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Silk menswear takes centre stage

Silk in unorthodox guises is the sartorial star of the season, says Tom Stubbs



Cornelliani raw-silk-look technical fabric parka, £500

WHERE TO FIND



Berluti, 43 Conduit St, London W1 (020-7473 1740; berluti.com). Caruso, carusomenswear.com and see Fenwick. Corneliani, 162 Sloane St, London SW1 (020-7493 7921; corneliani.com). Emporio Armani, 51-52 New Bond St, London W1 (020-7491 8080; armani.com). Ermenegildo Zegna, 37-38 New Bond St, London W1 (020-7518 2700; zegna.co.uk). Fenwick, 63 New Bond St, London W1 (020-7629 916; fenwick.co.uk). Katharine Hamnett, katharinehamnett.com and see Liberty. Liberty, Regent St, London W1 (020-77341234; libertylondon.com). Louis Vuitton, 17-20 New Bond St, London W1 (020-3214 9200; louisvuitton.com). Massimo Alba, see Fenwick. Mr Porter, mrporter.com. Our Legacy, ourlegacy.se and see Mr Porter.

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It started because I wanted to use something as luxurious and soft as fur, but not as barbaric,” says Katharine Hamnett of her affinity for silk. Along with oversized graphic slogans, silk was one of Hamnett’s defining motifs: the famous “58% Don’t Want Pershing” T-shirt Hamnett wore to meet Margaret Thatcher in 1984 was in silk. Her recent collections tap into the zeitgeist again: one of the season’s strongest menswear trends is silk used in unorthodox ways – and with unusual finishes.



Caruso silk shirt, £420. Berluti knitted silk jumper, £680. Massimo Alba silk swim shorts, £452

In Hamnett's hands, silk is a luxury used for utilitarian or **sporty pieces** – almost all of them unisex and one size – such as her long-sleeve bellows pocket shirt (£290) in white or black, with matching cargo pants (£225). Her short-sleeve Nigel **shirts** in white, black or light khaki (£225) also look great in semi-matte habotai silk that's dyed and washed in Italy.

Ermengildo Zegna puts silk in a sophisticated colour palette centre stage. Luxe leisurewear includes an anorak track top (£1,770) in pewter grey with matching double-pleated jogging bottoms (£860), and a four-pocket field jacket (£2,340) in moonrock-grey silk with matching **trousers** (£860). The house's recent acquisition of a specialist silk mill has facilitated new treatments and compositions. "Silk is often regarded as a feminine fabric for garments such as trousers, but through multiple washings, we've made a finish that works for both sportswear and modern **tailoring**," says creative director Alessandro Sartori. Striking examples of the latter include a single-breasted **suit** (£3,290) in green, and a double-breasted suit (£4,200) in opera-red silk – both of which feel great to wear.



Emporio Armani gives tailored silk a crinkled twist; it looks fantastic as an unlined navy **jacket** (£730), which works well with both navy silk short wrap trousers (£460) and a full-length pleated version (£340) in striking silver. At **Louis Vuitton**, pure silk seersucker gives a khaki double-breasted shirt jacket (£2,000) and an anthracite coat (£1,800) a fluid, relaxed elegance. Meanwhile, washed silk is used for a sporty parka (£2,270) and a “rain smock” shirt (£1,700) that’s like a space-age rambler’s cagoule. If such futuristic **hiker style** appeals, Corneliani’s bronze semi-metallic parka (£500) in a raw-silk-look technical fabric is another excellent option.



Ermenegildo Zegna silk suit, £4,200. Louis Vuitton silk parka, £2,270. Emporio Armani silk jacket, £730

Dense yet lightweight knitwear made with silk feels coolly modern. Louis Vuitton has some great silk knits, including an oversized anthracite fisherman's **jumper** (£620) and a matte navy funnelneck (£445), while Berluti has an elegant long-sleeve roundneck in dusty pink (£680), as well as a black **polo shirt** (£790). Both have been dry-cleaned several times to take the natural shine off the virgin thread, leaving the silk soft and muted.

Other wardrobe staples that feel fresh in silk include grandad-collar shirts. Louis Vuitton's (£640) and Caruso's (£420), both in elegant off-white, are prime examples. For those who like a full collar, Our Legacy has a stylish silk shirt (£190) in an on-trend pale pink "nep" (nep being a dot-like slub).

Silk's refinement and versatility reaches other new highs in the **swimwear** of Massimo Alba. His smart swim shorts – complete with waistband, fly and slant pockets – are made from silk twill, which is usually used for **ties** and handkerchiefs. And the antiqued fawn and washed-burgundy polka dot or striped (£452) patterns, taken from a 19th-century archive of foulards, are seriously suave. The fabric, meanwhile, has retained its natural finish, giving it a soft, tactile handle – a silky-smooth take on a familiar old favourite.