

BRAND YOU:

Made to measure

From fashion to food, we're all now tailor-making our lives. Judy Cogan finds out why, in Dubai, one size never fits all



As this weekend kicks off the month-long style circus that is the global Fashion Week calendar, a subtle sartorial revolution is taking place. Instead of clamouring for the loudest luxury labels, those in the know are choosing a more discerning way of sourcing quality – by going bespoke. Prestigious names are making way for the personal touch, with celebrities leading the way.

Whether it's Cameron Diaz in a tailor-made, eco-friendly gown at the Met Ball, Kim Kardashian showing off her Hermès Birkin pocketbook with a specially commissioned painting by artist George Condo, or Kate Middleton in her blue made-to-measure polka-dot Jenny Packham dress after giving birth last year, choosing customised has become the new non-design must do. And Dubai's legion of high-flyers are following suit, getting measured up by a new breed of dressmakers, tailors and shoemakers.

The word 'bespoke' is traditionally associated with men's suits, but now is proving big business in women's fashion too. No longer content with High Street

Haute (where cheap but chic once ruled) or straight-off the designer-peg, fashionistas have been looking for something new.

And plenty of men are also getting in on the act. Men's spending on luxury items accounts for 40 per cent of global sales – a figure that's grown almost twice as fast as women's spending since 2011.

On the back of hit TV shows such as *Mad Men*, and as the world turns its attention to the UAE in the run-up to the Dubai Expo, looking the part has become more important than ever for the UAE's suited and booted. So it's no wonder the bespoke suit industry in Dubai is now said to be worth \$50 million (Dh185 million) a year.

Although the traditional back-street bespoke suit experience has been around for years in the many excellent outlets in Satwa or Bur Dubai (try Deepa's, Whistle and Flute, Lobo, Kachin or Rinco's), Dubai's made-to-measure market is quickly becoming world class.

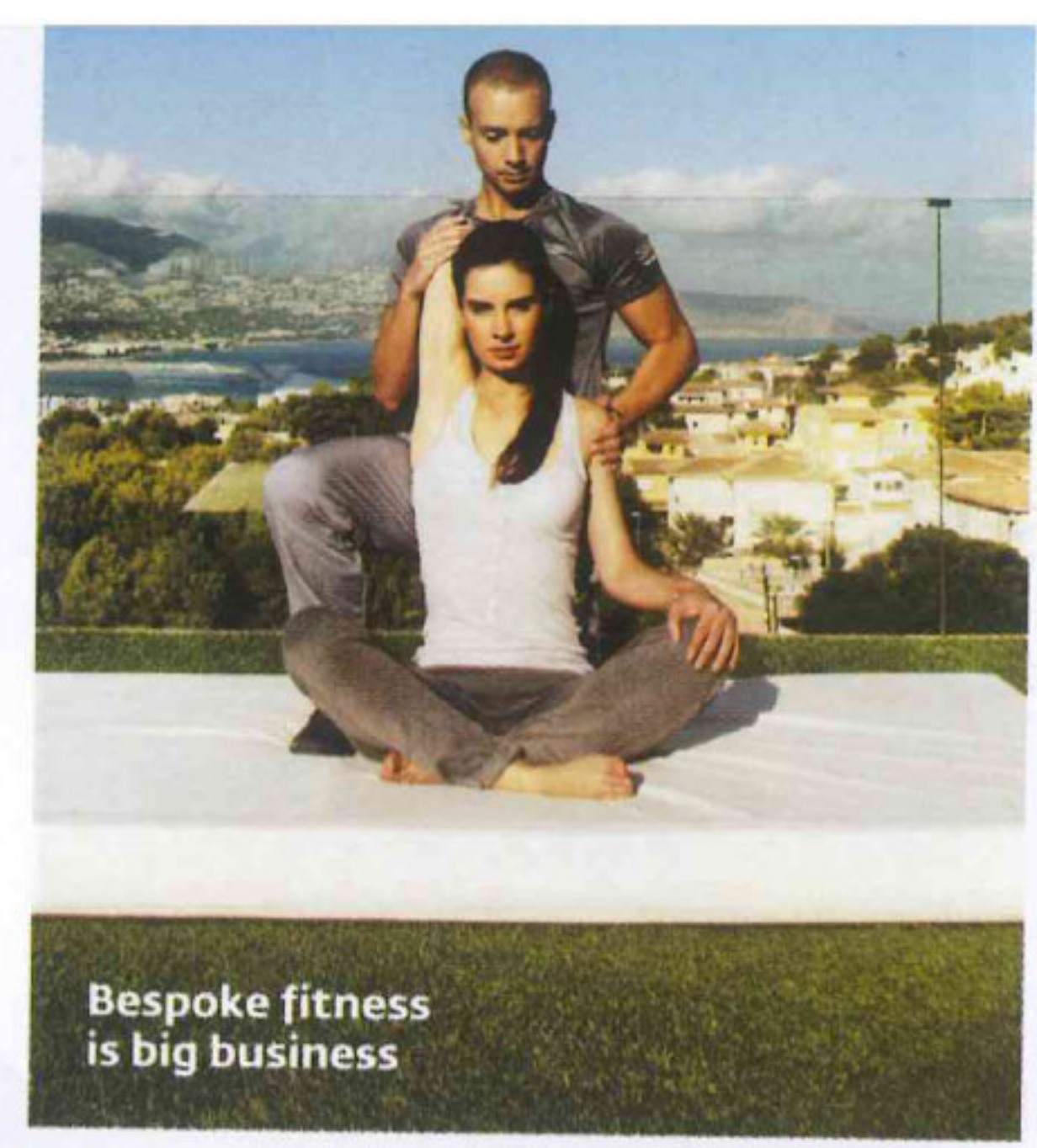
Some of Savile Row's finest – including Ascots and Chapels (in DIFC, Dubai Marina Mall and Souk Al Bahar), and Leonard Logsdail near Shaikh Zayed Road (supposedly Robert De Niro's go-to man when he's in town) – have flocked to the emirate. Meanwhile, websites like



Cameron Diaz at the Met Ball in a bespoke Stella McCartney organic, eco-friendly gown



Kate Middleton glows in a bespoke polka-dot dress



Bespoke fitness is big business



knotstandard.com offer a made-to-measure service without the need for you to even leave your home.

And it's the internet that means clothing is now only a fraction of the story on the bespoke bandwagon. Social networking sites are dense with detailed information on people's likes and dislikes, blogs mean that every ordinary person can be elevated to the level of broadcasting critic, while globalisation means that our high streets are becoming increasingly homogenised in a way that the style-savvy are now shrinking away from.

As consumers have become more diverse and demanding, big brands have begun to offer bespoke services on an almost unlimited scale. The 'one size fits all' approach just doesn't cut it any more.

Burger King has been letting us have it our way in the UAE for years; we can design our own trainers via NikeiD; and last year Coca-Cola invested \$100 million into Freestyle – vending machines that allow us to slap our names on drinks bottles. You

People are demanding something different, and they're prepared to spend on a gift of quality

can get pretty much anything, from cars to furniture, with the personal touch nowadays.

Even diets are getting the made-to-measure treatment, as healthcare company Bespoke Wellness (bespoke-wellness.com) offers personalised health and well-being services from

its base at Jumeirah Beach Hotel. "At every stage in life our physical needs change and so we should adapt our approach to health as we evolve," says founder Andrew Picken.

You start with a nutrition and/or physio consultation (Dh400 to Dh550 each), which delves straight to the core of your health glitches and tackles them much more efficiently than off-the-shelf products.

The super-healthy can even incorporate their fitness regime into a holiday. Fusion Fitness (healthandfitnesstravel.com) allows guests to choose from a selection of personalised activities and treatments – from yoga to TRX and kick-boxing – to create their perfect programme. So you're not paying for things you don't want to do and you get a tailor-made experience.

On a naughtier note, Cup 'N' Cakes – found at Carpe Diem la Cafette restaurant in Mall Jumeirah – offers

delicious bespoke cupcakes to suit all sorts of occasions. The founder Nicole Mrad started the business from her kitchen table and admits that while bespoke cakes are

nothing new, the customer's desired results are becoming more specific and often a lot more bonkers than when she started four years ago.

"From pregnant ladies organising a baby shower, to adults celebrating birthdays and new-job celebrations – everyone nowadays wants to make



Custom cakes are nothing new, but they're as popular as ever

their occasion special," says Nicole. "I've had requests for some really strange things."

Speaking of strange, one of the more bizarre bespoke businesses now thriving is Silken Favours, which allows you to immortalise your pet in a cushion (silkenfavours.com). Send them a picture of your pet and they'll create a silk cushion out of it and send it to you anywhere in the world.

"The idea came about as I wanted to create gifts that made people cry with happiness," says Vicki Murdoch, founder of Silken Favours. "People are demanding something different and individual, and they're prepared to spend on a gift of quality that can be cherished forever. And a bespoke product tells a story about you, reflecting your personality."

It's the quirkiest offerings that are often the most interesting – and personal. For example, Online company U Star Novels (ustarnovels.co.uk) has taken advantage of the growing trend for customised



Silken Favours founder Vicki Murdoch shows off her bespoke silk animal cushions