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**Headline: These tailors used to make their clients put on S\$700 suits in public toilets**

## **These tailors used to make their clients put on S\$700 suits in public toilets**

Fuelled by their passion for suits, they have come a long way since then.



Hertslet & Co's story is one among the stories of many other Singaporeans who braved the odds to pursue their passion. Do you know someone like them, or a project that started out in a similar fashion? Drop us an email at [info@mothership.sg](mailto:info@mothership.sg) with the subject header Re: Hertslet & Co.

It was a rainy Saturday morning, one which I could have spent in the comfort of my bed.

Instead, I was grumbling and climbing my way up the steep stairs to the third floor of a shophouse in Joo Chiat, only to be greeted by a man in a suit who offered me a glass of water (because climbing up three flights of stairs is hard work).

Behind him were four other men, minding their own business and similarly dressed in fancy-looking suits.

Was I on the set of *The Bachelorette*? I wish.

Rather, I was at the atelier of Hertslet & Co. Bespoke Clothier, in the presence of the key members behind the brand and a bunch of good friends — Ramon Hertslet, Cai Foong, Darren Chan, Deon Siah and Neo.

And they were more than happy to be working on a weekend.

What is bespoke tailoring?

No two suits will ever be the same, as a bespoke suit is made from scratch to fit an individual's exact specifications and takes into consideration a variety of factors like how one would move or sit.

It is truly the epitome of a tailor-made experience.

With a process that can take anywhere between six to eight weeks (including several consultations and fitting sessions) and the meticulous care and attention given by the tailor, it goes without saying that it costs a lot of money.

Hertslet & Co. charges anywhere between S\$900 to S\$3,000 and this, according to Foong, is "slightly cheaper" than what other bespoke tailors would charge.

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On a typical weekend, they can have about five clients coming in a day and while that may sound like a lot, it doesn't mean that they have always had a smooth journey.

Started at SCAPE

Without a single cent from their parents or a bank loan, Hertslet and Foong founded Hertslet & Co. in a co-working space at SCAPE back in 2012 with a lean capital of just S\$800.

They first met at a fashion event in 2010 and found out that they both were very much into suits and tailoring.

In the good ol' SCAPE days, they charged upwards of S\$700 for their services.

They had to keep all of their tools, like chalk, measuring tapes and fabric books in a small locker that they rented at S\$30 per month.

On top of that, they also had to befriend some security guards so they could store their full-length mirror in the guard post.

Since it was a co-working space, they were required to book a room if they had an appointment with clients. If no rooms were available, they would have to reschedule their appointments.

And when it came to fitting sessions, they would sheepishly tell their clients to manoeuvre their way among the practising dancers at SCAPE and make their way to the public toilet to try on their bespoke suits.

It doesn't sound exactly like a Kingsman experience for their clients, but as Hertslet mentioned, they make up for their shortcomings with their top-notch service (by offering their clients a drink, for example) and the suits that they had always wanted.

"If clients are not getting the kind of products they want, then why would they want to come all their way here?", said Hertslet.

Fortunately, their stint at SCAPE only lasted for a year and a half, before eventually moving to a shop in Upper Thomson and now, a quaint shophouse in Joo Chiat.

**Trials and tribulations**

Foong said that they felt like giving up many times, mainly for two reasons: profit margin and other people's perception.

"This industry comes with age and experience. People have said 'Who do you think you are? So young and you think you know what you're doing?'"

As Hertslet is the only full-time staff, this means that the other members have to juggle their stint at Hertslet & Co. along with their full-time jobs.

Foong is in the finance industry, Chan does marketing and Siah is an investment banker.

But the main thing that has kept all of them going, as cliché as it sounds, is seeing the smiles of satisfied clients and the burning passion they have for creating suits outside of their everyday work curriculum.

Foong added:

"We love what we're doing, so we don't mind spending our weekends with our clients."

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Brotherhood over business

To the people at Hertslet & Co., they prioritise the friendship of their clients over making money.

Apart from making suits, they also hope to provide advice for their clients and for them to be part of the brotherhood.

Treating their customers as their brothers-in-arms is so important to them that they have made — and are still willing — to make small sacrifices for them.

For example, Chan shared:

“Sometimes we discourage clients from choosing the most expensive material because they don’t know what they’re buying so we recommend another material and see how it goes from there. We could have earned more, but what’s the point if they don’t like it?”

And it seems like the bonds they have forged with their clients have served them well, earning them loyal customers like Najib Siddik.

Najib first became a client in January this year.

After falling in love with his first suit, he kept coming back and now has eight suits from Hertslet & Co.

And what sets Hertslet & Co. apart from other tailors, according to Najib? The sincere friendship he now has with the tailors:

“Every tailor has their own set of expertise. Since it is their passion, then friendship is definitely part of the package. I’m thankful for the friendships that I made and the networks I have found.”

Fuelled by passion

While things may be looking up for Hertslet & Co., they are by no means resting on their laurels.

On a larger scale, they hope to not just make it big in Singapore, but also to put Hertslet & Co. on the global map.

Hertslet and Foong are hoping to take a step back and play a more managerial and operational role in the near future, but that will take a while because to them, a good apprentice is few and far between.

For now, they’re just grateful to be able to do what they love to do, and for the brotherhood they have formed.

Hertslet shared his belief:

“If you truly love and enjoy what you’re doing, you can go head-to-head with anything in life. That’s the beauty of having passion in what you do.”

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