

Back in the 1980s, the V&A used to advertise itself as an “ace caff with quite a nice museum” attached. It was a vintage piece of Saatchi & Saatchi postmodernism at a time when all you needed to get ahead in advertising was a pair of exaggeratedly round, oversized spectacles, a broad-shouldered suit, a loud tie, a Filofax, a telephone that would breach modern airline hand luggage restrictions and a regular table at L’Escargot.

But attractive though life in the 1980s sounds, I have not brought my Filofax out of retirement quite yet. No, I was looking at that slogan with my deconstructed Jacques Derrida hat on (not that I ever saw him wear one, he seemed terribly proud of his quiff of white hair), thinking how to apply it philosophically. And I think he would be quite proud of what I have come up with, when I describe a Norfolk jacket as “an ace pocket with quite a nice tweed garment attached”.

Whenever autumn approaches winter, I find myself fancying a Norfolk, but never quite understand why. Could it be the storm collar; is it those straps over front and back; is it the belt; or was I a Victorian cyclist in a past life?

But apply my “ace caff” (or, if you prefer, post-deconstructionist) theory and it becomes apparent that the pocket is the thing. The pocket lies at the heart of a Norfolk jacket. The point of the other stuff (the belt and straps) is to assist in the installation of pockets. Terry Haste once told me that he got six outside pockets onto a country jacket he made for one particularly practical nobleman.

The straps on the front of a Norfolk enable the cunning tailor to slip in a “secret” pocket or hand-warming pockets without further disturbing the garment’s appearance. Meanwhile, straps and belt draw the eye away from hip pockets the size of supermarket carrier bags into which you can stuff a week’s shopping.

Edward Fox wore a natty Norfolk in the 1985 film *The Shooting Party*. As his character was a crack shot (perhaps a little unsporting in that he took a low bird, shot a beater and – even worse – was caught practising his gun mount), I have begun to think that a Norfolk might improve my abysmal shooting – so I broached the matter with top shot Fie Lucan who by happy coincidence has just launched a collection of Lucan shooting-inspired clothes including Norfolks (£895).

She has built each of her pockets to have a minimum capacity of two boxes of cartridges per pocket – that is 100 cartridges – only slightly fewer than you need to start a small war. Apparently, the trick is to have huge bellows pockets with poppers at the top to enable expansion and



SWELLBOY

pickapocketorsix

Nick Foulkes delivers droll deliberations on the delights of the Norfolk jacket’s capacious pockets. Illustration by **Chris Burke**

easy access. I found her Donegal mandarin-collared Norfolk very fetching, but she tells me she is considering a black-tie Norfolk. That, I would really like to see: I could put a box of Cohibas in each pocket. Her view is that the belt is vital, not least, because it gives even the most rotund of wearers a waist. Moreover, in addition to the belt suppressing the waist, the optical effect of two saddlebag-like pockets only serves to make the waist look smaller.

Peter Sant, my man at Farlows, tells me there’s another reason for the belt: it helps support the weight of laden pockets that

would otherwise distort the shoulder. But he feels the full Norfolk might be a bit de trop so has created a half-Norfolk (£695) with a belted back, gun pleats for swing and a front that looks like a tailored sports jacket – albeit one with a storm collar and generous patch and hand-warmer pockets.

This sort of “transitional” Norfolk reflects the interest taken in the garment by less overtly sporting outfitters. For instance, Isabel Etedgui of Connolly has made the Norfolk (from £1,350) her autumn/winter staple. If there is an autumnal activity, Connolly has the

Norfolk for it: brown with blue overcheck for country; blue or grey for town; and there is talk of one in Connolly driving tweed.

Connolly, of course, offers a cashmere Norfolk. And if this is the soft side of the spectrum then the high priest of the hardcore end is David Saxby, a character who sometimes seems on loan to the 21st century from a Dickens novel.

I first came to know David many years ago through his pioneering work rehabilitating the cravat; so, it is natural that he would, like me, see the point of a heavy tweed garment (£595) in violent Mr Toad checks that has the warmth of an overcoat, the versatility of a sports jacket and doubles as a wearable piece of luggage.

He is moved to almost religious ecstasies when he describes the pockets as easily accommodating a revolver, half-a-pound of boiled sweets and a Bible. One of his great converts is Gallic charmer Yann Debelle de Montby who he turned into a sort of Norfolk-wearing Jean le Baptiste, bringing the gospel of the true Norfolk to the wilderness, otherwise known as France.

“It is amazing,” he says, “I have French people coming over just to buy Norfolk jackets. I ask if they are over for business or pleasure and they say, ‘Non, we are just ‘ere to buy ze Norrr-foke.’”

At this point, to be scrupulously fair, I have to point out that the French have their very own Norfolk substitute, the multi-pocketed, high-buttoning *Forestière*: a fabulously wearable garment of Derridan unstructuredness (perhaps that should be post-structuredness), equally at home shooting in Alsace as it is *flâning* on the Left Bank. It became available through Berluti (price on request) after the shoemaking maison merged with Arnys, the chic Parisian tailor that developed it especially for Le Corbusier. It should be in every intellectual’s wardrobe – which explains why I don’t have one.

So, I will probably end up toddling round to Terry Haste to bespeak a Norfolk (from £2,800) this winter (in grey for travelling and in case I return to urban cycling). When it comes to the fittings, I have decided that I will be bringing my bloated, old Filofax with me as it will be the perfect way to check that the pockets are sufficiently sized. However, it might be overdoing it to try and squeeze one of those vast “mobile” phones in – not least because I fear the antenna would get in the way every time I fastened the belt. ♦

SERIOUSLY, NORFOLKS

Berluti, 43 Conduit St, London W1 (020-7437 1740; berluti.com). **Connolly**, 4 Clifford St, London W1 (020-7952 6708; connollyengland.com). **David Saxby**, 60-62 Fulham High St, London SW6 (020-7610 6558; davidsaxby.co.uk). **Farlows**, 9 Pall Mall, London SW1 (020-7484 1000; farlows.co.uk). **Kent & Haste**, 7 Sackville St, London W1 (020-7734 1433; kenthaste.co.uk). **Lucan**, houseoflucan.com.

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