

Demystifying Bespoke

WHAT IS BESPOKE? DOES THE TERM BESPOKE
ENCOMPASS EVERYTHING CUSTOM-MADE?
ACCLAIMED LUXURY EXPERT AND CONSULTANT,
LORRE WHITE, ANSWERS ALL THESE AND MORE...

The term Bespoke dates back to the 17th century. In those days tailors kept full lengths of clothes in their ateliers. When a customer chose a certain measurement of material as per requirement it was said to have "been spoken for". Thus when a tailor who makes clothes individually to a client's specific personal requirements, it is known as bespoke.

Over the years, especially the last few decades, bespoke has been used to describe services and products that are custom-made or to client specifications. Dilution of the term and what it stood for is but inevitable with bespoke being used rather loosely in many contexts.

So what then is bespoke? How does one differentiate bespoke from made-to-measure or custom-made? We turned to none other than the Guru of Luxury, as she is popularly known, Lorre White to explain the concept of Bespoke. White is an internationally acclaimed consultant of luxury with her clients being Ultra High Net Worth (UNHW) individuals. Her work as a renowned luxury marketing consultant at the company she owns White Light Consulting (www.whitelightconsulting.net) has made her a highly trusted authority in the world of luxury.

Her expertise in the luxury arena encompasses a plethora of subjects - from travel to fashion as well as understanding the luxury consumer's requirements. She has organised elite events, started the NBA airline, spearheaded global marketing for NetJets/Marquis Jets BBJ programs and worked in a diverse range of companies that catered to the luxury consumer. A popular media personality, White's luxury news blog, www.LuxGuru.Typepad.com, features topics that she regularly talks about on TV and online shows.

In this thought-provoking interview, Lorre White shares her views on bespoke, how the concept emerged and what the term means in today's world.

As the guru of luxury, how would you describe the term luxury especially when today it seems to be used rather loosely?

Luxury is the best of any art form, and like any art, luxury is defined by its ability to evoke an emotion - like any great masterpiece, quality is inherent. Luxury comes in every category. It is something that separates itself from the others by uniqueness and creating pleasure. Not all luxuries

have an expensive price tag, but often the rareness, the increased time to produce and the more expensive components do drive price. The fastest growing luxury segment is the one that supplies an emotional component, experiencing life to its fullest. Luxury supplies a very special opportunity to experience something new. It is often educational

and can be shared with friends and loved ones. The Robin Leech 80s excessive decadence, disrespectful wastefulness of resources, and gaudy gluttony is gone. It is now an enlightened approach to living. It is about creating last memories.

Don't just exist... Live! Luxury is what we do above mere survival; it is the Art of Living.

What does the term bespoke entail? What can one expect from a bespoke experience? People tend to get bespoke mixed up with made-to-measure.

The word bespoke is a British term that means "spoken for". There are some that say that the term actually started in the footwear business and became popularised through custom tailoring in England, where lengths of cloths were said to be "spoken for" or "bespoken" by another customer. This art arises from Savile Row in the UK and is the most traditional way a suit is made.

Many words are injured in the process of marketing to the public. "Bespoke" like the word "Luxury" and



"Haute Couture", just to name a few, often get misused in mass marketing in an attempt to fool consumers that are not accustomed to the terms, into thinking that they are getting something much better. Mass marketing is very different than Luxury marketing. There are now even specific Luxury MBA courses because they are almost the opposite of each other. Despite the common misuse of the terms, here are the technical differences in the garment business.

1) **PATTERN-MAKING:** A made-to-measure (MTM) service provider takes these patterns and modifies them if your measurements are outside the range of standardised sizing. The mastertailor / house cutter will modify standardized patterns to take your body shape differences into account, like jacket length and shoulder width. The Bespoke process starts with a new pattern (not just MTM modified) created for each individual wearer. This allows for a more exact fit. It is more complicated to achieve this and includes the



slope of the shoulder, the arch of the back, etc).

2) FABRIC SELECTION: MTM probably will offer a couple of mills. There is no standardisation to the quantity of mills. To be clear, I am not speaking about fabric selection. The amount of mills is important for selection, price and quality range. Bespoke would have a library of fabrics and have at least 10 mills and likely more. The customer is probably even offered option to commission a unique dye lot of fabric. This last option does come at some considerable expense.

3) MULTIPLE FITTINGS: With MTM there is usually only two fittings. An initial fitting to take measurements and draft a design, then a final fitting after it's fully created, but none during the creation of the garment. Depending on measurement accuracy / the preferences of the customer, there might be alterations to the final product, which might require a third fitting. Achieving a bespoke fit requires multiple fittings during creation of the garment. Here's where Bespoke clears MTM, and why some will argue that it's worth the premium. First is the skeleton baste fitting, second the forward fitting, third the fin bar fin fitting, all being done at different stages of tailoring. I've heard of some bespoke shops doing 5+ mid-fittings. These fittings do more than just verify the original measurements were accurate in the beginning – talented tailors build on top each fitting, achieving a more precise fit along the way.

4) TAILOR VS. SALES CLERK: In MTM the customer is usually measured by a sales associate and the level of training varies enormously. With a Bespoke purchase, the customer will meet only with the person constructing the garment. Having first hand contact with the client ensures not only a much greater tailoring skill, but also a clear understanding of what the consumer wants.

5) DESIGN / CUSTOMISATIONS AVAILABLE: MTM is more standardised. The maker will have a list of options that are available cuffs, pleats, buttons on jacket, pocket style. For a Bespoke garment, the sky is the limit regardless of difficulty or quantity of special details the customer wants

From its initial advent in the world of tailoring, bespoke today is embraced with equal fervour by technology, footwear, automobiles... Does everyone who offer the service understand and put to practice 'bespoke'?

Bespoke means a clothing item made to a buyer's specification. While the term historically is applied to only men's tailored clothing, it now generally includes other apparel, implying measurement and fitting. The term bespoke in fashion was originally reserved for men's clothing, analogous to women's "haute couture". Since the word Bespoke encompasses technical aspects of garment production, when used by other industries it cannot truly match the definition, but it is used more in the "spirit of the definition" than in the technical sense. For most non-clothing items it has been adapted by marketers to mean "built to order" or "Custom Made". "Custom Made" is a very forgiving term that can be used to describe anything that has been tweaked to fit you based on your measurements and style options. When this term is used, it can mean a variety of things, or a combination of methods. The term 'bespoke applications' can refer to custom software built by a company for its own use by a department other than the IT department.

When speaking of Bespoke regarding luxury cars many brands like Rolls-Royce offer Semi-precious stone inlays, embroidery, customised paint and intricate designs on cars. This is particularly popular in the Middle East, one of the largest markets for luxury automobiles. They have seen bespoke services soar as discerning customers look for ways to distinguish themselves and have something uniquely theirs.

What should a person expect when being offered a bespoke service/product/experience?

Despite the term being technically misused, what all marketers are trying to convey, is that the product and the surrounding service will be stupendous, and specifically created just for you; a one of a kind piece to meet your individualized wants, or "custom made". It (what ever it is, a jet, a yacht, a car, a private banker) will represent the best of quality, style, personal fit, and highest service by superiorly trained and skilled artisans or professionals. It is a term adapted to represent the up-most in luxury. But obviously, just because the marketing uses the word Bespoke, it does not make it so. This is why elite brands with long histories of service, are better trusted than new comers to the market. The luxury brands have had to prove themselves consistently over time and when a customer is shelling out very substantial sums for the "Bespoke experience", they want to make sure they actually get what they paid for. ☺