

Bespoke cuts, specialised treatments for today's men

There was a time when men would feel uncomfortable, even threatened, by words like 'grooming' and 'fashion'. Visiting a salon was mostly for a haircut or shave. As for clothes, traditional whites and blues were the colours of the shirts they wore. Not anymore. Men spend as much time as women while shopping for clothes and accessories. They visit spas and fitness centres not just to tone their muscles but to undergo treatments that rejuvenate them, making them feel good. They dress appropriately for every occasion – casual, formal or at play. Yes, looking and feeling good is the new mantra. The trend is reflected in the sprouting of spas and wellness centres as well as bespoke tailoring establishments across the region. **Rupkatha Bhowmick** reviews men's grooming scene in Dubai

Changing the perception of 'tailoring' to create fashion statements

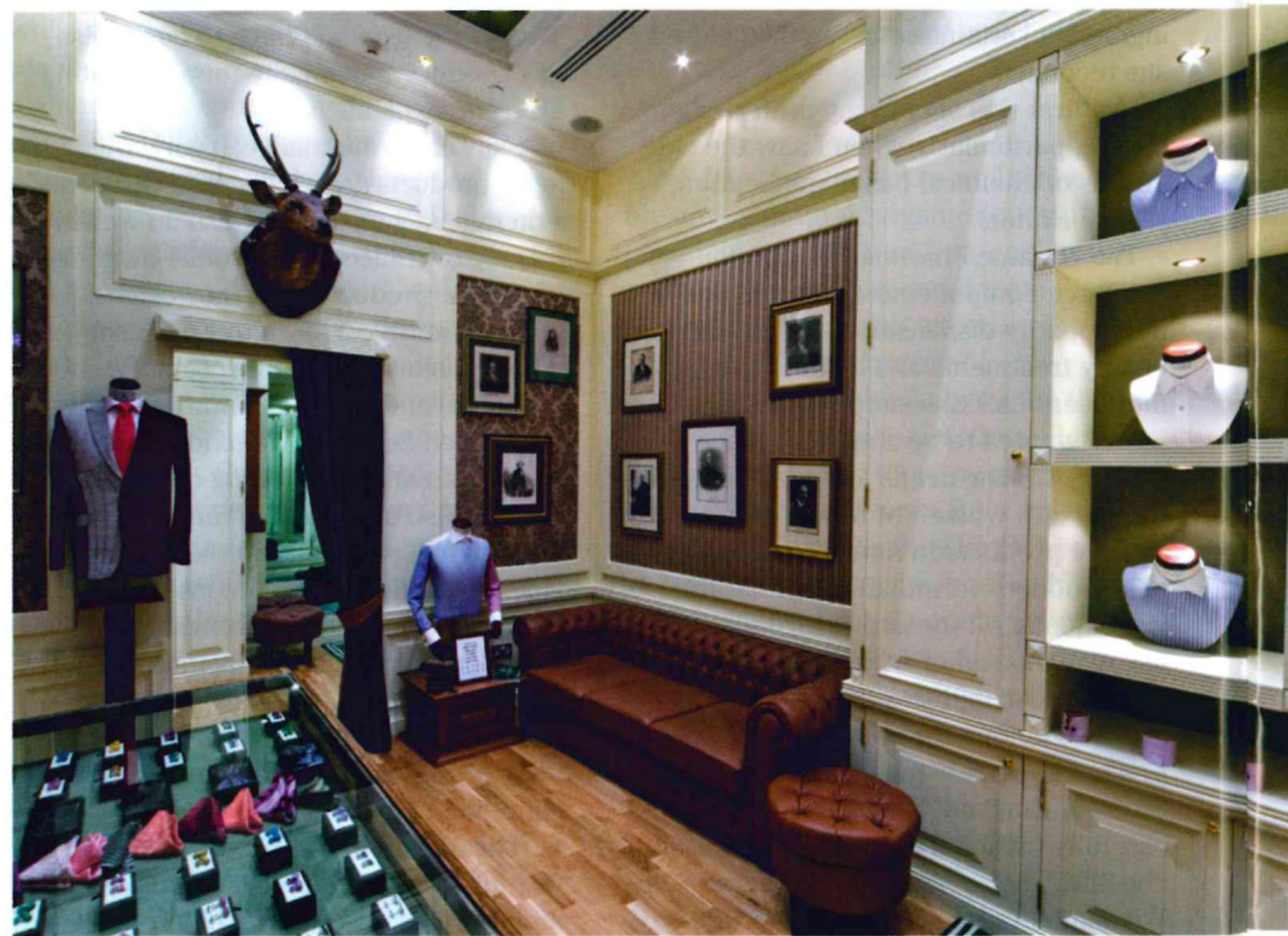
"Men today engage in power dressing and groom themselves regularly. They are a new breed that understands the importance of wearing the correct attire to work, for occasions and even while relaxing. We get customers wanting lounge suits, or something suitable for polo races, yacht parties and the golf course, or for black tie events. In earlier times a nice grey suit sufficed. That's no longer the case today. Men don't restrict themselves to the typical blue, black and grey," says Zaki Ali, design director and managing partner of Dubai-based Zaki Design Group, the regional licensee for British bespoke tailoring concept Ascots & Chapels.

"Awareness and exposure in Dubai is immense, with the growing expatriate population impacting the fashion business. Everyone tries to create their own niche. Sometime ago one wouldn't think of celebrating St Patrick's Day, but today we have clients walking into our outlets asking for green shirts. That's because Dubai has a strong and growing Irish community. They bring with them their cultural nuances that get reflected in what they wear. We even invested in software for Chinese alphabets because we get a lot of Chinese clients keen to have their initials embossed on shirt cuffs and jackets," he continues.

"During the course of doing business here over the past 35 years, we've noticed a huge shift in consumer preferences towards tailoring. The age-old tradition saw it as something only for the older generation. But today even 30-somethings are tailoring their own garments to make a fashion statement. From shirts to chinos, socks to shoes and cufflinks to belts, men are paying close attention to every minute detail. That's why bespoke

perfumes, collector watch editions, colourful socks and other personalised items are so much in demand today," Ali ruminates.

"That's also a big reason why Armani recently started doing made-to-measure garments. We've been doing that for ages, offering clients what they want, irrespective of on-going fashion trends. Men like to establish their own uniqueness to stand out in the crowd.



They also tend to follow personalities. For example, the dark navy blue tuxedo Daniel Craig wore became a craze, while black was always the preferred colour of tuxedos earlier," he adds.

Ascots & Chapels typically caters to people who appreciate and enjoy good clothing. It could be small details like contrast buttons and stitching. The 130-year-old brand understands that creating such detail in a garment is more difficult than creating an out-of-the box piece. It has its own selection of fabrics manufactured in its own mills.

"We hold a licence for this region, manufacturing the fabrics here under the supervision of our principals. Today's customers are willing to experiment in colours such as lilac and pink – we offer 5,000 fabric options, 400 in white and 100 in blue alone. When we brought Ascots & Chapels to the Middle East we initiated some amount of customising since we realised the typical British boxy cut wouldn't work here. That's why we give cuts that suit the body type of our clients. Also, compared

to the eight weeks required in London to make four shirts, we take two weeks for shirts and three for suits," Ali asserts.

"Our entry level prices are affordable. We change our fabrics thrice every year in keeping with the seasons and launch fitting accessories in sync with the seasonal collections. For example, this October we will launch camel hair scarves. It's this local knowledge that we've infused into the British brand that has gained us customer loyalty. In Dubai we cater to a cosmopolitan crowd with its own unique individual preferences and we're able to meet every demand," he explains.

"Bespoke is something made for the individual but such end-to-end tailoring can sometimes be a daunting experience.



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Zaki Ali

Our customers spend an average 45 minutes at our outlets selecting the fabrics, collars, cuffs and getting measured. They come back two to three times for fittings before delivery. We offer multiple options for those who don't want to return for fittings. Our global concierge service allows clients to select the fabric, get measured and place an order in Dubai, and collect the finished garment after three weeks from our stores in London, New York or Sydney. Similarly, our Middle East operations have established a presence in Abu Dhabi and Doha, to be followed soon by Riyadh, Istanbul and Kuala Lumpur. We have fitting rooms in premium residential areas in the UAE like Motor City and Al Raha Mall, where customers can walk in for a fitting. Or we send our wardrobe consultants to our clients' premises to get the fitting done. But we don't accept fabrics or alteration requests from outside. That's our differentiating factor," Ali elaborates.

"The brand has a huge legacy but it was a challenge to change the perception of tailoring in this region, especially in malls. To most people the image a tailoring shop evokes is of clutter and untidiness. We had to struggle to change this perception. Today we've bridged the gap between a typical tailor and a fashion brand, taking the concept of tailoring to the next level. Currently we are the only tailoring concept in premium locations such as The Walk in Jumeirah Beach Residence (JBR), Sowwah Square, Dubai Marina Mall, Souq Al Bahar, Dubai International Financial Centre and Pearl Qatar. We're also negotiating with 15 malls across the GCC and are looking to roll out 15 more stores within the next three years," he concludes.

Pampering fashion-conscious men the Italian way

"The word 'fashion' is usually associated with women. But fashion is a way for people to express themselves and their personality. It's a way of life. Man, woman or child, every person today wants to wear what they like and aren't willing to accept what's imposed," observes Elie Moussalem, senior brand manager of Boggi Milano.

"The Middle East is an advanced market in terms of offerings. This region is ever keen to remain up-to-date with the latest technology, research and fashion. The market is witnessing significant developments in men's fashion – at Boggi our Middle East customers are demanding," he adds.

The brand claims to cater to fashion conscious men with its Italian fabrics, look and lifestyle. "The Boggi man is smart, elegant, energetic and full of life. We offer our clients high quality, elegant and trendy outfits for every event, from casual to smart wear. We've studied our customer base closely over the years to understand its fashion needs and we work to fulfill these needs with our modern yet elegant offerings," says Moussalem.

"We're here to serve fashion conscious males, pampering them to the extent possible," he asserts.





The brand offers three menswear lines – casual, smart and classic – endeavouring to serve customer needs through its collections – special and limited edition – that offer everything from suits, shirts and polos to special wedding ensembles.



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Elie Moussallem

“We research every line to make them equally strong since our customers need different kinds of attire for different occasions – work, daily wear, weekend casual and occasion wear. Our bestselling product is our tuxedo suit. We currently have four styles of tuxedos. Our recently launched blue tuxedo is witnessing great success in our stores across the Middle East. The next bestselling item is our shirts, which come in a wide variety of materials and cuts. Finally, we have our suits in more than 40 models made using a wide variety of materials exclusive to Boggi such as Loro Piana, Guabello and Vitale Barberis,” he elaborates.

Boggi's collections are divided into spring/summer and fall/winter, each with pre-collections and core collections. The spring/summer pre-collection arrives in December, the core starting from January-February and extending to May, while the fall/winter pre-collection starts in May, its core extending from June-July until November.

Boggi is expanding its business in the Middle East. “We currently have 18

stores in the region. Our future plan is to expand to new and exciting countries to build a strong consumer base and get closer to our customers. That's why location is so crucial for us. It's quite challenging choosing the right location, especially with the competition getting stiffer and the real estate limitations we face,” Moussallem admits.

“Men's fashion is moving fast. Today men are expressing their character and personality through the way they live, preserving the image of virility and maturity in an elegant manner. And we will continue help them in their efforts,” he concludes.

Concentrating on inner well-being, tranquillity and vitality

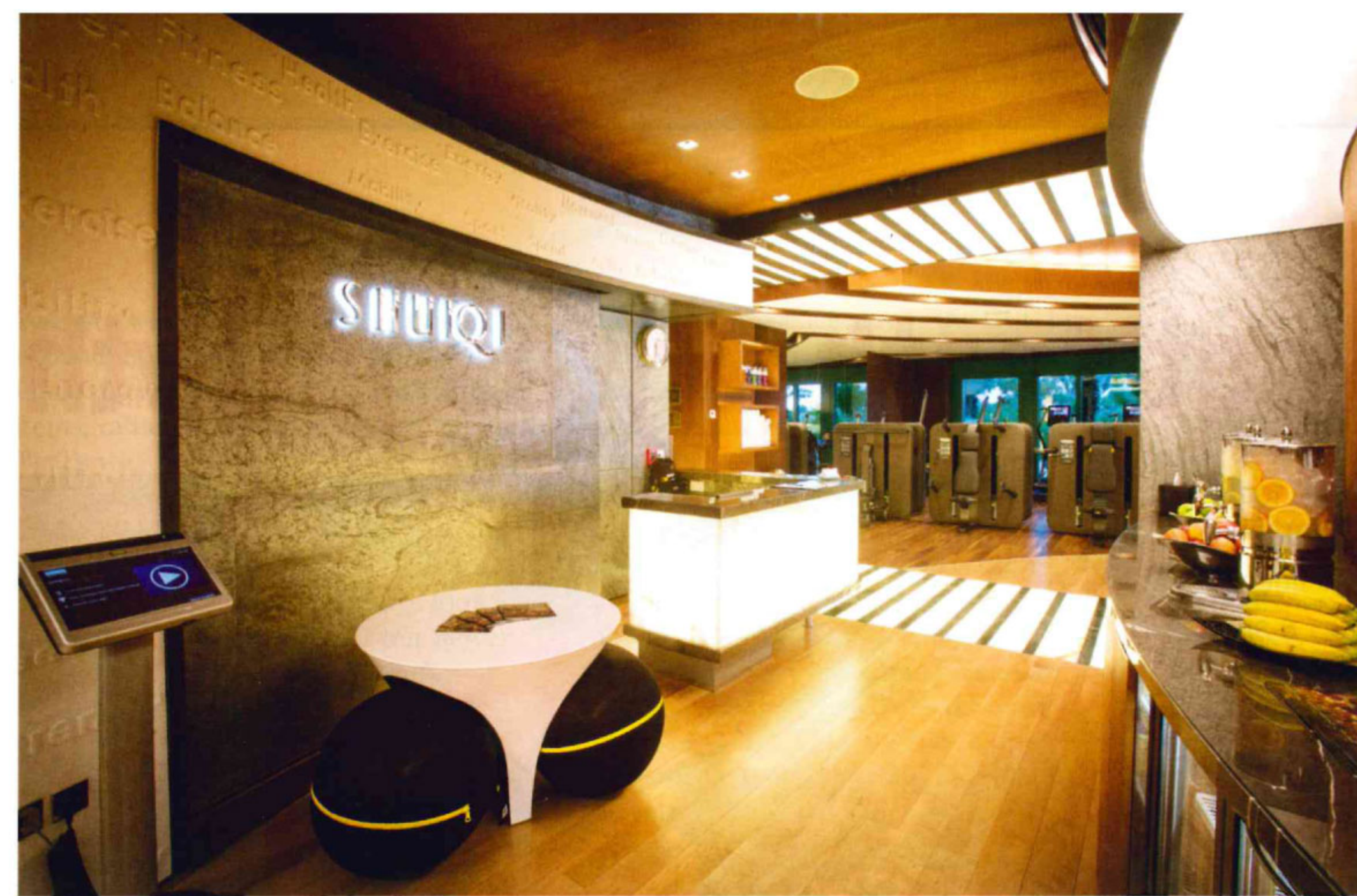
“When we speak about grooming or beauty treatments, it's always been for the ladies. Gents, too, have skin and muscles to take care of, especially in the harsh weather of the Middle East that wreaks havoc on their skin. Men are beginning to realise how important

it is to look after and care for their body. They are becoming more conscious about looking and feeling good,” says Mohamed Abdelsamiea, manager – spa services, Atlantis, The Palm.

“The beauty, wellness and personal care industries have taken cognisance of this trend and are now focusing on developing products and services targeted at men. It was a challenge initially – introducing the idea of men's-only wellness and spa concepts, what with beauty and wellness being considered a woman's thing and men only visiting a salon for a haircut or shave. But beauty and wellness experts have been putting in a lot of time and effort of late to educate men about grooming and looking and feeling good. So we are now beginning to see a deluge of men's spa and salon concepts in the market – not just high-end but masstige as well,” he continues.

“The texture of men's skin is different from women's. So men need products for their specific requirements. They tend to choose shorter, effective and result-oriented treatments, with most men spending less time in salons and spas than women. This is one of reason why Gentlemen's Tonic is so popular because we've designed shorter treatments using our own branded products ranging from shaving creams, shaving oils and aftershave to brushes and razors,” Abdelsamiea explains.

Other than haircuts, hair colouring and beard trimming, Gentlemen's Tonic offers



two special shaving services – traditional and royal. “The 30-minute traditional shave is designed for men with a demanding schedule who require a clean shave before a critical appointment. The skin is softened with essential oil extract before a precise shave is delivered. The skin is then instantly soothed and rehydrated with a post-shave moisturising treatment. Time is also allocated for forearm and shoulder massage and a treatment around the eyes so that the face is completely rejuvenated. The royal shave is a 45-minute treatment focusing on refreshing and recharging the face by thoroughly rejuvenating the skin and promoting tissue regeneration. The process starts with cleansing the face and softening the hair stubble using pre-shave oil, followed by a touch-up shave using a razor and brush set. A mask is applied after the shave to cool and tone the skin, reducing the appearance of pores and fine lines. Acupressure massage is applied while the mask dries, focusing on stress relief points to encourage deep relaxation and a free mind,” Abdelsamiea elaborates.

While Gentlemen's Tonic focuses exclusively on male grooming, the ShuiQi Spa and fitness centre looks after the needs of both men and women. It does have specific treatments for men, with a professional product line Espa designed only for men that can be used for facials and body treatments. The men's body



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Mohamed Abdelsamiea

treatments are more geared to recovery than relaxation.

“We concentrate largely on inner well-being and tranquillity in terms of services and the retail space. Our services and products are designed to promote a sense of well-being and vitality, and are carefully selected and tested for quality and effectiveness. Our exclusive range of ‘Inner Strength Experience’ treatments has clicked among not only female but male guests as well. It was developed by Geraldine Howard, co-founder and president of Aromatherapy Associates, who, guided by her instincts, developed a unique oil using a powerful combination of uplifting clary sage; frankincense to help focus the mind and calm thoughts; cardamom and rosemary to help fortify physical strength; rose and vetivert to calm and heal; and geranium to achieve emotional balance and stimulate circulation. This exclusive Inner Strength Experience range of treatments and the Inner Strength bath and shower oil sell very well,” asserts Abdelsamiea.

“Every man has his own set

preferences. While some prefer visiting salons and spas that are mall-based or five-star hotel-based, others may like visiting the one in the neighbourhood. What we've seen is people who visit us typically look for a high level of service, hygiene and, of course, the lifestyle aspect. We began with a barber shop that took care of the basic grooming needs of our clients. But we soon realised they were looking for something more sophisticated. Since quintessential British brands see considerable demand in the Middle East market, we thought of bringing Mayfair-based Gentlemen's Tonic to Atlantis. It's a perfect mix of old and new – wood, leather and marble mixed with high-tech music consoles and LCD screens in each private haircutting station and treatment room,” recalls Abdelsamiea.

“We receive a lot of in-house guests staying at the Atlantis and local clients residing in and around The Palm, JBR and Dubai Marina at both Gentlemen's Tonic and ShuiQi Spa. Some of our local members come not just for body treatments but also to the ShuiQi fitness centre. The percentage of repeat customers is specially high at Gentlemen's Tonic. On an average, they spend around 40 to 45 minutes with us, if not more. At Atlantis our motto is to wow the guests and we bring in brands in sync with that ethos. We're proud that both Gentlemen's Tonic and ShuiQi Spa have been able to live up to the Atlantis brand image,” he concludes. ■