



Required trimmings: 1 m body canvas; 20" horsehair chest canvas; 5" collar canvas, bias cut, across the piece; 10" linen holland on the double; 20" domette on the double; 5" x 12" collar melton, bias cut, on the double; 18" sleeve head roll; 2 x medium winged shoulder pads; 1 m silesia, on the double; 50 cm fusible; 10 m reel of buttonhole twist; silk thread for finishing.

MAKING A COAT

*A step-by-step guide to making a coat by hand,
following the method of Rachel Alice Smith*

THE MOST frequent comment from first-time customers for a bespoke coat is about how it feels. They can't explain it necessarily, it just *feels different*; more comfortable, more connected to the body. It makes them feel more confident, and so it should. The time and attention taken by the cutter and tailor to make the piece are a labour of love. The coat is not simply assembled and thrown on, it is designed to mould and sculpt around the owner's body, creating shape, and redefining their proportions.

This starts with the *cutting*. For example, the armholes are closer, and cut higher into the armpit. This might sound counterintuitive, but the height of the armhole creates less resistance between the sleeve and the body of the coat at the chest, allowing for better rotation and freedom of movement. Furthermore, the longer seam under the arm elongates the body, making the coat feel lean and less boxy. Another concern is 'balance' – the difference in length between the front and back of the coat. The bottom of the coat should run parallel with the ground: if a person has a rounded back, the jacket will gape off the neck, and they require more back balance. If they have a more prominent chest or stomach, the coat will rise and cross over at the front, so they need more front balance. This is not just an aesthetic conundrum. Should a coat be short of back balance, for example, the owner will forever feel that it's falling off their neck – as if they're being pulled backwards – and will be obliged to constantly tug it back into position. A bespoke coat should hug the neck – this is the anchoring point from which the rest of the garment drapes.

Then comes the *tailoring*. When you hold a bespoke coat in your hands, besides the beautiful hand-finishing you will see one fundamental difference from anything off-the-peg: *shape*. The owner's shape is quite literally built into the coat through the canvas and interlinings. The tailor uses a series of 'pad' stitches, dart manipulation and iron work to create a three-dimensional canvas form, from which the rest of the coat is constructed. The canvas and interlinings are made of natural fibres – wool, linen, cotton – and, like an iron, the human body creates heat and moisture. So, over time, the more the coat is worn, the more it begins to cast itself around the body, becoming more comfortable, more shapely and unique.

A bespoke coat can be a welcome delight for someone who finds it difficult to wear off-the-peg clothes. The ready-to-wear system is flawed. How can the few billion people around the world who wear coats be pigeonholed into wearing ten common sizes? Bespoke offers a solution: a unique garment, designed by the owner, with form, function, and style all considered. Historically, this was *the only way* to buy clothes. That changed with the advances in technology and export, but now, with a consciousness for the environment and limiting waste, spending more on fewer pieces is very much in the fashion zeitgeist. A bespoke coat does just that. It's built to last. Inlays are hidden inside the garment, allowing it to be let-out up to four or five inches in its lifetime. The making process hasn't changed much in two hundred years, so, if you know how to put a coat together by hand, you can take it apart by hand, rebuild it and extend its life, perhaps even, as is common on Savile Row, beyond that of the original owner. •