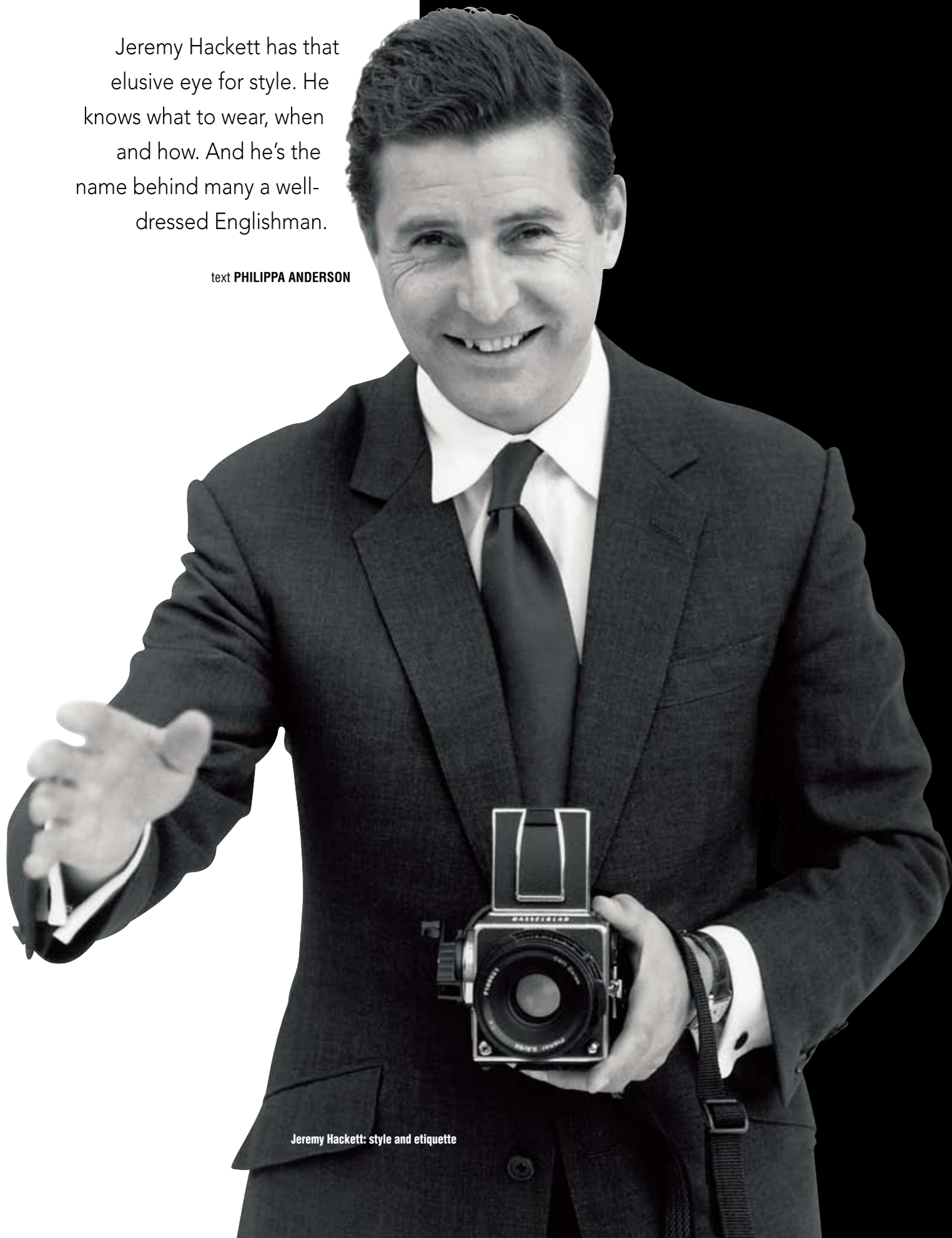


Jeremy Hackett has that elusive eye for style. He knows what to wear, when and how. And he's the name behind many a well-dressed Englishman.

text PHILIPPA ANDERSON



Jeremy Hackett: style and etiquette

# QUINTESSENTIALLY BRITISH

**W**hen young Jeremy Hackett brought home consistently poor school reports, his parents said, "Unless you improve, you're going to end up working in a shop." Little did they realise that Jeremy would indeed wind up working in a shop — but his name would be above the door and that name would go on to become a much-admired, quintessentially British brand.

Tartan rugs, summer picnics, tweed jackets, corduroy trousers, hand-knitted sweaters, morning coats, sports like polo and rugby, and British events such as Ascot, Goodwood and Henley — all combine to epitomise Hackett. The sense of heritage appears to have been handed down through generations. But the reality is quite different. It's more about a chance meeting 24 years ago, and "being in the right place at the right time".

The chance meeting was with Ashley Lloyd-Jennings, who like Jeremy, was combing London's Portobello Road market for quality second-hand clothes. The place was London's New King's Road, where the two decided to set up shop selling their market finds. And the time? 1983, when the upper-middle classes in west London were known as 'Sloane Rangers' and keen to find fashions that distinguished their ilk. Word spread fast among the sartorially inclined. That first Hackett shop quickly gained cult status with visitors from Europe, the US and Japan all in search of *le style Anglais*.

Demand soon outstripped supply. The duo decided to have new clothes made in traditional English styles, using natural, quality fibres. And just as with his parents, Jeremy was to prove his bank manager at the time wrong. The store was at the "wrong end of King's Road", according to the bank manager, but within a few years Hackett had taken off. Soon there were eight stores in London and a thriving business in Spain. "We hit the right note," says Jeremy.

## A TOUCH OF ECCENTRICITY

When asked what appeals about British clothing and style, Jeremy states: "Functionality, wearability — with a touch of eccentricity." He demonstrates this by showing me a classic-cut Hackett tweed jacket. It makes a bold, fun statement with its iconic 'Horse and Hound' green tweed fabric with red over checks. "English gentlemen are perceived as being extremely elegant. The English calendar has a range of occasions all requiring different outfits — from morning suits for Ascot to more casual wear for boating at Henley. We just seem to do it better than other countries," he quips.

Not just a successful businessman, Jeremy has become a recognised authority on menswear, with a regular newspaper column and a book, *Mr Classic*, to his name. There is also a facility on the Hackett website to 'Ask Jeremy' questions on style/fashion etiquette — ranging from subjects such as ties and collars to what a male guest should wear to a rural church wedding in the UK.

Where did he acquire his own sense of style? He shows me a couple of small black and white photos of himself as a child. Even at a young age, clutching a bucket and spade at the beach, he looks dapper in his hand-knitted sweater and straw hat. It's that



sense of "you've either got it or you haven't". "Even at school I liked to dress differently," he says. "I guess I was a bit of a rebel."

In fact, Jeremy was adopted at the age of six (his early years were spent in care homes) and he recently traced his birth mother to discover that not only did she have a real sense of style but was also involved in publishing and writing. "Maybe that's where I get it from. There must be something in the 'nature' thing," he muses.

His underwhelming performance at school meant that by 17, he'd left to take up a full-time job in a local men's fashion shop in Bristol, having worked there previously as a Saturday boy. Within a year, he moved to London and worked in the fashionable King's Road before accepting a position at a tailor's shop on Savile Row. It was then that he began to daydream about starting his own clothing business. "I just knew I didn't want to work for anyone else," Jeremy says.

His first venture was a shoe shop in London's Covent Garden, and as a sideline, he would get up as early as 4am to head to the street markets to buy quality second-hand clothes which he would then sell on, often to Paris. "It never felt like work. It was fun. I could pick out the quality suit among the 10 cheaper ones, even from a distance. I soon realised that rather than selling them on, I could sell them myself."

**EVOLUTIONARY, NOT REVOLUTIONARY**

Jeremy watched what attracted customers to the second-hand clothes — the cut, the right lining, quality buttons. "We started with jackets. They were like bespoke, but half the price," he explains. Shirts



and ties followed, then polo shirts. Hackett is now a one-stop shop for the well-dressed man; with a boys' range as a recent addition.

The recently refurbished London Sloane Street store, for example, sells everything from a morning coat to a polo shirt; boxer shorts to braces; suit carriers to key rings; and chukka boots to hot-water bottle covers. There is also a barbershop and a bespoke tailor.

Jeremy is now chairman of Hackett and still very much involved. Asked what he would have done differently, he replies that he wished he'd been better on the finance side and had had a "safe pair of hands" in the business at the start. In 1991, the business needed investment and Dunhill Holdings PLC bought a majority shareholding in Hackett. The brand was later bought by Torreal, a Spanish investment company.

The investment means expansion across Europe and beyond. Hackett now has 15 stand-alone stores with 11 in London, concessions in many department stores, particularly in Spain and Portugal, and a growing wholesale business. Is Hackett likely to expand into women's wear? "I seem to end every interview on the same question," Jeremy smiles. "The answer is no. Women tend to want something very different each season, whereas men find something they like and tend to want to repeat it."

In short, Hackett is evolutionary, not revolutionary. Quintessentially British. ▲



**"FUNCTIONALITY, WEARABILITY, WITH A TOUCH OF ECCENTRICITY." — JEREMY HACKETT, ON BRITISH STYLE.**

Jonny Wilkinson: closely linked with the Hackett brand

**CLASSIC ASSOCIATIONS**

A link with the Guards Polo team gave birth to what has now become the classic Hackett polo shirt. Other sponsorships have forged the brand's link with equestrian pursuits, including the Pony Club Polo Championships and William Fox-Pitt, the British Olympic three-day eventer.

More recently, Hackett became the official supplier of formal wear to the England rugby team. Five years ago Hackett signed up one of the team's best players, Jonny Wilkinson. It was a smart move. The following year, Wilkinson became a hero when he scored a last-minute drop goal to win the Rugby World Cup in Sydney in November 2003. He has been featured heavily in Hackett advertising ever since — and the two are inextricably linked in the public's mind.

Other Hackett sponsorships which help integrate the brand as part of British heritage include official clothing partner of both the Aston Martin Racing team and the London Rowing Club.