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A CAREER AS A SAVILE ROW TAILOR SUITS KATHRYN SARGENT

Blonde, be-suited, 30-something tailor Kathryn Sargent is on a roll. She was appointed head cutter in Savile Row in 2009, working for the seriously pukka firm of Gieves and Hawkes; early last year she set up her own company and this spring examples of her work will go on show in the Rhode Island School of Design's exhibition *Artist/Rebel/Dandy: Men of Fashion in the US*. She is also the recipients of the Hand and Lock Embroidery Prize for the second time. 'I keep pinching myself – I'm living the dream,' she says.

It's a dream Sargent's followed since she enrolled on a fashion course at UCA Epsom in 1993 and realised that womenswear was not for her. Aware that she needed a job at the end of college, Sargent realised that out of about 60 students only 10% went into menswear and so took the unusual decision to specialise in this area; it wasn't just any menswear, but the high-end, high-quality craft of tailoring that she was drawn to. 'I was a bit of a Mod at the time and liked 1960s styling and sharp tailoring,' she explains, adding, 'It was a deliberate choice to make myself a bit different.'

This choice was the start of a love affair that Sargent has pursued passionately. Her degree course hardly covered tailoring so she taught herself. 'I bought old Burberry suits and took them apart to learn how they had been made, photocopied the pieces and then put them together again,' she says, adding, 'I wanted to make everything myself and to understand the process.' Another study aid was the second-hand tailoring books she collected published by *Tailor & Cutter*, see pg 24, which were full of arcane tips of the trade, illustrations on how to draft traditional patterns and analysis about how classic clothing was constructed.

After graduating Sargent was taken on as a trimmer by Gieves and Hawkes. And this is where she honed her skills: tailoring, like any craft, is all about hands-on experience. 'I got my head down and got on with the work and practised and practised and practised,' she says. This dedication clearly paid off as she rapidly worked her way up the tailoring tree, winning the Golden Shears Award in 1998 and becoming a cutter with her own clients in 2000. And

although Savile Row is very much a man's world, run by men for a predominantly male clientele, Sargent managed to avoid hitting a tweed ceiling on her way up. She attributes this to her professionalism, but I suspect her undoubted talent and steely determination also helped. 'I didn't want my gender to hold me back so didn't let it become an issue,' she explains briskly. And the result is she now runs her own company, Kathryn Sargent Bespoke Tailoring.

So what exactly is bespoke tailoring? It is the intricate process of making a personalised garment for an individual client from scratch. The process starts with Sargent meeting the client to discuss their needs, tastes and lifestyle. 'Communication is really key,' she says. The client is then measured and from this set of measurements the cutter, 'the architect of the suit' according to Sargent, makes a unique paper pattern which is then used to cut the actual cloth (which will have been chosen by the client with Sargent's input). This is lightly basted, or tacked, together for a further fitting and then details such as pocket position are decided on before a final fitting and hand finishing. A bespoke suit can take up to 50 hours to make in a process that involves eight different specialists including cutter, trimmer, coat and trouser maker and presser.

The starting price for a Sargent suit is £3,200 plus VAT, but for this the client gets exactly what he or she wants and a garment that they will look and feel good in; an experienced tailor will be able to disguise a client's physical imperfections and subtly flatter their physique. It's this individual approach that appeals to Sargent who, in spite of the relatively limited range of clothing she makes, never gets bored with her job. 'Everything I make is different as every client has a different personality,' she says. In fact her range is constantly evolving and is no longer limited to the traditional business suit or dinner jacket as clients are now ordering more casual wear. Womenswear is also becoming increasingly important and now accounts for 15% of Sargent's business, an increase probably due in part to the elegant tweed jackets she makes for herself to wear at work – a great advertisement for both her skill and commitment to the world of bespoke tailoring. ♦♦♦ **Diana Wolf**