

Fit for purpose

Katherine Hooker has an instinct for tailoring that flatters the female form, and her new online store means bespoke need not be off limits

Words Charlotte Metcalf **Photography** Joakim Blockström

There is a reason why Katherine Hooker is one of the only tailors in London who specialises in dressing women. When she made her first 'Braid' coat, now a popular staple of her brand, she took it to a Savile Row tailor to help her with the final adjustments.

'He admired the coat's cut, then suggested I move a front seam left and down by a quarter of an inch,' says Hooker. 'It perfected the coat, so I rang to thank him and asked why he didn't make women's clothes. He laughed, "One reason and one reason only: boobs!"'

It is to Hooker's advantage that tailors shy away from the various shapes that women come in. 'There are only about three male body types and mostly we're dealing with bellies, which just means altering the circumference,' says Hooker. 'But look at women! They come in a hundred different forms, so you have to worry about balance as well as width and height. What's more, women are very sensitive about their bodies and most want clothes that make them look 10 pounds thinner.'

The secret to Hooker's cut is that her clothes are narrow-shouldered and fitted under the armpits, providing a long, lean and flattering silhouette. Those of us who own a Katherine Hooker jacket are used to spotting each other in the street and smiling conspiratorially, or being stopped constantly and asked where our coats come from.

Eight years on, her sunny, unassuming shop stands on a quiet street off Lots Road in

Fulham. It is to here that customers flock to have their unique coat or jacket made, and to choose material, linings, trims and buttons from an array of British tweed, cashmere, wool, linen and silk. 'I source everything in Britain,' says Hooker. 'That way, I have total control over quality and a reliable connection with my suppliers.'

This month, Hooker is launching an online shop, katherinehookernow.com, selling seven styles in sizes 8 to 14 at a lower price, along with accessories, including bags, snoods, scarves, belts and mittens. Her clothes are already being sought after by exclusive boutiques in Manhattan, Cincinnati, Miami and Washington, following a series of sell-out 'trunk shows' in the US, at which she presented her designs direct to buyers. Hooker is sanguine about her success, appreciating that though many women may want to wear beautiful bespoke clothes, not all can afford them. 'What I'm offering is virtually an haute couture coat but at an affordable price,' she says.

Hooker is American, although she has no trace of an accent. She understands intuitively that busy, working women on both sides of the Atlantic want to look classic, elegant and smart, but that they also want to stand out confidently as possessing their own style. Her clothes are enabling women from Wall Street to Kensington Palace to do just that. ♣
Katherine Hooker bespoke jackets are priced from £470 to £970 and coats from £520 to £1,175; katherinehooker.com



