



# luxury briefing

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## LIMITED EDITIONS



# Turn OF TWEED

*Pip howeson*, tailoring perfectionist, taps into the new taste for all things bespoke

Pip Howeson creates unique clothes, beyond the label and beyond fashion, championing hand woven British textiles, especially tweed.

She had the prescience and determination to start a tailoring business, which would attract the most discerning clients: 'doers and thinkers, lovers of the arts, cultured, and haters of carbon copies.' There is a new admiration for craftsmanship, and a desire to possess something unique, a move away from transient fashion, where 'must haves' change every six months, towards a thing of beauty which is a 'joy for ever.'

Pip trained with master tailors and High Street brands, won a scholarship to the 'School for Startups' a serious business course held at Somerset House, attracted investment from venture capitalist Chris Ingram of Ingram Enterprise, and ex-Dragons Den panellist, Doug Richard. Her clothes come with a lifelong guarantee. She will look after each item through the years, changing linings or buttons, allowing for the passage of time.

Since starting her company in Autumn 2012, she has made about a hundred sales, including famous names Hugh Bonneville, Stephen Fry, and Nic Fiddian-Green (world's greatest equestrian sculptor), a clutch of aristocrats, businessmen, a Duchess and a Master of Foxhounds. Her new Chelsea studio will open in March, though she often visits clients at home, and trawls the British Isles in search of the finest fabrics, especially the wilder shores of Scotland. Daughter of a Naval commander, and keen rider to hounds with the Berkeley Hunt, her coats are often inspired by the elegance of sporting and military cut.

***When did you first decide to transform your own original concept into a business?***

My brother tells me I was always talking about it as a child, I was entranced by my father's naval uniform, enjoyed wearing long overcoats at school to keep warm, instead of ugly blazers. I suppose it started at about fourteen, the idea that I could make 'coats for people' not just coats. When I was training with a series of master tailors and high street brands, I could sense that customers were moving away from the assembly line.

***Personal style cannot be equated with fashion, so how do you define your customers, and how do they find you?***

My customers are beyond being competitive, they do not crave a costly new 'designer' bag each season, and I suppose they come by recommendation, or repeat orders. I spread the word through social media, and hope to gain interest from writers who report on craftsmanship and individual taste as well as high fashion. I discuss ideas with customers, try to guide them towards a flattering shape as well as the life they lead.

***Riding and hunting give you pleasure, would you say that the cut of equestrian clothes is the most important design element in your clothes?***

I was brought up in Cornwall until I was about 8 or 9, right on a cliff in the middle of nowhere. There was a local hunt, and I think it informed my spirit rather than my tastes. The thing about equestrian clothes is that they're functional. They're never bulky, they are always cut exactly to fit, so people look their best, slimmer and smarter. I love double vents at the back and curved shoulder seams. When I start exploring ideas for the next collection, I find myself looking at equestrian and military cut, because of the functionality.

***You follow the traditional rules of bespoke tailoring: skilful measuring, making a calico version before cutting into the cloth, the very opposite to high street?***

For the 'Utterly Bespoke Service' there are about nine procedures, from measuring to fittings and final pressing. I offer three options: Made to Order, Custom Made, Utterly Bespoke, details explained on my website. Very traditional people 'baste', I don't baste. This means when you make a calico waistcoat and stitch it into the jacket. You would do it for a man's seriously bespoke Savile Row suit. Women's coats do not move as much, so I don't think they're essential. Shoulders. Shoulders, shoulders. It really irks me that people with bigger busts (busts are getting bigger I find) tend to buy a bigger size in ready to wear, which makes their shoulders too broad, and then it looks too big for them, bulky, not chic.

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***In your collection there are some designs of a more formal, metropolitan cut, are you planning a more comprehensive range?***

Later in the year, if customers wish, I will make pieces for Ascot, Chelsea Flower Show, English formal events, in a very light tweed called Linton (Earlswater Cumbria). They make the fabric for Chanel. I might also use brocade, silk and Irish linen.

***You have talked about adding a personal touch, a note of wit that you can bring to clothes, a particular motif special to the customer. Could you give any examples?***

Chris Ingram is a collector of 20th century art so I had a silk lining printed with versions of an Elisabeth Frink drawing and added a goat's suede backing to the collar. Sometimes I have people's names embroidered behind the collar, I search for unusual buttons made from elk, horn, metal and silver, from a favourite button shop in Amsterdam. Hugh Bonneville has an extra 'script pocket' in a jacket based on a military tailcoat. The sculptor Nic Fiddian-Green has a pocket capacious enough for paint brushes or any other artists' materials he needs.

***Fabrics handwoven in the british isles, are of paramount importance?***

I have a particular love for Harris tweed, which has to be woven in a crofter's cottage, only by hand, a weaver could be struck off the Harris Tweed association for adding a battery to his loom. I search for family owned mills, often a husband and wife partnership. Hand woven tweeds are so soft, and pliable, that is their unique quality. One favourite is Islay Woollen Mill (my husband's family live on Islay), another is Joshua Ellis. My new studio will be crammed with hundreds of swatches, with overflowing wine boxes full of fabric samples. Infinite variety is essential for customers, and for me to guide them towards making the perfect choice.

***Could you describe some of the most fascinating commissions so far?***

Stephen Fry who has a cashmere jacket from Magee, an Irish mill specialising in Donegal tweed, asked for leather patches on the elbows, 'like a geography teacher.' Nic Fiddian-Green wanted to tramp through marshes in his coat, wrap up his wife or even sleep in it on the Surrey hills. For a German client with a Scottish wife, she made a 'hybrid' coat in green velvet, combining the formal Teutonic Sunday best, known as a 'Trachten' with the glamorous English smoking jacket. Think Captain von Trapp meets Sherlock Holmes.