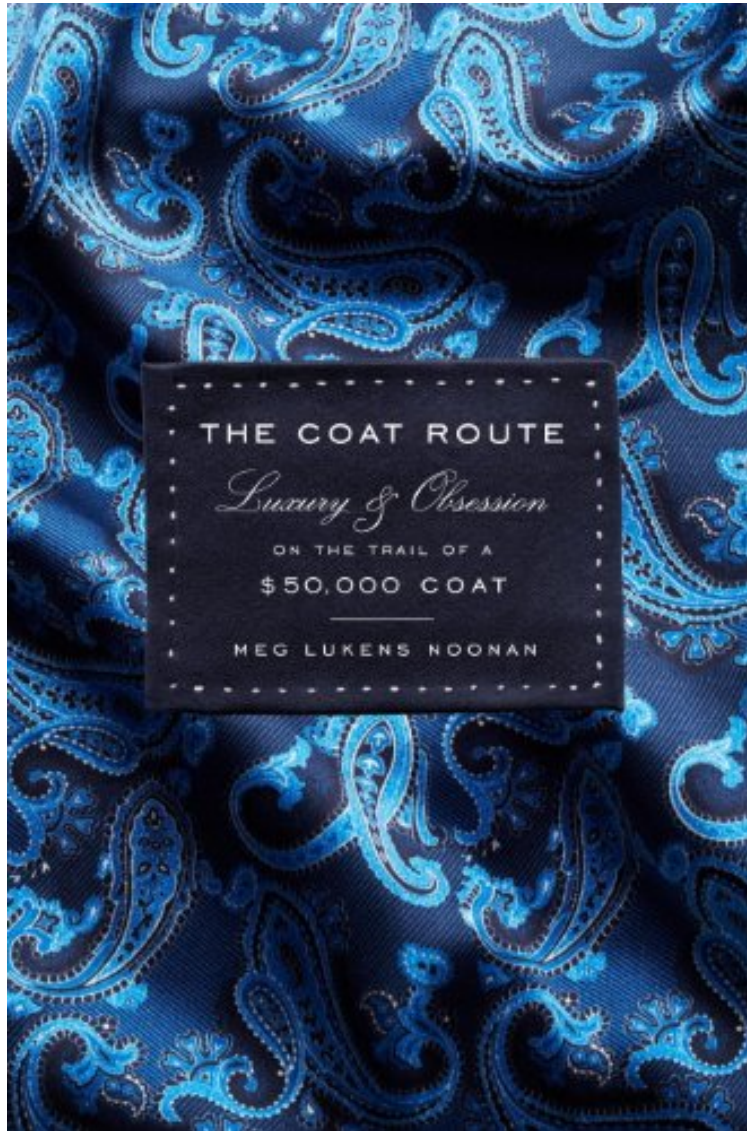


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The Coat Route: Craft, Luxury, Obsession on the Trail of a \$50,000 Coat

Meg Lukens Noonan

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Meg Lukens Noonan : The Coat Route: Craft, Luxury, Obsession on the Trail of a \$50,000 Coat before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Coat Route: Craft, Luxury, Obsession on the Trail of a \$50,000 Coat:

12 of 12 people found the following review helpful. "For the apparel oft proclaims the man."By Amelia GremelspacherThe book starts with a fifty thousand dollar coat. The coat has been made to order from the very rare wool of the vicuntilde;a. This is the world of bespoke. As in the slow cooking movement, this is "slow sewing." While

few garments reach the exclusiveness of this overcoat, each piece is tailored exactly to the specifications of the client. Exact measurements are taken, and a consultation teases needs and lacks. A suit requires several fittings. The resulting garment fits perfectly. It is finished to perfection. Indeed, this is a garment that will last a lifetime. Contrasted with the quickly assembled, mass market, cheap fabric, and flitting style; this industry is about few garments done perfectly. For this coat was crafted by John Cutler for Keith Lambert. Keith has had a difficult high profile year enmeshed in the public family drama of his employer. They decide to make the coat the finest of its kind. Arising to the challenge, Cutler decides to make every stitch by hand. The lining will be a silk that the maker rarely allows into other artisan's garments. Even the label will be engraved gold. Our author sets off on a voyage to explore the components of a dying industry. Few or none young people wish to learn the craft. Even many luxury brands are made for one season of high fashion. Most of the processes have been highly copied in China, albeit not to the standards of the bespoke eye. The book is fascinating and stands as the exploration of the world of bespoke along with a history of the construction of luxury clothing. I have to say it made me yearn for a closet with only a few perfect pieces bespoke to my body. That isn't going to happen, but I can slip into the dream with this book which I highly recommend. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A gem! By Marjorie Matthews As someone who had the pleasure of reading portions of this book as it was being written, I may be considered biased as a reader. However, writers who read and comment on another's work-in-progress might actually be even more critical than the average reader, for we read closely and look for areas of weakness. Reading Meg's work was a pleasure from the beginning thanks to her fine writing and the appealing subject matter. Now that I've been able to read the book in its entirety, I can only say that it is even better completed than I imagined it would be a couple years ago. Meg is the rare nonfiction writer who can weave information into narrative seamlessly and with prose that sings. That she is a poet may not be immediately evident to most readers--and really shouldn't be obvious in a nonfiction work like this--but that training keeps her prose tight and lyrical. Her grace as a reporter clearly won over her subjects and allowed her access to places, people, and moments others would never witness. I feel as if I took an in-depth course on the world of bespoke clothing, except no course I ever took was this engaging and pleasurable. Given the subject matter--a \$50,000 coat!--Meg deftly navigates the difficult line of celebrating craftsmanship and beauty while acknowledging the absurd aspects of luxury spending by the super rich. The implications raised by this particular narrative have implications for us all. Individually, we must decide how we spend our money, but should we also consider what those collective choices say of us as a society? As we enjoy the cost benefits of mass produced clothing, we lose a vital aspect of our social fabric and history. Fine craftsmanship and sustainability are replaced by poorly constructed, disposable fashion and we are all the worse for it. This is one of those books I want to give to everyone I know and encourage even those I don't know to read. It's a gem. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating look into the world of bespoke tailoring By Sugar Kowalczyk Well-told story of the handcrafted world of high-end men's clothing. As Tim Gunn's review says on the back cover, "I couldn't put it down!" Fascinating details of fabrics, buttons, the men that make them, and the clients that wear them. If you are interested in fibers, textiles, sewing, and/or personal style, this book is highly recommended. What surprised me was how readily people like Stefano Ricci, John Cutler, Peter Grove, and Frederic Dormeuil welcomed the author into their professional (and personal) worlds. Ricci's family especially seemed very warm and welcoming (though she also alludes to months of correspondence to set up the meeting). One question has me hanging, though -- how on earth did she manage it -- considering the stipulation by Ricci that Cutler was never to tell anyone about the purchase? I wish the author had explained this. My only other niggles are minor:- The author claims that female silk moth pheromone is released from the antennae, which is incorrect- A typo in the engraving chapter ("a famed copperplate engraver specializing in high-end *stationary* and naval charts") borders on sacrilege! Well-worth the read.

In today's world of fast fashion, is there a place for a handcrafted \$50,000 coat? When journalist Meg Lukens Noonan learned of an unthinkable expensive, entirely handcrafted overcoat that a fourth-generation tailor had made for one of his longtime clients, she set off on an adventure to understand its provenance, and from that impulse unspooled rich and colorful stories about its components, the centuries-old bespoke industry and its traditions, and the master craftsmen whose trade is an art form. In *The Coat Route*, Noonan pieces together the creation of the coat in question, tracing its elements to their far-flung sources, from the remote mountains of Peru, where villagers shear vicunas whose soft fleece is more coveted and rare than the finest cashmere; to the fabulous Florentine headquarters of Stefano Ricci, the world's greatest silk designer; from the family-owned French fabric house Dormeuil, founded in 1842, which drapes kings, presidents, and movie stars to the 150-year-old English button-making firm that creates the ne plus ultra of fasteners out of Indian water-buffalo horn and the workshop of the master hand engraver who makes the eighteen-karat gold plaque that hangs inside the coat's collar. We meet the dapper son-in-law of an Australian wine baron who commissions the coat's creation, and we come to know John Cutler, one of the top bespoke tailors in the world, who works his magic with scissors and thread out of his Sydney shop, redolent of cedar and English wool. Featuring a cast of offbeat, obsessed, and wildly entertaining characters, *The Coat Route* presents a rich tapestry of local masters, individual artisans, and family-owned companies that have stood

against the tide of mass consumerism. As Noonan comes to realize, these craftsmen, some of whom find themselves on the brink of retirement with no obvious successors, have increasing reason to believe that their way is the best way—best for their customers, best for the environment, and best for the quality of life of all involved. The Coat Route is a love song to things of lasting value. Praise for The Coat Route "A spirited tour of fashion history . . . The Coat Route compels us to remember that behind every garment is a deep history and a pair of human hands—whether those hands stitched the dress's hem or pulled a lever that stringed together that \$30 must-have jacket."—The Wall Street Journal "Delightful . . . The Coat Route celebrates those who work with their hands, creating something beautiful and lasting."—The Seattle Times "Meg Lukens Noonan's exploration of the business of fashion is fascinating and thorough, and her examination of bespoke goods redefines the words luxury and obsession."—The Daily Beast "Traditions of bespoke tailoring (and other related crafts) are skirting the edge of extinction. Noonan's delightful story makes us hope they endure."—Publishers Weekly "A fabulous story, brilliantly told . . . I couldn't have enjoyed it more."—Bill Bryson "As captivating as any mystery or thriller, The Coat Route demystifies the rarefied universe of bespoke tailoring and provides a lens into the culture that covets it. It educates and inspires. I couldn't put it down!"—Tim Gunn From the Hardcover edition.

"A spirited tour of fashion history . . . The Coat Route compels us to remember that behind every garment is a deep history and a pair of human hands—whether those hands stitched the dress's hem or pulled a lever that stringed together that \$30 must-have jacket."—The Wall Street Journal "Delightful . . . The Coat Route celebrates those who work with their hands, creating something beautiful and lasting."—The Seattle Times "Meg Lukens Noonan's exploration of the business of fashion is fascinating and thorough, and her examination of bespoke goods redefines the words luxury and obsession."—The Daily Beast "Traditions of bespoke tailoring (and other related crafts) are skirting the edge of extinction. Noonan's delightful story makes us hope they endure."—Publishers Weekly "Lush writing and eagle-eyed reportage uncloak the insular world of bespoke fashion. . . . Globe-trekking travel writer Noonan is well-equipped to bridge the chasm and bring back a narrative every bit as finely rendered as the title's subject. Outfitted with an infectious curiosity and enviable eye for detail, the seasoned correspondent executes a sartorial odyssey that spans a remarkable portion of the planet. The fantastic journey is both fast-paced and rich."—Kirkus "A fabulous story, brilliantly told . . . I couldn't have enjoyed it more."—Bill Bryson "As captivating as any mystery or thriller, The Coat Route demystifies the rarefied universe of bespoke tailoring and provides a lens into the culture that covets it. It educates and inspires. I couldn't put it down!"—Tim Gunn "If there's anything as unlikely—or as unnecessary—as a \$50,000 overcoat, I'm not aware of it. But if there's anything more interesting than a book about the worldwide network of vicinities: a ranchers, button makers, silkworm breeders, gold engravers, pattern weavers, and master tailors who make such a coat possible, I hope someone as talented and as companionable as Meg Lukens Noonan writes it. For me, The Coat Route was a delightful journey."—Daniel Okrent "An informative joy from start to finish."—Richard Anderson, author of *Bespoke: Savile Row Ripped and Smoothed* About the Author Meg Lukens Noonan spent ten years as a correspondent for *Outside* magazine and has written for *The New York Times*, *National Geographic Adventure*, *Travel + Leisure*, *Esquire*, *Men's Journal*, *Vogue*, and many other publications. She lives in New Hampshire. Excerpt. copy; Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Chapter 1 I hold that gentleman to be the best-dressed whose dress no one observes. Anthony Trollope On a rare cloudless October morning in London's West End, I am in a cab, stuck in traffic. The problem is not the standard transit strike or a procession of minor royals or a road race for charity. The holdup today is due to sheep. By decree of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, this is British Wool Week, and, to celebrate, Savile Row is hosting a Field Day. The block has been closed to vehicles and turned into a barnyard, complete with a thousand meters of clipped sod, a rough-hewn barn, and two flocks of no doubt puzzled sheep. When I finally rush into the press reception at Sartoria, the restaurant that is serving as Field Day Central, the welcoming speeches are already under way. I find a spot to stand in the back of the room, elbow to elbow with a sea of men in good wool suits. Most are in dark solids or subtle chalk stripes, but a few have broken out mossy plaids with matching flat caps—the kind of foggy-heath apparel that cries out to be accessorized with hounds. One after another, the speakers sing the praises of wool, farmers, and Prince Charles, who is himself an enthusiastic keeper of sheep. Ten months had passed since textile executives, designers, carpet makers, and retailers sat on folding chairs in a frigid two-hundred-year-old beamed barn in Cambridgeshire to hear the prince outline his five-year Campaign for Wool, aimed at reviving the Commonwealth's moribund wool business. Charles had kept his double-breasted camel overcoat on as he stood in front of a small podium, backed by bales of hay and a red wagon full of raw wool, and bemoaned the state of the fiber that for centuries had been the glorious engine of England's economy. The cost of shearing sheep, he said, was higher than the price being paid for wool. Demand had fallen, and farmers were reducing or eliminating their flocks. "The future for this most wonderful fiber is looking very bleak indeed," said the prince, who,

following his comments, mingled for a time with attendees but left before the Mutton Renaissance Club served its signature mutton stew. Committee members, many of whom are in Sartoria this morning, had worked hard since then to coordinate a week's worth of wool promotions and photo ops all over England, designed to remind people that wool was warm, natural, comfortable, and sustainable. Field Day was their marquee event and, it must be said, the one that seemed most likely to have taken shape over a second pour of Laphroaig. (Idquo;Whatsquo;s that? Sheep? On Savile Row? Smashing idea, old cod!rdquo;) Before dawn this morning, trailers arriving from Devon, in southwest England's moor country, had deposited sixty bathed and fluffed sheep in their temporary pasture. These weren't just any sheep: one group was the U.K.'s last remaining flock of Bowmont sheep, developed by genetics researchers in Scotland in the 1980s by crossing Saxon Merinos with white Shetlands, with the object of producing a hardy, fine-shy;fibered animal; the other was Exmoor Horn, a stocky, ancient black-shy;nosed breed with elegant backswept horns and a long, dense white fleece. The farmers, too, had been groomed for the occasion. Two historic tailoring houses, Huntsman and Anderson Sheppard, had outfitted themdash;shy;and their dogsdash;shy;in bespoke attire using English wool woven on English looms. Idquo;This is proper cloth,rdquo; a mill executive is saying to the audience in Sartoria. Idquo;Itsquo;s the cloth that, before Gore-shy;Tex and Polarfleece, a gentleman would put on a tweed jacket with a stout pair of shoes and walk up Everest.rdquo; The line gets a laugh, but nostalgia mists across the room as if it had been sprayed from a fine-shy;nozzled hose. I head outside to see the flocks and to get a feel for Savile Row, the quarter-shy;mile side street that is as meaningful to men who are reverent about handmade clothing as Cooperstown is to baseball fans and St. Andrews is to golfers. A dozen or so of the block's tailors are hosting open houses, and several have scheduled short presentations about some aspect of their business. This is, from what I have read, an extremely rare show of hospitality by a group that, for most of its history, has preferred to keep its activities behind drawn curtains and unmarked closed doors. Open-shy;to-shy;the-shy;street windows, in fact, were unheard of until 1969, when maverick designer Tommy Nutter set up shop with master cutter Edward Sexton at 35a Savile Row, with the partial backing of Peter Brown, the managing director of the Beatles's Apple Corps, whose headquarters were across the street. Nutter was the darling of mod London. Mick and Bianca Jagger, Twiggy, Elton John, and John Lennon (who, according to the author and historian James Sherwood, was known in the Nutter workrooms by the code name Susan) all sported his signature three-shy;piece suits, with their giant skate-shy;wing lapels, nipped-shy;in waists, and roomy trousers. Every Beatle except George Harrison wore his designs for the Abbey Road album cover. As if his designs alone weren't enough to shake up Savile Row's Old Guard, Nutter also dared to show off his wares in provocative window displaysdash;shy;one featured giant purple phallus-shy;shaped candles and another, taxidermied ratsdash;shy;created by a young Simon Doonan, who would go on to become the creative director of Barneys. Nutter not only allowed passers-shy;by to see into his mirrored-shy;wall showroom; he also had the audacity to encourage them to come in and browse. Nutter died in 1992, of complications from AIDS, but if he had lived he probably would have loved the spectacle that is Savile Row today. There are banker types teetering between vexed and amused as they make their way through the crowd; tourists in jeans and windbreakers posing in front of the caution: sheep ahead sign; buttonhole makers and pressers, up from their basement workrooms, taking extended cigarette breaks; and film crews who can't seem to get enough of Harry Parker, the tweed-shy;clad, apple-shy;cheeked, staff-shy;wielding farmer who appears to be having the time of his life herding his Exmoor Horns from one end of the narrow corral to the other as the cameras roll. And at the top of the street, on a roped-shy;off square of sod, there are several people drinking champagne inside what is apparently an invitation-shy;only sheep trailer, painted a splendid Prussian blue. Savile Row was developed in the 1730s, on what had been part of the third Earl of Burlington's estate, a large manicured spread on Piccadilly Street in London's then mostly rural West End. As Richard Walker explains in *The Savile Row Story: An Illustrated History*, Lord Burlington was a well-shy;traveled sophisticate and a talented amateur architect who poured an obsession with ancient Rome into the construction of Burlington House, his neo-shy;Palladian palace. Though he had wealth of his own and had married an heiress named Dorothy Savile, his extravagances left him strapped for cash. To raise money, he was forced to develop a chunk of his land. He laid out a handful of streetsdash;shy;Old Burlington, Cork, Clifford, Boyle, and, later, New Burlington and Savile (named for his wife in a bid, perhaps, for redemption after selling off her gardens). Lord Burlington oversaw the building of blocks of town houses, which were soon occupied by aristocrats, military men, and surgeons. Naturally, they needed proper attire, and before long tailors had opened workshops nearby to serve them. The West End was booming at a time when ideas about how gentlemen should dress were going through a radical change. After the French Revolution, there was widespread rejection of anything that smacked of Louis XVdash;shy;style self-shy;indulgence and excess. There was also a surge in appreciation for the classic nude male body, as depicted in ancient Greek sculpture. Meanwhile, the English gentry were discovering the great outdoors, retreating on weekends to country homes, where they spent much of their time foxhunting and dale-shy;walking and pursuing other activities that required unfussy, comfortable attire. When some of these squires wore their country clothes into the city, they helped fuel a desire, even among urban sophisticates, for well-shy;cut apparel made from matte-shy;finish fabrics in subdued colors. Idquo;It happened quickly,rdquo; Richard Walker wrote. Idquo;One moment the average aristocrat was wrapped in velvet and lace and the next he was stepping out in rustic

simplicity. Without the distraction of sheen and sparkle, the focus became the figure of the man himself. Skilled tailors were much in demand. Using shaping techniques and strategically placed padding, they could give almost anyone a pigeon-breasted or pot-bellied man that coveted a V-shaped silhouette. The perfect man, as conceived by English tailors, was part English country gentleman, part innocent natural Adam, and part naked Apollo; the art historian Anne Hollander wrote in *Sex and Suits*. Dressed form was now an abstraction of nude form, a new ideal naked man expressed not in bronze or marble but in natural wool, linen and leather. Jim Fogel Book Composition