NEWS

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New menswear shop in Wooster Square honors London tradition

BY ADA GORDON
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER



ADA GORDON / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

On Saturday morning, clothier Mark Anthony Grasso hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony for Mark Anthony Bespoke, the menswear shop he founded. The venture intends to bring the central London tradition of custom fitted, handmade suits to Chapel Street.

A new clothier is bringing custom menswear to Wooster Square in the tradition of London's Savile Row.

Mark Anthony Bespoke hosted a Saturday morning ribbon-cutting ceremony at its Chapel Street storefront. Mark Anthony Grasso, the shop's founder, said he wanted to share his love for style while designing clothing that makes his customers feel comfortable. Celeste Grasso, the founder's mother, said men's fashion has been a passion of his since he was young.

"When he was little, and he went to school, it would take him forever, and I would be like, 'Mark, what are you doing?'" she said. She said he would respond, "'Mom, I got to dress, because the first impression is the best impression.'"

Grasso credited his older brother, Brian Grasso, with his interest in fashion. Brian Grasso attended Choate Rosemary Hall, a boarding school in Wallingford, Conn., where he was surrounded by people who "just liked to look nice," Mark Anthony Grasso said.

The clothier said that fine clothing is about feeling comfortable in one's body.

"I just really appreciate the look of, you know, being well dressed, feeling clean and feeling put together," Grasso said. "It's just helped me to feel good about who I am as a person and feeling confident."

Now, Grasso said, he wants to help his customers feel the same way.

Mark Anthony Bespoke doesn't have a "made-to-measure option" or a rack of finished suits for sale, according to its website. Customers select every element of the suits they order, including the fabric, pockets and lapels, Grasso said.

"He's always had a passion for men's fashion, and nothing ever fit him correctly, so he was really into making sure that he could help people find exactly their perfect fit," Ava Grasso, the clothier's wife, said.

New Haven is home to menswear shops like J. Press and Ferrucci Ltd., but Grasso and his family said they think his shop will find its niche in the market of custom-made clothing. In his ribbon-cutting speech, Grasso explained that the shop pays homage to Savile Row, the London street considered the historic center of bespoke men's tailoring.

Grasso said it was important to him to preserve traditional tailoring techniques, which he learned while working at Giovanni Louise, a bespoke menswear shop in Berlin, Conn., for 15 months.

"I think he just carries with him a lot of, you know, artisanship in his bones and in his blood," Brian Grasso, who serves as the shop's unofficial business manager, said.

Brian Grasso said the shop has partnered with the Zeneli family, the owners of Mark Anthony Bespoke's building and the founders of a local Naples-style pizza joint.

The Grasso and Zeneli families have built a close relationship over the last few years, Brian Grasso said. He said that when Mark Anthony Grasso wanted to begin his tailoring business, the Zenelis gave him the opportunity to use the space on Chapel Street.

"They also said, 'We want to build roots here, and we want to invest as much as we can,' and so they're investing their own proceeds into all of the buildings around here," Brian Grasso said.

Though Grasso said that he was slightly nervous to open the shop, he also said that it represented the culmination of a long-time dream. He said that Mark Anthony Bespoke will offer a 15 percent discount for students.

Grasso's family members said they were excited about the venture.

"I think at the end of the day, bespoke is not just a high-priced custom suit," Brian Grasso said. "Bespoke is tailoring, not only a garment to the shape of your body, but to the shape of your identity. It actually is a garment that will represent who you are, and you can carry with you for many, many years to come."

Mark Anthony Bespoke is located at 528 Chapel St.

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Environmental benefits of city's first electric trash truck unclear

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When New Haven introduced Connecticut's first electric trash and recycling truck in 2024, city officials anticipated lower operating costs and reduced emissions.

Two years later, the vehicle has become an early test of municipal fleet electrification, but questions remain about whether its environmental and financial benefits have matched expectations. Officials expressed confidence in the truck's environmental benefits, but publicly available data has not yet compared its operating costs to those of a diesel vehicle or established whether it has garnered projected savings.

"Cars and trucks are responsible for nearly 70 percent of smog-forming emissions in Connecticut and 35 percent of climate pollution," Tracy Babbidge, a commissioner at the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, said in a phone interview. "Targeting transportation-related sources of emissions is critically important for Connecticut to improve air quality and meet these national health-based standards for ozone."

The $616,000 truck was chosen to replace a diesel-powered vehicle as a part of an effort to reduce pollution in New Haven and completely electrify the city's fleet of vehicles by 2030. A grant from the state helped pay for the truck.

In a 2022 letter to the Board of Alders, City Engineer Giovanni Zinn '05 estimated that electric vehicles would cost two to three times less per mile than those powered by diesel fuel. Zinn wrote that the electric refuse truck would pay for itself within a year.

Babbidge said the state had originally supported New Haven's project because of its potential to improve air quality in an urban community while demonstrating the viability of electric heavy-duty vehicles.

Connecticut continues to face challenges meeting federal air quality standards, particularly for ground-level ozone. Babbidge said the state exceeded health-based ozone standards on 17 days during the most recent ozone season, prompting air quality alerts warning residents about unhealthy outdoor conditions.

When evaluating grant applications, the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection considers the expected amount of emission reduction and the communities vehicles will serve, according to Babbidge.

New Haven's truck was selected through the state's 2021 grant-application process. Babbidge described the project as particularly promising because refuse trucks regularly operate along neighborhood streets.

Asked whether the truck had delivered the environmental benefits that motivated its funding, Babbidge expressed confidence that the project was meeting its original expectations.

"We would expect this project to be delivering reductions of nitrogen oxide, reductions of carbon monoxide and reductions of greenhouse gas emissions. We would be expecting this project to save over 40,000 gallons of diesel," Babbidge said. "We have no reason to believe that that's not being accomplished."

Babbidge did not provide the anticipated time frame for the 40,000-gallon projection.

Beyond the purchase price of electric vehicles, cities must account for charging infrastructure, electricity expenses and maintenance costs, Babbidge said.

Kenneth Gillingham, a Yale professor of environmental and energy economics, said government assistance remains key to making electric heavy-duty vehicles financially viable.

"At the moment, subsidies are quite important because electric heavy-duty trucks tend to be substantially more expensive in terms of upfront costs," Gillingham wrote in an email to the News.

Gillingham also said that the stop-and-go nature of recycling and trash collection makes electric vehicles particularly efficient. He said evaluating whether New Haven's truck has delivered the promised operating savings would require comparing its actual expenses with those of a comparable diesel vehicle.

"It would be great to see the full upfront and operating (fuel and maintenance) costs for the new electric recycling truck along with a comparable diesel truck," he wrote.

Beyond the financial considerations of electric refuse trucks, transportation researchers say electrification might reduce public health risks associated with diesel exhaust.

Eric Jackson, the executive director of the Connecticut Transportation Institute, said the trucks' frequent stopping and starting, combined with the energy used to lift and compact materials, can elevate diesel truck emissions. He said particulate pollution can penetrate deep into the lungs and contribute to respiratory problems, particularly for people who live near heavily trafficked routes.

"That's why you see a lot of asthma flare-ups with people that live close to transportation infrastructure with a lot of particulate," Jackson said in a phone interview.

In January 2025, the Board of Alders authorized the city to seek and accept federal funding toward another electric refuse vehicle.



ETHAN SULLIVAN / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

The truck arrived in 2024 as part of a city-wide effort to reduce pollution. Connecticut leaders and environmental experts touted its public health benefits, though data comparing its costs to those of traditional refuse trucks is not yet available.

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