

Inside the Snooty, Well-Dressed World of British Grouse Hunting

A guide to the ‘country gentleman’ look, a dashing fall style that nods to grouse-shoot outfits. Labrador not included.

By

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Bespoke shooting wear from Huntsman, the Savile Row tailor. Photo: Nick Tydeman

I once dated a Frenchman for his cashmere blazer—the buttery feel on my cheek, the faint caramel scent in the chilly October sun. We lasted one Parisian autumn. I was more in love with the style than the man.

This fall, on urban sidewalks and rural paths, you'll find plenty of variations on that country-gentleman look: tweed blazers, chocolate-suede laced ankle boots and a playful purple sock peeking out from under a forest-green corduroy cuff. Not to mention all those of-the-moment barn jackets. Brands in this space include [Loro Piana](#), [Fendi](#) (which last year released a Princess Anne-inspired menswear collection) and, if you fancy a cashmere sweater pricier than a Porsche 911, the Italian brand [Brunello Cucinelli](#).

The style is rooted in the culture of the British grouse shoot, where European men and women stomp through muddy hillsides, typically in shooting parties of nine or ten. Whether shooting or watching, they don tweed suit jackets and trousers, wool buttoned vests and earth-colored sweaters—a look as far from the tactical cargo gear and backward baseball caps of American hunters as a banana split is from a flaky Napoleon pastry. (The best shooting grounds in both the U.S. and U.K. are models of conservation for nongame wildlife and proper land use. All downed birds are sold for their free-range meat.)



Huntsman Bealach Tweed Jacket, \$3,330

Country-gentleman style reminds us of a more genteel world, one that honors beautiful manners and the art of conversational back and forth. For a key source of this seductive look, look to Huntsman, founded in 1849 on Savile Row in London. Initially Queen Victoria's tailor, it's considered by many the holy grail of elegant equestrian, military and sporting tailoring. "Our materials move with you whether crossing a river or getting into a city taxi," said Huntsman's owner, Belgian financier Pierre Lagrange. He explained that his tweeds are naturally water-resistant. "The garment must have a *raison d'être*," he said. "Men go for utility over how it looks."



Pierre Lagrange, owner of Huntsman, pictured in Berkshire, England. Photo: Simon Upton

Alongside Lagrange, I attended my first weekend shooting party at a Cotswolds estate a few years ago. By day, he wore a Huntsman mossy, sagebrush houndstooth suit with a purple check woven into a light tweed; at night, he slipped on a velvet smoking jacket.

In the morning fog, a dozen guests piled into green vintage Land Rovers for the first of five daily “drives.” It looked like a plaid-and-tassel factory had detonated all over our group.

When I packed my bag in New York for that first shooting party, I’d found the clothing list pretentious. I’d paid no heed to silly suggestions such as a flat, plaid newspaper-boy cap. Stupid move. Mud plastered my tan J Brand jeans; my gray turtleneck smelled of a soaking Golden Retriever. My stubborn “non-style” came off foolish and foreign.

On the moors, I witnessed the utility of shooting attire: how “breeks” (knee-level trousers or “knickers”) and thick socks with colored tassels prevent burrs and prickly thistles from riding up trouser legs. (Tassels add flair and are functional, roping around to hold up socks.)



From left: Turnbull & Asser Stripe Westminster Shirt, \$605; Schöffel Ross Tweed Pants, \$400

Soon after, before leaving for another shoot with Lagrange, I raced to the Beretta Gallery shooting store in New York and alerted the salesperson: “Code Red, fashion trauma!” Channeling royals at Balmoral castle, I bought a plaid poncho and brown suede pants. Sadly, my look screamed, trying too hard, very “Sound of Music” Liesl von Trapp escaping Austria.

Among the real habitués, rattier clothes are cooler. “Dukes and lords would not dream of wearing anything new in the field,” said London-based art collector Elizabeth Louis, a high-level shot and sartorial wonder. “The key: Look effortlessly uncrisp and seasoned, as if you spent all your living days shooting forever.”

For your own outfits this fall, whether in the city or country, learn from my mishaps: You are not copycatting a snooty lifestyle. Reference the look in subtle clothes you would actually wear. When you walk down a sidewalk or grassy field, remind us of the suede-booted, worn-trouserred Downton Abbey man walking up a hill with a yellow Labrador at his side. For heaven’s sake, don’t show up in knickers for your Saturday afternoon Hinge date.



From left: Thom Sweeney Suede Derby Boots, \$875; Borsalino Beaver Medium Brim Hat, \$875

On weekends, try a crisp, light blue Oxford, a brown checked blazer and camel-colored scarf. If your afternoon doesn't call for a blazer, don a quilted [Barbour](#) jacket and navy [vest](#) (not the Patagonia tech-bro version; a gilet with a plaid or suede collar).

Tarquin Millington-Drake, managing director at Frontiers Ltd (U.K.), which books parties at conservation-friendly estates, recommends a [Schöffel](#) waterproof coat and a [Holland & Holland](#) "action back" shooting jacket (with a belt sewn in the lower back that creates a roomier top half to stretch one's arms). For nights, he suggests an [Oliver Brown](#) smoking jacket.



From left: Antonio Cavero, the Marques de Ardales, owner of the Ventosilla estate in Toledo, Spain; Sophie Neuendorf-Teba and Jaime Patiño, the Countess and Count of Teba, at the Ventosilla estate (Patiño is Cavero's cousin). Antonio Cavero Mitjans

Nobody glides between city and country more naturally than Antonio Cavero, the Marques de Ardales, whose Spanish aristocratic family dates to the 15th-century reign of King Juan II. On the Spanish hillsides, Cavero looks as rumpled as Indiana Jones; his historic Ventosilla estate holds 170 yearly partridge shoots. “A cashmere jacket and tailor-made thin linen shirt has equal elegance for dinner in Madrid or the field,” he said.

Concerned you’d splurge on a tweed suit and never wear it? Peter Georgiopoulos, chairman of the Mashomack Fish and Game Preserve in Dutchess County, N.Y., wears tweed suit pants with a sweater and a Schöffel jacket in the field, and the whole suit in the city. “Hell yeah, I wear these suits all the time in New York and London,” he said. “It feels great going to dinner in them.”



Peter Georgiopoulos, chairman of New York’s Mashomack Fish and Game Preserve, pictured at the Goodwood House in Chichester, England. Photo: Peter Georgiopoulos

Andrew Bolton, head curator of the Costume Institute at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art, has worn tweeds for decades. “Those Merchant Ivory films spawned the birth of young fogeys,” he said, describing the look as “a shabby version of the English country gentlemen circa 1920s to ’30s...typified by a well-worn tweed jacket with elbow patches.” He said he’s “never quite given up” the style.

Just don’t overdo it, warns Darren Henault, designer and habitué of the Millbrook, N.Y., shooting scene. “You wear paddock boots in the city and you look like a tool.”

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