter of Berluti, became interested in the firm, to the point of buying it in 1993. He went on to make Olga Berluti an international star next to the acclaimed British houses John Lobb, Church's and Edward Green.

Alessandro Berluti

The Berluti story started in the late nineteenth century with the arrival in Paris of Alessandro Berluti, a young Italian bootmaker from the small village of Senigallia, on the Adriatic Coast. He did well in the booming *fin de siècle* atmosphere, and soon made the right acquaintances, creating shoes for fellow Italian bootmakers and the rich customers of the Paris luxury hotels.

In 1893 Berluti created a very out-of-the-ordinary model whose design surprised everyone: a lace-up pump made from a single piece of leather without any visible stitching. It was named the Alessandro after its creator. This shoe remains an emblem of the house, and (next to John Lobb's double-buckle monk shoe, William) has certainly triggered many a gentleman's affair with shoes and sartorial passion. I must speak up on behalf of thousands of other Parisian gentlemen and make it known that it was most probably this shoe that inoculated me with the virus of elegance and provoked my craving for beautiful clothes.

Jean-Michel Casaleppi, Pierre Rock and Anthony Dolin, Berluti's three master bootmakers. Dolin was awarded the prestigious title *Meilleur Ouvrier de France* (Best Craftsman in France) in 2012.

Clockwise from top left: An in-house bootmaker works on a bespoke pair, in this highly specialized atelier, all kinds of stitching methods are mastered and perfected; two photographs show custom ski boots crafted for Greta Garbo in the mid-1930s.

Thirdly, the firm was able to understand, cater to and harness the developments of the modern era, and to do so better than any other. It thus became an important player in the field of "democratic luxury", if I can coin such a paradoxical phrase. Ostentation may still be alive today, especially in Russia, China and the Middle East, but the luxury industry has undergone great change over the last five decades. Aristocratic ostentation has mostly given way to a more emotional approach based on a quest for better quality of life, with consumers adopting a more aesthetic attitude to their possessions. The philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky brilliantly explained that trend in his book *Le Luxe Éternel* (2003):

What matters now is not to challenge others but to please oneself. Pleasure is now a private thing, in line with hypermodernity. Distinction has become a narcissistic feature, not a social one. It is not about showing off, but rather about enjoying oneself in private, with goods

that are loved for the power of imagination they bring.

This new "hypermodern" trend is at the heart of contemporary luxury business, and Vuitton has been able to tackle that dimension better than other companies.

Finally, Louis Vuitton has always been able to balance the two-sided need for both modernity and eternity. When one buys a luxury object, such as a Vuitton trunk, there is a deep connection to a special sense of time. Thus, buying a Louis Vuitton piece means buying something inscribed with time, fighting the decay of things, the lack of substance.

In terms of volume and turnover, the Asnières workshop is only a drop in the ocean of Louis Vuitton's luxury empire, which boasts thirteen factories and a centre for research and development. Still, it is this one workshop that remains the backbone and heart of the company, commanding admiration and respect and lending it a sense of tradition—and possibly eternity.



A small trunk of 1905 in striped canvas, covered with hotel stickers.

The gamut of handle lock was invented in 1884 by Louis and Georges Vuitton, and is still in use today in its original design.

Louis Vuitton's four historical canvas patterns, in chronological order: Tricolor (1854, bottom right), the striped canvas (1872, bottom left), Damiers (1888, top right), and Monogram (1896, top left).





Caron has always been the odd one out among perfumers, staying faithful to its roots despite hardship and tribulations, never yielding to fads and trends or the whims and fancies of marketing experts. As early as the late 1910s, Félicie Wampouille, the muse of Caron's founder, Ernest Daltroff, said she believed more in the virtues of word of mouth than in advertising, and she decided that Caron perfumes should be sold only in Caron boutiques. This kind of freedom, in word and action, was often at odds with the evolving trends of the luxury market, but it was this very attitude that enabled Caron to become such an original company, a true jewel of French perfume.

After a period of great uncertainty, during which Caron was passed like a hot potato from one hand to another (including the supermarket group Cora), the golden egg of Parisian perfume eventually landed in good hands. They were those of Patrick Ales, an apparently clairvoyant entrepreneur, endearing and atypical, who did more than just restore the past glory of a company that was almost a century old.

Ales has been responsible for putting Caron back on track, resuming the course of this unique company, whose creations kept shaking things up, and offering men and women fragrances with a strong character. This is the extraordinary and very touching world of Caron.

Le Tabac Blond is a distinctive fragrance created in 1919 by Caron in homage to the US soldiers who introduced the famous Virginia tobacco to Europe. It evokes the sweetness of Virginia tobacco smoke, without containing any tobacco extract.

Ernest Daltroff and Félicie Wampouille: Love and Fragrances

Ernest Léon René Lucien Daltroff was born on 17 November 1867 at his parents' house in Sainte-Cécile in Bourgogne. His father, Louis, came from Russia, and was Head of Division at the local railway in Paray-le-Monial. The rest of his family was part of the Jewish elite in Paris.

Very early in his life, Ernest travelled around the world and developed a gift for recognizing and memorizing scents. Following his personal taste, he decided to become a chemist and perfumer, and in 1902, with his brother, he bought a small haberdashery-perfumery on rue Rossini in Paris.

The pair's reason for choosing the name Caron for their budding business remains shrouded in mystery. Some specialists say it was a tribute to a famous acrobat of the time; others claim it as the name of the previous owner, one Anne-Marie Caron. Whatever the case, Caron is a simple, typically French-sounding name, and it became a historical symbol of French perfumery.

The enterprising and optimistic Daltroff brothers also bought a small upstairs office in the renowned rue de la Paix, as well as a small perfume factory called Emilia in Asnières-sur-Seine, in the suburbs of Paris. This was where they started their creative experiments with fragrances.

The year 1906 is an important one in Caron's history, as it was when the brothers were joined by Félicie Wampouille, a young designer whose role at first was to help Ernest to create bottles and packaging for the fledgling business. Wampouille, with whom he soon fell madly in love, dedicated her entire life to the company. She ran the business until 1962, long after the death of its founder (which occurred in 1941 in the United States, after he fled anti-Semitism in France in 1939).

Ernest and Félicie rapidly produced original fragrances whose evocative names met with great

success, both in France and abroad. Their first triumphs came with Chantecler in 1906, Narcisse Noir (Black Narcissus) in 1911, L'Infini (Infinity) in 1912 and Ravissement (Rapture) in 1913. Caron consequently opened a boutique and a small factory in New York in 1923.

In 1916, while a generation of men was fighting in the trenches, Caron launched N'Aimez que Moi (Love Only Me), a fragrance given by many soldiers to their wives or girlfriends in the hope that they would behave while their men went through their terrible ordeal. Three years later, as an homage to the US soldiers who had introduced the famous Virginia tobacco to Europe, Caron launched Le Tabac Blond (Light Tobacco). This fragrance (which is still produced by Caron) was intended for men, at a time when they used only cologne or handkerchief perfumes (such as the famous Mouchoir de Monsieur, created a few years earlier by Jacques Guerlain). The story goes that it was actually women – the newly emancipated flappers sporting men's clothes – who adopted the new fragrance.

Le Tabac Blond was among the first fragrances to use leather as a dominant note. It is still part of Caron's catalogue, and keeps pleasing men and women alike. Soft, sweet and complex, it was part of the first generation of "impressionistic" fragrances – like Guerlain's Jicky – trying to avoid replicating nature's scents, and instead evoked the feeling of sweetness of Virginia tobacco smoke, all without the tiniest extract of tobacco.

Pour un Homme de Caron: An Eternal Masterpiece

The Daltroff-Wampouille duo delivered its masterpiece in 1934. Daltroff loved lavender; Wampouille loved vanilla. Since he was madly in love with her, Daltroff attempted the strange conjunction of both aromas, producing

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