

Introducing Mr. Fish

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Objekttyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Textiles suisses [Édition multilingue]**

Band (Jahr): **- (1970)**

Heft 3

PDF erstellt am: **26.05.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-796801>

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introducing



Photos: Clive Arrowsmith

When I first saw the photograph reproduced on this page of the angry looking "mod" man, I could hardly believe that it was the same tall, slim, very polite and soft-spoken Mr. Fish who greeted me with an engaging smile. "I was very angry with the photographer when he took this picture", Mr. Fish explained.

In fact, I think that the photograph reflects "the other side" of the young man who rebels against the conventional, likes to live each moment as he pleases and wears original clothes which are being copied and talked about. It is, paradoxically, conventional training which has given him a valuable and useful background and formed the basis for his success. Mr. Fish has emerged as a trendsetter for men's fashions in Britain. His list of customers now include some of the most famous and influential names.

Michael Fish, born in North London 30 years ago, started work at 15 in a men's shop in London's Shaftesbury Avenue, still called oldfashionedly "Gentlemen's Hosiers and Glovers". Later, as a young shop assistant, he was required to wear a bowler hat and because he could not afford the starched cotton collar which went with the dark suit, he wore a plastic one instead. In the shop he was always called very formally "Mr. Fish", although during those days, he would much prefered to be addressed as Michael.

After a spell with shirtmakers in Jermyn Street, Mr. Fish worked for three and a half years in yet another old fashioned shirt and tie shop in London. There, his main occupation consisted of selling over the counter, day after day, 16 varieties of black and white spotted ties, the customers being mainly former Eaton school scholars. Then he joined Turnbull & Asser Ltd., the shirtmakers in Jermyn Street, London. Whilst with this firm, 6 years ago, Michael Fish decided one day to design his own, different tie. It was this wide and beautifully made tie he wore when a reporter from a London national newspaper came to the shop, spotted it and asked "What is this?" Another shop assistant, always teasing his colleague for his name, quipped "It is a kipper and this is Mr. Fish". "You can imagine how I felt" recalled Mr. Fish, but soon the tie story appeared in the London press, marking the beginning of Mr. Fish's success. Carnaby Street was then in full swing and Mr. Fish was invited to join John Steven as assistant managing director in a expanding market. On December 1, 1967, Michael Fish started in business on his own with a partner at his present premises at 17 Clifford Street, London W.1., just off London's famous Savile Row. A brass scroll sign on the building reads simply "Mr. Fish". Captain Fred Barker, of the Singer Sewing Machine family, later joined Mr. Fish as a partner.

"I take you' round" offered Mr. Fish and we started our tour in the basement which houses the tailoring department. I was fascinated to see "The Shop" on the main floor with shelf upon shelf stacked with striking shirts, masses of them made in Swiss printed and embroidered voiles, some in Swiss silk and others in fancy woven and printed fabrics. There are

hundreds of ties in all shapes and sizes, including large butterfly bow ties in heavy silk or velvet and wide oval shaped pure silk varieties. Multicoloured and heavily embroidered vests and jackets vie for attention on the clothes racks with colourful caftans and twin printed suits and coats presented with matching silk shirts. The shop stocks so many accessories, including shoes and boots, that clearly a man can dress there from top to toe. Mr. Fish has also started to produce ladies made-to-measure garments.

His tailor-made shirts are all produced in clean, tidy rooms on the premises while stock goods are all made outside, in Mr. Fish's own work rooms. Pride of place in the window is given to the Gold Tiberius Statuette, the Italian award for tailoring.

As it was Royal Ascot week when I visited Mr. Fish, he showed me the outfit he was going to wear on that day: a closely fitted silver grey shot silk coat with a wide flat collar and just as I thought to myself "this is a comparatively quiet outfit" he turned it around to reveal a glittering multi-coloured embroidered bird covering almost the entire back of the coat. This was a typical surprise from talented Mr. Fish. He has now a big business surprise up his sleeve and by the time article appears, he will have extended his activities beyond his present branches in Belgium, Ireland and New York, thus adding yet another chapter to this success story.

Greta Sitek

Mr. Fish

