



MADE TO MEASURE

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A firm belief in the bespoke has led a boy from Geraldine to be a crucial player in the world of men's tailoring. Today, Murray Crane is synonymous with style, helping shape menswear for a New Zealand audience for over 20 years.



Murray Crane gives himself away before our interview even starts. As we leave Crane Brothers' High Street store for the short walk to their Shortland St offices, he pauses to adjust the placement of a leather armchair. Having surveyed the result with a critical eye he continues out the door.

It's a glimpse into the precision and exacting standards that underpin the world of men's tailoring; a world in which Crane has built his menswear business over the past 20 years and come to be recognised as an industry leader, not just in New Zealand but overseas too.

Suits, it turns out, have been part of Murray Crane's life for a long time. His earliest memory of wearing one was at age 11.

"No occasion," he says. "That's probably when I got tired of my mother helping me choose my clothes."

Raised in Geraldine, he recalls teenage years browsing thrift stores in Timaru and Christchurch and finding that suits from the 1940s and 1950s fit him well.

"That's where I started discovering the fascination with how things were constructed, because I was pulling them apart and getting Mum to taper the legs and reshape them."

Today, Crane Brothers is synonymous with tailored suiting. The self-taught designer has stores in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Sydney.

His success has been recognised recently by famed Italian cloth manufacturer Albini, which has selected Crane Brothers as one of only 18 shirtmakers worldwide (and the only one in Australasia) to offer a limited-edition fabric collection drawn from the historical archives of one of its premium brands, Thomas Mason. Dubbed 'The Icons', the striped fabrics are a tribute to 1960s Britain, in patterns considered to have been "emblematic" around that time in Jermyn Street, the London address famous for its range of gentlemen's tailors. Those chosen to offer the capsule collection are a who's-who

of the tailoring world and include the UK's Turnbull and Asser, which was established in 1885 and holds a Royal Warrant for shirtmaking. Crane admits to being "pretty chuffed" to be among them.

Each shirtmaker has received enough cloth to make just five shirts in each pattern and Crane expects strong interest.

"I think now what people really crave is individuality; it's no different to what's happening with cars and watches. People really like that idea of getting something that no one else, or very few other people have."

That understanding of his audience has been key to Crane Brothers' success from the beginning. It was while working at Zambesi and helping to launch Zambesi Man in the late 1990s that Crane spotted the growing local audience for quality menswear.

"We were bringing in some fairly challenging labels like Jean Paul Gaultier, Martin Margiela, Comme des Garçons. But the thing I really started to notice is that there were men who were interested in how they dressed, and I thought, 'There has to be a market for the ten guys who are coming in and not buying anything, rather than the one guy who is buying something.' It felt like the market was bigger."

Following his hunch, Crane launched the business in 1999, opening the first store on Auckland's High Street in 2000, where it remains today.

He says it followed a renaissance in men's tailoring globally. To his surprise, the tailoring proved more popular with Kiwi men than the off-the-rack product from the beginning and the mainstay of Crane Brothers business remains made to measure suiting (with a strong wedding clientele), although these days everything is manufactured in Italy.

It also offers shirtmaking and handmade shoes, as well as off-the-rack business casual pieces and accessories. A full handmade bespoke suit and shirtmaking service (referred to as 'couture') is also available.

A select few imported brands are stocked, but Crane sees the business being 95 percent private label within the next two years.

“Our heart and soul is handmade; small runs, exclusivity, personalisation, customisation. That’s what we’ve always built our business on,” he says.

While New Zealand’s menswear market has grown significantly, Crane Brothers is reaping the rewards of cementing its brand early on.

“A lot of those clients have stayed with us over the last 20 years, and now they’re partners in law firms, or they run architecture firms or they’re successful businessmen or entrepreneurs and they’re still shopping with us.”

The business has also had to adapt to the changes in how people shop, and a newly redesigned website gives a more in-depth picture of the made-to-measure offering, alongside its ready-to-wear. Visitors to the site can research a wide range of styles and fabric options and even see details of the crafting process.

“We’ve treated the new website journey in the same way we would the journey for someone coming into the shop,” explains Crane.

As industries the world over seek to operate more sustainably, tailoring is well ahead of the pack: the antithesis of fast, disposable fashion.

“Made-to-measure tailoring and men’s tailoring is probably one of the most sustainable industries of all time,” points out Crane. “Everything we sell we can adjust and repair and alter. We have 36 suits here at the moment that we’re making adjustments to... letting the trousers out or taking them in, darned the pocket, re-lining the jacket or replacing the buttons. Some of those suits are probably six, eight or 10 years old.”

And while life might have become more casual over the last 20 years, Murray Crane is emphatic about the role of a suit in a man’s wardrobe.

“It’s fundamental. Obviously. It doesn’t matter how relaxed you are in the way you dress. There will always be times in your life when you’re going to need to put a suit on.”

Far Left The business of bespoke: Murray Crane in his Auckland office.

Below Crane Brothers offers shirtmaking and handmade shoes as well as off-the-rack business casual pieces and accessories.

Bottom Cloth manufacturer Albini recently selected Crane Brothers as one of only 18 shirtmakers worldwide to offer a limited-edition Thomas Mason fabric collection.

