

# The Millennial Manscape

Fashion for the Modern Day Gentleman



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**NEW YORK**—In February, VM’s Millennial Project shed light on “The New Breed” of Millennial Women who, thanks to higher rates of college education, advancements in the workplace and postponement of marriage and children, have become a compelling and attractive consumer group worth courting.

But don’t count the Millennial Men out just yet.

Much like Millennial women have demanded more gender equality and penetrated fields conventionally reserved for men, Millennial guys are redefining what it means to be a man. The young men of Generation Y are embracing traditionally female-dominated spaces, such as lifestyle and fashion, with a revived interest in things like fine liquors, food and clothing.

In a June article on Mashable.com, David Infante, a 26

year-old writer for the site, wrote an article titled “The Hipster is Dead, and You Might Not Like Who Comes Next.” In it he introduced a new term—Yuccies—short for Young Urban Creatives, which he defined as “the cultural offspring of yuppies and hipsters... intent on being successful like yuppies and creative like hipsters.”

“We define ourselves by our purchases, just like both cohorts, sure,” he said. “But not by price or taste level; we identify by price and taste level: \$80 sweatpants, \$16 six-packs of craft beer, trips to Charleston, Austin and Portland. How much it costs (high or low) is immaterial if the material bought validates our intellect.”

It is a pretty fair assessment of the Millennial generation, especially the men. And hot off the first New York Men’s Fashion Week in 17 years, men’s fashion hasn’t been in the spotlight quite like this in decades.

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## The Modern Gentleman

Men's apparel sales are actually growing faster than women's in the U.S. with total men's apparel retail sales having reached \$60.8 billion in 2013, a 5 percent increase over the \$57.8 billion generated in 2012, according to The NPD Group, a market research firm. By comparison, the U.S. women's apparel market grew 4 percent with total sales of \$116.4 billion dollars.

This rise in apparel retail sales is no doubt driven by Millennial men, as indicated in a 2012 Boston Consulting Group study titled "Millennial Passions" which found that among male Millennials, 38 percent reported shopping for clothing more than twice a month, compared with only 10 percent of non-Millennial men. Male Millennials also spend twice as much on apparel per year as the men of previous generations with the difference consistent across all ethnic groups, incomes and household types, proving that U.S. Millennial men are knowledgeable about clothing and like buying it.

Not only are younger men now taking a broader interest in fashion and style, they are using their wardrobe as a way to express who they are. Through accessories like pocket squares, watches, bags, and yes, eyewear, and with irreverent details, unexpected patterns and vibrant colors, men are dressing with the aim of communicating individuality.

The most notable example of this trend is a product category long dormant thanks to the rise of business casual work environments—suits.

Marshal Cohen, chief industry analyst of The NPD Group, said that suit sales were up 33 percent for 18 to 34 year olds over the 12 months ending May 2015 versus the 12 months ending May 2014. "Millennials are driving footwear and apparel, and surprisingly, driving the suit business," he said. "They are getting more dressed up. It's something to pay attention to."

One of the biggest shifts for men is a renewed appreciation for quality and a mainstream move toward spending on pieces that last. Creativity is a new form of currency and success today is defined by having something to say. The idea is to present yourself in a way that reflects your inner drive.

McGregor J. Madden, a Millennial and co-founder of Proper Suit ([www.proper-suit.com](http://www.proper-suit.com)), a Chicago-based custom suit company founded in 2010 with fitting studios in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Washington D.C., Los Angeles, Atlanta, Seattle and Portland, is building a



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**2x** Male Millennials spend twice as much on apparel per year as the men of previous generations.

— Boston Consulting Group

business on that trend.

"I had studied abroad my senior year in college in Hong Kong, where I met Richard Hall, who is now my business partner. There weren't any jobs for us when we graduated so instead of going home, Richard went to Shanghai to work and was able to line up a job for me too," Madden said.

"We had a crew of ex-pat friends who

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were all really young and very entrepreneurial. I lived with guys from Italy and Stockholm and they would go to the tailor markets and the fabric markets. They have a culture of custom clothes and made-to-measure, which we don't have in America. It was a really eye opening experience; we would get clothes made and I thought it was a really cool idea. So we thought, why don't we take this and bring it to the masses?"

The sort of personalization Proper Suit provides offers exactly the kind of point of

is a habit formed online with this generation thanks to their high numbers of digital participation so it is not a surprise it would resonate IRL (In Real Life).

"There is nothing more depressing than walking into a [department] store to buy a ready-to-wear suit right now for a young person," added Madden. "You walk in, the light is bad and there are salespeople who don't know what they're talking about. Then there is the fit issue and you have to take it to a tailor and when it really comes down to it you

## Fashion Online

Though reports say more Millennials are shopping in stores, the sort of utility and ease of use offered by the internet allows them to explore new ideas, trends and brands from the comfort of their own home. And the digital space is accelerating the rise of businesses catering to this generation of guys, with brands able to easily fill the void left by traditional retailers in fashion.

Utility is another trend hitting hard with Millennial men. It's great if something looks good, but if it also serves a purpose, even better. A fine example of a new business that is blending the idea of fashion, utility and ease of access is the Salt Lake City-based Declan ([www.getdeclan.com](http://www.getdeclan.com)), a stylish line of microfiber cloths.

"The first concept I had related to Declan was about five years ago. It wasn't until late 2013 that the idea evolved into a functional pocket square and modern handkerchief," said Jason Fullmer, CEO and senior creative, who funded the company with a campaign on Kickstarter in late 2013. "I started Declan as a means to clean my glasses in a more proper, mature way. We teach kids not to wipe things on their clothes, but still do it as adults. It doesn't work and it looks silly. Enter Declan."

Using the same sort of microfiber materials familiar to the optical industry as lens cleansers, Declan has combined that idea with something many men wear or carry every day; fashion-

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**38%**  
of Millennial men  
shop for clothing  
more than twice  
a month.

– Boston Consulting Group

Photo courtesy of Declan

differentiation this generation is looking for. It also makes the purchase emotional with the ability to design your own product providing a bigger emotional connection to the brand. This idea of co-creation

have absolutely no input into the actual design. Proper Suits have five different shoulder constructions alone. There are so many different sorts of design choices and details."

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ably patterned pocket squares or handkerchiefs. Fullmer said that Declan customers include anyone that uses glasses, sunglasses, smart phones, tablets and cameras but that 80 percent of their customer base is male and 18+.

“We try to make Declan designs appeal to a broad demographic while keeping it authentic to ourselves,” he explained. “We like traditional designs, but we also like to do something unexpected. It seems like our very basic designs and our more ‘out there’ concepts perform the best,” suggesting there is no middle ground for this consumer. It’s either a classic or it’s a statement maker.

Some of Declan’s recent partnerships have included retailers like Nordstrom, Birchbox and JackThreads, brands that resonate well with the 18 to 34 year old set. And according to Fullmer, “95 percent of Declan’s business is done online and they are big fans of using Instagram to better brand awareness.”

Social media could be one of the reasons for this youth driven renewed interest in looking good and dressing well. Proper Suits’ Madden said, “Guys these days, and this is where the social media comes into play, are going to charity events or weddings and that’s where people post photos because they are all dressed up. I do believe that young people are dressing up again and it is because they don’t want to look like a slouch on their social media profiles.”



Photo courtesy of Proper Suit

# 33%

Suit sales were up 33 percent for 18 to 34 year olds from May 2014 to May 2015 versus the previous 12 months.

– NPD Group

“Facebook and Instagram allow them to get new impressions. It’s not just first impressions anymore. There are internet impressions. People need to have this online profile where they are hireable, they are desirable. And I think a suit, clothes, are really important. If you dress up its just respectful.”

Ultimately, the fact is Millennial men

today have come to embrace style and fashion as essential components to a successful and fulfilling life. As a result, the brands and retailers that target these men must recognize this shift and adjust their marketing strategies accordingly, in order to complement this evolving and increasingly savvy generation. ■

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