

Male order

FLORENCE, ITALY WHEN IT COMES TO MEN'S FASHION, IT'S NOT THE CATWALKS OR FASHION EDITORS OF PARIS OR MILAN THAT CALL THE SHOTS – IT'S THE BUYERS AND BLOGGERS OF PITTI UOMO

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Called to the cloth: Carl Davidsson (left) and Joakim Svärth of gentlemen's outfitter Rose & Born in Stockholm size up Naples-based Flannel Bay's jackets

'PITTI UOMO IS ABOUT CLOTHES THAT MEN ALL OVER THE WORLD WILL ACTUALLY WEAR, THAT WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO PEOPLE'S LIVES'

I have committed my fair share of sartorial blunders. I have worn crumpled shirts to important work meetings (aesthetically trivial), attended formal weddings in an unwashed suit (aesthetically impolite), worn brown shoes at black-tie occasions (aesthetically disputable) and on one embarrassing occasion in my early adulthood, worn socks with a pair of Birkenstock sandals (aesthetically unforgivable).

But the question is whether I have ever been this wide of the mark. It's a crisp January day in Florence and I've turned up at Pitti Uomo, the biannual menswear fair, seriously underdressed.

I'd arrived in Italy straight from my honeymoon in Florida – a string of delayed flights meant I couldn't stop off in Stockholm to repack – with little more than a pair of flip-flops and a bagful of dirty laundry.

It was a blow to my vanity, which would have preferred that I had been able to iron some shirts and plan a few outfits which, if not as good as the ones mod-

eled by Florence's demanding fashionistas, would have been at least a little less embarrassing.

Pitti Uomo is a must for menswear buyers the world over. Here, in the courtyard of Fortezza da Basso – a 500-year-old fort on the outskirts of Florence, just 20 minutes walk from the tourist area of Piazza del Duomo – men's fashion has been enjoying something of a renaissance since the early 1970s.

It's the gents at Pitti Uomo, both exhibitors and visitors – Americans, Japanese, Englishmen, Scandinavians – who set the tone for what the well-dressed man will be wearing next season. And by the look of it, that's brown, blue or gray suits; woolen pants and cashmere sweaters; denim shirts and workwear jackets; Italian suede loafers, English brogues, American Red Wing boots and the occasional brightly colored sneaker.

An air of self-consciousness hangs over Pitti Uomo, whether it's young pups in the latest workwear, cool forty-somethings combining tailor-made with cargo patterns, or distinguished 60-year-olds with their initials embroidered on their shirts. The men ogle each other's outfits, unashamedly studying new cravat knots and unusual *pochettes* (pocket ▶



Cobbled runway: Window-shopping between the Duomo and River Arno



Old hand: Umbrella maker Maglia Francesco



Tastemaker: Marcello Marchetti outside his popular store



Man about town: Reiji Katayama (left) of Hawaiian label Island Slipper cuts a dash at Fortezza da Basso, the 500-year-old fort on the outskirts of Florence where Pitti Uomo holds court



Blood ties: Marco (left) and Andrea Chiarini with their store manager Fabrizio Vangelisti

‘YOU DRESS MUCH MORE DARINGLY. THEN YOU REALIZE THAT IT WOULDN’T REALLY WORK AT HOME. PEOPLE WOULD THINK YOU WERE GOING TO A FANCY DRESS PARTY’

squares), constantly on the lookout for photographers.

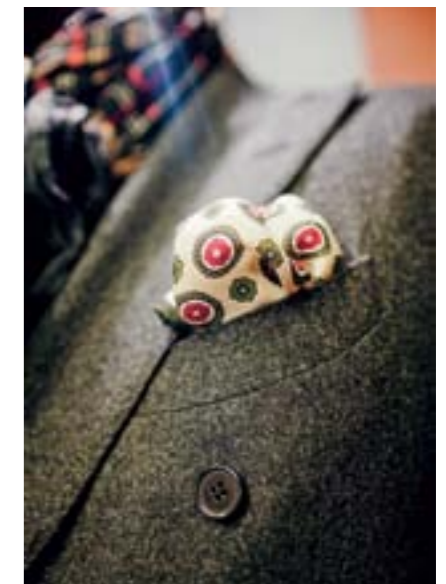
AT PITTIUOMO, photographers and/or bloggers are everywhere. The American edition of *GQ*, the men’s lifestyle magazine, has its own street shooter, Tommy Ton, who uploads images daily to the magazine’s website (which are then unashamedly republished in countless fashion blogs).

Then there’s the prince of bloggers, Scott Schuman, aka The Sartorialist. I spot the 42-year-old sneaking around in a dark blue overcoat, brown suede boots and iPod earbuds hunting for the Next Big Thing.

“When I came here four years ago, I was the only blogger taking photos,” Schuman says. “I had just made my name as a street photographer in New York and all kinds of people said I should come here, and I’m glad I did. The thing with Pitti Uomo is that it’s a pure menswear fair, whereas in Paris and Milan you see a lot of conceptual fashion that will never be produced and which doesn’t really mean much to anyone. Pitti is about clothes that men all over the world will actually wear, that will make a difference to people’s lives.”

The first thing that strikes you about Pitti Uomo is how different it is to the world’s car, boat and furniture fairs and their brash and noisy hangars. Here, every stand is a refined gentleman’s outfitter, with muted lighting and wall-to-wall carpeting.

IT WAS FLORENCE, not Milan or Rome, that laid the foundations for Italy’s fashion



Hip to be square: Eredi Chiarini dresses its suits with a pochette

industry. A Florentine businessman, Giovanni Battista Giorgini, had seen a gap in the postwar market for tailored prêt-à-porter, particularly in America, where there was only haute couture or department store mass production. Italy’s first fashion show took place at his home in February 1951, and paved the way for the runways of Florence’s Sala Bianca, which would establish Made in Italy in the years that followed.

All around the Italian countryside an army of tailors and other craftsmen were making shirts, suits and accessories. Family run businesses that are now into their fourth or fifth generation: Anderson’s Belts, umbrella maker Maglia Francesco, ▶



Snap happy: Street shooters and/or bloggers keep us abreast of the latest fashions, chief among them Scott Schuman, aka *The Sartorialist* (below)



and hatmaker Grevi, to name a few. Giorgini set about organizing them.

Pitti Uomo launched in 1972 and was primarily a shopwindow for Italian menswear and accessories. Today, it's the most important event in men's fashion with 825 exhibitors – a third of them from outside Italy – and more than 30,000 visitors.

It's easy to get hung up on your appearance when you're surrounded by some of the world's best dressed men, especially when your outfit comprises a pair of gray, baggy Ralph Lauren woolen pants, bought at an outlet outside Miami, and a crumpled Acne jacket that the photographer brought from Stockholm.

Imagine my surprise, then, when on my first day at the fair, a street photographer stops me – and I have my photo taken.

"It's for a blog," the Italian tells me, palming me a business card and moving on.

FEELING TALLER. I once more enter the exhibition hall where distinguished names including Crockett & Jones, Boglioli and Barbour are showing.

At Naples-based Flannel Bay, an extensive range of sports jackets in every imaginable color and style has caught the eye of Carl Davidsson and Joakim Svärth,

who own gentleman's outfitter Rose & Born in Stockholm. Davidsson is trying on a tight waffle-patterned cashmere jacket in an off-white tone. "The design is a bit like my grandma's old cape," he says with a smile.

Svärth and Davidsson have been coming to Pitti Uomo for 10 years, and have celebrated many a Midsummer Eve here during the summer edition. Four years ago they took over Rose & Born, a classic menswear store leaning toward English tailoring. Since then, they have successfully renewed their collection, creating something more daring, more colorful and, yes, more Florentine. The colorful inner linings of their blazers have become their signature.

"Half of what's on show here wouldn't sell in Scandinavia," Svärth says. "Swedes are very conservative and we always have to check ourselves before we place our orders. Something as simple as a gray winter jacket wouldn't work back home, people still want black."

"Being here is always an inspiration," adds Davidsson, who is fond of orange accessories. The burned yellow of his scarf, watchband and lighter contrast with his otherwise muted suit.

"You suddenly dress much more eccen- ▶



Bridge of sighs: Ponte alla Carraia is just one of the bridges spanning the River Arno



Buyer's market: Crockett & Jones, Boglioli and Barbour were among the labels doing a brisk trade on the lower floor of the main pavilion at this summer's Pitti Uomo

'THE BEST FASHION SHOW IS DEFINITELY IN THE STREET. ALWAYS HAS BEEN, ALWAYS WILL BE'

which promotes Italian fashion around the world through fairs such as Pitti Uomo.

"You can have cargo pants, desert boots, shirts with cufflinks and a dressed-up blazer – and still look well-dressed. Men's fashion today has far fewer rules than before. It is easier to mix and match. But it is in the nature of fashion that it is constantly evolving."

It is hard to imagine Pitti Uomo anywhere other than Florence. Nowhere else are the men so well dressed. Florentines are renowned for their love of tight cuts and bold colors, and somehow come off being macho despite their vanity.

The line in the men's room is down to people studying themselves in the mirror. In Sweden, even a cursory glance at your hair would be embarrassing. A Swedish hairdresser who has worked in Florence says the number of Florentine men who come in once a week to trim their fringes would make the vainest Scandinavians look like Jeff Bridges' The Dude in *The Big Lebowski*.

IN THE DOCUMENTARY PROFILE *Bill Cunningham New York*, *The New York Times* fashion photographer feted for his street photography, says: "The best fashion show is definitely in the street. Always has been, always will be."

With that in mind, I decide to scout the town. Apart from the big brands' showrooms – ranging from homegrown talent such as Gucci, Pucci, Ferragamo and Cavalli to Borsalino and Bottega Veneta – there's an impressive array of menswear boutiques.

Down by the River Arno, the WP Store is full of the latest lumberjack styles from Woolrich, Blundstone, and others.

Milord, a classic men's tailor, is crowded with fashion-conscious Florentines, Japanese, Americans, and Russians who are either here to study and be inspired or explore a clothing culture they don't have at home. ▶

trically, more colorful and daring. Then you realize that it wouldn't really work at home in Stockholm. People would think you were going to a fancy dress party."

Pitti Uomo has loosened its collar in recent years. There has been more mix-and-match, more fashion, and more outside influence from Japan and elsewhere. Ten years ago, it was easier to discern the trends – one year there would be tight-fitting pants, the next year loose – but today it's a broad church.

This rejuvenation has changed the dynamics of Pitti, and by extension the way men dress.

"Nowadays it's hard to say what the formal way of dressing is," says Raffaello Napoleone, the CEO of Pitti Immagine,



Accessoires à la Montreal: Twins Byron and Dexter Peart showcased their luxury leather goods line Want – Les Essentiels de la Vie at Pitti Uomo

‘WE PAY A LOT OF ATTENTION TO THE FIT. THE SUITS SHOULD BE TIGHT AND SIT WELL. THEY DON’T CARE ABOUT THAT IN MILANO!’

with the staff who are practically my friends now. There’s a service and atmosphere here that you don’t find anywhere else in the world.”

A few blocks away, around the corner from the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, or Duomo, is Eredi Chiarini, where brothers Andrea and Marco Chiarini – both familiar faces from *GQ*’s street style blog – run one of Italy’s most highly regarded tailors.

“We pay a lot of attention to the fit. The suits should be tight and sit well. They don’t care about that in Milano!” complains Andrea, dressed in purple checked pants and with a small gold charm in his buttonhole, as he guides me around the store.

Andrea, 62, is the younger of the brothers and a typically gruff Italian. But by the time he’s shown me around the store, which comprises nine rooms in a beautiful Florentine apartment (just as in a private home, you have to ring the doorbell to get in), his mood has mellowed.

When he shows off the suits you see the gleam in his eyes. Like an overexcited child, he tells how he buys in the fabric and has the suits made up by the store’s eight tailors in Naples, with prices starting at \$2,270.

“Feel this!” he demands, running his hand over a gray pinstripe-check suit jacket. “This is our latest, a woolen fabric with a clear vintage feel. It’s like something my grandfather wore.”

The Chiarini brothers opened their store in 1970, building on a family tradition stretching back to 1884. I wonder if there’s as much pressure on them to move with the times, especially in a conservative niche like bespoke menswear.

“Our most important customer is the one aged 25-40,” Andrea says. “We’re always looking for better manufacturers and higher quality. But it is the younger ▶

Walking in, I bump into Stefano Cocoloni and his son, Samuel. Samuel, 24, is here for his first suit fitting. The Italian man’s relationship to his tailor is equivalent to a woman’s with her hairdresser, and the tailor is often passed on from father to son.

“Samuel’s grandfather is also a customer of mine,” says Marcello Marchetti, 56, who started Milord 10 years ago.

Steve Lee, J. Lindeberg’s agent in Seoul and Hong Kong, is here too, just passing through on his way to Milan for Fashion Week.

“Whenever I’m in Italy, I come to Florence to see Milord,” says Lee, who’s based in Tokyo.

“I come here, drink coffee and chat

customer that pushes us to think in new ways and find new directions.”

Andrea picks up a red patterned scarf and ties it around his neck with a knot I have never seen before.

“People always tie their scarves the same way. We change every season. And we wear them inside out, so you can see the seams on the back. There’s more color that way.”

THE FACT SHEET

Pitti Uomo

January 10-13, 2012.
www.pittimmagine.com

WP Store

Via della Vigna Nuova, 75. Tel: +39 055 2776399.
www.wplavori.com

Milord

Piazza Strozzi, 12/13. Tel: +39 055 280739.

Eredi Chiarini

Piazza Beccaria, 5. Tel: +39 055 244839.
www.eredichiarini.it

Boggi

Via Della Vigna Nuova, 27. Tel: +39 055 219179.
www.boggi.it

Rose & Born

Grevgatan 2, Stockholm, Sweden.
Tel: +46 8 662 08 90. www.roseborn.com

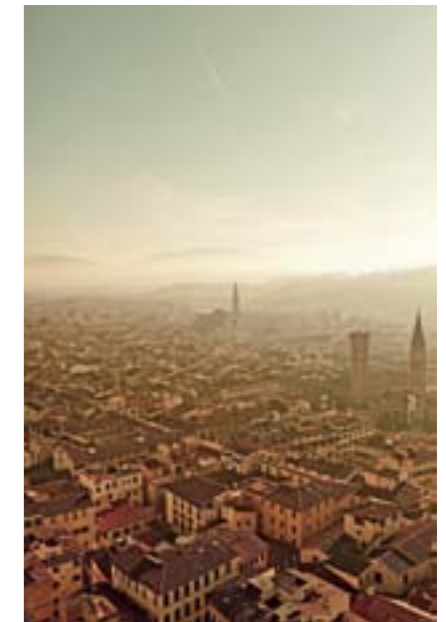
I pick out a flowery scarf in purple and light green, then turn to Andrea and confess that Scandinavians would never dare wear such a thing. “We are far too conservative up there,” I explain. I’m just about to pay when I envisage myself on the streets of Stockholm, and my fear of being seen as a peacock poseur gets the better of me.

I HAD SEVERAL CLOSE CALLS in Florence. In Boggi, a sort of Italian Brooks Brothers, I spent a long time caressing a quilted riding jacket and a brown checked jacket with a sewn-in padded vest, but changed my mind at the last minute. Both felt just too Italian, too daring.

In the end, I bought a pile of leather wallets from a street vendor, as if they were the height of Florentine workmanship. For \$20 or so you can find the most beautiful silk scarves, wallets and briefcases, right under your nose.

And the fashion blog I was photographed for outside Pitti Uomo? After visiting the website every morning for four days, I finally give up clicking the refresh button.

Even my vanity has its limits. ✦



High fashion: Florence seen from the Duomo

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For further details about Pueblo Don Thomas visit www.pueblodonthomas.com

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