



MENSWEAR'S NEW GENERATION

by Silvia Bombardini

Tom Lipop is part of that lucky, talented clique of London menswear designers who are taking the expertise of Savile Row to show the world an updated expression of British elegance. Seamless suits embrace a new attitude that is affable and unusually welcoming. Even London's "family of menswear designers" represents a new type of relationship, one based more on friendship than rivalry. t.lipop's innovative cuts and clean silhouettes recently caught the eye of River Island's Design Forum. We can now look forward to an exciting high street collaboration.

Silvia Bombardini: I've read that your first foray into fashion was designing football kits. What can you tell me about these early days? Do sport uniforms still have some kind of influence on your work today?

Tom Lipop: Well, I'm a big football head. I love all things football oriented. Weird for a fashion guy, I know. I also loved drawing and I just crossed the two and ended up designing kits all the time. It was just something I used to do in my spare time. I can't say they don't have an influence on my design somehow, but our ethos is more centered around cutting than the uniform as such.

SB: If you could pick any team in the world and dress them up, which one would you choose and what would you do?

TL: It would have to be my beloved LFC [Liverpool Football Club.] I hate our recent kits and would definitely want to refine this, like my friend Aitor did with the England kit.

SB: I heard you're still playing too, with rather unexpected company at that. How did you end up on the field with the likes of Agi and Sam, Matthew Miller, and Aitor Throup? Is competition really just not a thing for the new generation of London menswear designers?

TL: All the lads are footy nuts. We just decided we would play a bit of seven-a-side together. Actually it's more Sam from Agi and Sam, Steve Salvage and Daniel Jenkins. Matthew prefers to watch in the pub rather than play and we haven't got Aitor down yet.

SB: The London fashion scene, especially for menswear, is nothing like what we can see in Paris or Milan. Why do you think this is happening here and now?

TL: I just think it's a very exciting time for menswear at the moment. It's strange. Fashion has changed a lot; it's now a lot of young guys and girls who are lucky enough to have an incredible amount of support from the likes of the BFC [British Fashion Council] and the CFE [Centre for Fashion Enterprise] and have this opportunity to do their own thing, build their own brand and be their own boss. To be honest, whilst everyone is competing in some context, you just don't get that feeling in the London circuit. We're more like a family of menswear designers. There is no bitching and everyone gets on! It's a great time to be a part of British menswear and there is nowhere else like it in the world.

SB: You've also said that you kind of fell into fashion, something that many young British designers are now saying. There seems to be a shift from the highly

competitive industry we were taught to prepare for. Is this now the way to go, a relaxed, positive attitude and a lot of teamwork?

TL: Don't get me wrong, the industry is still highly competitive and you have to prepare and fight to be noticed, but we are all mates. Hard work will always pay off but it's not for the faint-hearted. The workload is exceptional and there is a huge amount of talent in London to compete with. But as mates, we are all trading contacts and helping each other out whenever possible. I guess it's changed a lot from what it used to be. I am often asked what it's like to be part of a stereotyped industry, and in truth, things have changed. There are so many young straight guys here just doing their thing.

SB: Before setting up your own brand, you worked with Nathan Jenden, House of Holland and Griffin Laundry and you featured on Sky One's Project Catwalk. In which ways, if any, do you believe these experiences influenced your taste, technique and creative growth? Is there anyone else you'd love to team up with in the future?

TL: These all formed part of who I am as a designer. Project Catwalk opened up so many doors and I wouldn't change that. My first job at House of Holland helped me build a contact book; Nathan Jenden formed my cutting and tailoring skills and Griffin was very much about the technical aspects of design and form. At some point in my career, and as well as running my own label, I wish to become the creative director of an historical brand, maybe one of the big English or Parisian houses.

SB: Much has been said about t.lipop's innovative cutting technique. What can you tell me about it? Where did it come from and how does it work? What is it about it that makes your creations so appealing?

TL: I like to think we are modernizing tradition. I specialize in manipulating form to create something that is very much like its predecessor but also very much taken forward. For instance, we have a shirt that looks like a traditional shirt, but it's cut in two pieces of fabric and darted very carefully for fit. Or take the simple three-pocket sports jacket – we have cut this in two pieces too, then laser cut and constructed the pockets, each out of 14 individual pieces. For our signature blazers, the darting is removed from the front whilst keeping the fit, and the outer hip pockets are removed. You shouldn't use these as it breaks up the silhouette, as my father used to tell me when I got my first suit. We have a curved sleeve for better fit. It's the perfect travel blazer. It's all these little details that separate us from others.

SB: Do you have a favorite piece from your winter 2013 collection or from spring 2014?

TL: I guess for winter 2013, my favorite piece is the sheepskin jacket. I wear it all the time. And I guess for spring 2014, it would be the ivory linen blazer with raw-edge detailing and the cord and button fastening. It's also embroidered to the chest and under the collar. My favorite piece ever? It's a draped duffel coat cut in two pieces which you will see this coming season for winter 2014.

SB: Could you tell me something about your references, for both seasons?

TL: Winter was about explorers in the city – it had quite a Paris meets Persia meets the Arctic feel to it in my eyes. Spring instead was about the Spanish Riviera and had that kind of 80s business spirit to it. It was about relaxing by the pool in your lounge suit, sipping on a margarita and puffing away on a cigar!

SB: I would be lying if I said that your choice of models, both for winter and spring, wasn't one of the first things that caught my eyes when thumbing through the look books. Where did you find them? Do they resemble some sort of character you had in mind when designing the outfits?

TL: I guess they do and thanks for this, we really searched hard for the right guy. It's been kind of a signature of the brand to have a guy that resembles the character and look we are trying to depict. It's also becoming a kind of signature for us to have guys with beards. Neither were models as such but have both done a few things here and there before us. We met Suren (winter 2013) after he contacted us on Twitter and Darren (spring 2014) we met in a bar; he is one of the owners of Hostem, in Shoreditch.

SB: Somehow, you've also found the time to design a capsule collection for River Island's Design Forum, to be available this coming September. Can you tell me something about this collaboration? How did it happen, and what inspired you?

TL: We were recommended by the BFC as one of around five or six other designers. We presented our portfolios to them and were lucky enough that they selected us and we loved them and I guess the rest is history. The focus for the collection was very much on the fabrics and I really wanted to push them into using beautiful rich fabrics rarely seen in high street stores. I think everyone will see when the collection launches. Wool crepe, wool mohair, cotton panamas and boiled wool. It's all about the details!

SB: A beautiful short film by Aoife McArdle already gives us a charming sneak peek of the looks. What's the story behind it, where did the idea come from? Is that a real crocodile?

TL: Aoife is just incredibly talented. She came up with the overall concept after looking through the collection. I guess at that point, the collaboration really began and we could refine the details and the plot. It's very much about the textures and richness of color and translating those into an engaging story, something that only the light of the Sultan Sea, northeast of LA, could offer us in terms of scenery and rawness.

SB: What are your plans now, your hopes and projects for the future? What can we look forward to?

TL: I would love to work with River again and produce a spring collection for them. We have winter 2014 in January, various other collaborations in the pipeline and a sartorial shoe app for customizing your traditional shoes like the loafer, brogue, derby and slipper. It's at tlipop.bespokefactory.com. It's going to be a busy year and we're looking forward to every moment.

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