

Body scanner takes tailoring to the masses

July 1 2012, by Emma Charlton

Can a tailored suit help clinch that tricky deal at work? Get the girl? Or simply put a spring in your step? Absolutely, if you believe a year-old Paris firm that is using a 3D body scanner to bring made-to-measure to the masses.

"There is a whole psychological side to men's suits," said Francois Chambaud, co-founder of Paris store Les Nouveaux Ateliers. "Say you arrive at a meeting -- or your wedding -- in an ill-fitting suit, you just won't feel right."

"A person who feels well-dressed will sit forward and make their point, as opposed to slumping back in their chair," said the 25-year-old. "It can give you a big confidence boost."

Convinced there was a vast and untapped market of style-hungry men out there, Chambaud set out to capture it in February last year, using technology to slash the cost of customised clothes.

"We wanted to offer made-to-measure suits for the cost of ready-to-wear. And we wanted to make it fun, to break with the image of something a bit austere and elitist," he said.

"Traditionally, the whole process of getting measured up and coming back for fittings, was quite drawn-out, it could take up to three months."

Here, customers simply strip down to their undies, and step into a scanning cabin that snaps a [3D image](#) of their body, capturing 200

measurements in a second compared to 45 minutes by hand with a tape measure.

Clients fully customise their suits and shirts, picking the fabric, cut, and every last detail from buttons to collar shape.

Their measurements and choices are fed into a computer-assisted design tool, creating a virtual body on which the clothes are modelled to produce a pattern, which is sent off for assembly in the firm's workshop in Shanghai.

Three weeks later the suit is back in Paris, ready to slip into.

With 7,000 customers so far, a second Paris store open, profits already coming in and plans to expand in the provinces and abroad, the firm appears to have struck gold.

Who is the typical customer? "There is no typical customer. We have catered to men aged 18 to 94. We have clothed a dwarf and an NBA basketball player, 2.17 metres (7.1 feet) tall," said Chambaud.

But on the whole -- whether students, young executives, corporate bosses or sportsmen -- the store attracts clients who are new to tailoring, and can't find what they need in the ready-to-wear market.

-- 'It's a small revolution' --

Twenty-one-year-old Eddy Benarous is a rugbyman, built like a rugbyman -- with broad shoulders, narrow hips, powerful thighs. And until recently he had yet to find a suit that fitted.

"I want something that lets me move my arms freely, but is fitted at the waist. It's just impossible. They are always either too big or small," the

young Parisian told AFP.

"This is just right," he said, patting the bag with the two brand new suits he just collected from the store. "I even got them to leave some extra room around the arms because I need to bulk out a bit."

Final year law student Ilan Halimi, readily admits he is on the picky side.

"I can't find what I want in ready-to-wear, even in high-end brands, because I am very demanding.

"I like waisted suits and tailored shirts, not too long, not too short either. I like to pick the collar I want, to get exactly the shirt I want by customising it myself."

"It's a fun experience," he said. "And it's over really fast. It's also really cool to see your suit in 3D on a screen. And the result is perfect, exactly the way I want it."

The combination of time-saving scanner and pattern-making software enabled the firm to slash costs, with suits starting at 290 euros, less than half the typical entry-level price in France for a made-to-measure suit. Prices rise to 890 euros for the highest-grade cloth, by the Italian Loro Piana.

Les Nouveaux Ateliers claim to be the only firm in Europe, if not the world, using a [body scanner](#) this way, and have patented their pattern-making software.

But for trendwatcher Emma Fric of the Peclers Paris consultancy, the firm is tapping into a broader, powerful trend.

"It's a small revolution that is taking place," she told AFP. "The notion of

returning to couture, to tailor-made clothes, is becoming very important again."

She sees the trend as being fed by two things: "a real need for individuality, and a desire to get back to real work on fabrics, cuts, finishing touches."

Fric expects technologies like 3D imaging -- while still at experimental stage -- to spawn a huge proliferation of customised clothes over the next decade.

"The tricky question," she said, "is whether the consumer really has the maturity and the ability to design their own clothes."

Les Nouveaux Ateliers worked around that problem by employing fashion graduates as store attendants, to guide style novices in their choices -- and steer them clear of a tailoring faux pas.

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