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# Style at the double

*From smart and formal to casual and elegant, the double-breasted style is making a comeback*

Words: Eric Musgrave

Atten'shun! There's the smartest of uniform approaches to men's style this year. Military greatcoats and naval jackets are major influences in the long-overdue revival of double-breasted styles. The wrap-over fastening can be seen everywhere this season, from luxurious overcoats and pea-coat-style casual jackets to business suits, relaxed weekend blazers, easy-to-wear cardigans and the most chic eveningwear.

Prince Charles is probably the best-known champion of the double-breasted or DB style. He is rarely seen in any other suit than a classic DB English drape style from bespoke tailors Anderson & Sheppard. He also has a penchant for long tweed overcoats with crossover buttons – just the thing to keep the winter and spring winds at bay while he walks at Highgrove, Balmoral or Sandringham.

Cutting a dash: Prince Charles, seen here inspecting troops on a visit to Australia, is rather keen on a double-breasted suit



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A double-breasted suit comes together at Kathryn Sargent's studio (right); Lord Louis Mountbatten shows off the 1940s naval style that continues to inspire designers (far right); a contemporary approach from Ermenegildo Zegna (opposite)



Army officers are well known for preferring double-breasted options for their civilian suits and the prince's sons are beginning to be seen in similar styles. Prince William, in particular, favours a DB evening suit.

Although the single-breasted suit has dominated the menswear market for a couple of decades, the DB has always been popular with men who want to make an impression and who want to show they care about their clothes and their appearance.

To look good, the DB jacket must be worn fastened and it takes a skilful tailor to achieve the right balance of comfort and precision of cut. Kathryn Sargent became the first female head cutter at Gieves and Hawkes, bespoke tailors with a tradition of naval and military clients. Now running her own bespoke tailoring business, Sargent is an enthusiastic adherent of double-breasted styles.

'When I first started my career I thought that a double-breasted suit was something worn by old men in a scruffy manner. When I started working on naval uniforms at Gieves, however, I soon learnt the beauty of the double-breasted style. DB blazers and suits are a serious look and show you mean

business. The cut of a double-breasted draws the eye to the waist and emphasises the chest, so it is great for a sharp business suit.'

This season, Italian ready-to-wear tailoring specialists such as Canali and Corneliani have more DBs than usual, but rather than the boxy shapes of the 1980s, these are totally contemporary, with close-fitting jackets and slim-leg trousers.

Showing another aspect to the DB, Ermenegildo Zegna has used a three-piece suit with a double-breasted jacket for its advertising image, but this is a casual suit in Zegna's own Cashco cloth, a blend of cashmere and cotton.

In contrast to its formal heritage, the DB is increasing being seen in softly tailored blazers. The Italian brand Boglioli has a very versatile blazer in a wool hopsack that can be dressed up with a shirt and tie and smart trousers or worn with an open-necked shirt and jeans.

In the same vein, Lanvin has visible stitch detail and raw-edged seams on a blazer that is unstructured and only partially lined, feeling more like a cardigan than a traditional tailored jacket.

Cardigans are in vogue generally, but the man with an eye for style will be attracted by the considerable selection of DB

## The Look•



options from creative names. The French brand Paul & Joe has created a DB fastening with leather straps on its chunky Norwegian cardigan in cotton, while for a more luxurious approach Burberry Prorsum has a chunky-knit cardigan in thick cashmere yarn that sports a detachable rabbit-fur collar.

Such flamboyant decorations work well on DB overcoats. Alexander McQueen has a neat, black, velvet collar on a grey DB city overcoat, YSL adds a fur collar to a leather coat, and Ports 1961 uses a detachable fur-trimmed collar on a grey check cashmere coat.

Says Sargent: 'Double-breasted overcoats look great both fastened and unfastened. They can be worn over a suit of any style and add a bit of extra warmth with their wrap-over fastening.'

For a slightly less formal approach than a city coat, designers have reworked that naval classic, the pea coat, in a huge number of options in recent months. Moncler Gamme Bleu, Barbour, McQ Alexander McQueen, Burberry London, Gucci, Dunhill, Paul Smith, Dolce and Gabbana, Balmain and Maison Martin Margiela have all signed up for this stylistic voyage.

Valentino has produced a cool version in wool and cashmere that is lined with shearling. Raf Simons chose a bright blue

wool-and-cashmere blend for his six-button version of the pea coat, while American designer Thom Browne reminds us of the jacket's seafaring traditions with the golden buttons on the wool pea coat in his diffusion line Thom Grey.

The special qualities of the double-breasted style are especially appropriate for eveningwear. The DB evening suit in black or midnight blue wool barathea cloth is a perennial classic, but this season designers are championing velvet in particular.

Burberry Prorsum has a high-fastening eight-button DB grey velvet jacket that gives off a mid-1960s vibe. It can be worn with matching trousers to form or with contrasting trousers as a separate jacket. Also backing velvet for an evening DB is Giorgio Armani, the man who made slightly oversized double-breasted styles popular in the 1980s. Today his look is slimmer and more figure-hugging. The Italian maestro sticks with black but uses shawl collar lapels for an elegantly refined look.

Many of the brands and styles mentioned above are available at Harrods. [www.harrods.com](http://www.harrods.com)