

Thom Browne's recreation of the suit was successful enough to propel his brand to delve further into menswear, womenswear, and other facets that a lifestyle brand carries. Thom Browne's deals with Brooks Brothers and Harry Winston exhibit that his creativity and business tactics alike are both strong and successful. So why, with such success, was the designer's signature suit not taken seriously? The designer was before his time. Like many designers or artists who cannot be appreciated until the times catch up with them, Browne created a controversial look that while receiving harsh criticisms, actually influenced the fashion industry and allowed for him to further develop his brand by exercising his eccentric creativity and tailoring that merits shocking reactions to this day.

Browne's shrunken suit was a nod to the future of men's suits. He created a look that was so new to the consumer of its time that it received harsh criticisms. Alex Pappademas, wrote about the early criticisms of Browne's suit in an article for GQ magazine, "In the beginning, the suit struck some people as ridiculous, and sometimes it still does. That's part its power. *Made you look.*"¹ In 2001, when Browne began selling his new suit, this was the general opinion. The opinion that the suits were ridiculous because of their cut-for-a-boy quality, however, was genius. This idea caught on for many reasons. As Pappademas said, the suits can still be laughed at and seen as an unrealistic garment, but they are actually revered for many reasons.

The suits were considered beautiful because of the same reason many hated it. The slim cuts and shortened hems were ridiculed, but they were introduced at a perfect time in history. Jack Gallagher, blogger of *A Continuous Lean* explains why the Browne suit had the opportunity to flourish in its time. He wrote, "[W]hen Browne debuted his now unmistakable aesthetic, the suit was in a sorry state. Men were struggling to pull themselves out of the tacky nineties, with its

¹ Pappademas, "Designer of the Year." GQ.

beefy shoulder padded suits and puddling trousers.”² The suit, contrasted those that came before it, slimming down the excess fabric of suits that preceded it. Simon Doonan, Creative Ambassador-at-Large of Barneys and author of *The Asylum* contests this fact, where he wrote about finally finding a suit that his small frame could fit into amongst the masses of suits made with excess fabric in the 90’s. The contrast of the suit to its predecessors forged its path to become highly influential even if people did think as Doonan put it that Browne was “totally fucking crazy.”³

In reality, the suit was a revolution. It was a genius piece of its time because it led the garment out of its rut and into a new and desirable shape. Browne’s ability to identify the problem with the suit and remake it underlies the garment’s extreme beauty and his genius alike. “In the beginning, the suit struck some people as ridiculous, and sometimes it still does. That’s part of its power. *Made you look*. Also, though, it spoke to guys fed up with the distressed-jeans arms race, with designer seed-feed caps. Guys who’d *done* the dirtbag-chic thing and were boomeranging toward reactionary squareness.”⁴ This movement of trends and styles gaining momentum off of one another worked for Browne. His suit and his style worked in their context even though it took awhile for some to engage in this change. The criticisms did not halt even though his suit was influencing various designers around him. Pappademas wrote for GQ Magazine, “He’s one of the few designers whose creativity starts arguments—like a Mathew Barney movie or the latest transmission from Radiohead. Almost single-handedly, he’s made

² Gallagher, "Why The Thom Browne Suit Won't Die."

³ Doonan, " *The Asylum*."

⁴ Pappademas, "Designer of the Year." GQ.

other designers question the proportion of a suit.”⁵ These arguments and criticisms over Browne’s work are the backbone for his influences. If he did not break barriers, he might not have gained the attention that he deserved. Even past his suit, he has gained criticism from editorials like Vogue. In a review of his church-inspired and obviously eccentric Fall 2014 womenswear line, Vogue wrote in a review, “Every choice projected opulence, but the sort of opulence best veiled, best hidden away in secret cloisters concealed from those who can’t understand it.”⁶ When a designer is honored with such high criticisms and arguments about his work, it is obvious that he is breaking barriers in the design world. Browne’s suit amongst his other collections received these harsh criticisms and dubious looks, but the criticisms only showed how truly influential he was in the fashion industry.

The influences were subtle and those criticizing his work were most likely engaging in his trends through other brands. Browne’s influences include menswear from the late fifties and early sixties. He was inspired by uniformity, lack of choice, and American style. His looks take consumers back to a time of a strong sense of American suiting, but with an even more dramatic cut.⁷ In a time when the suit was lacking, he brought out its beauty. He influenced top companies known for their suiting. “[H]e’s managed to do something traditional menswear manufacturers were starting to give up on: He made the suit cool again. Even the behemoth Brooks Brothers is starting to show narrower cuts.”⁸ While some gawked at his looks, they were shopping for the same slim-cut suit that Brooks Brothers adapted from Browne’s influence. His influential status

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Brown, "Thom Browne Fall 2014."

⁷ "Details.com: Rules of Style from Thom Browne."

⁸ Pappademas, "Designer of the Year."

showed that “He is a game changer...a designer whose aesthetic, like those of Coco Chanel or Alexander McQueen, is skewed so singularly that it takes some time for the viewer’s eye to adjust.”⁹ The influence that Browne had sums him up to be the next big thing. He took the fashion world on a ride through his controversially revamped suit so much so that it took time for people to accept his unconventional design aesthetic. At first glance, one may view a Thom Browne design and see it as too extreme to be considered real fashion. The original fashion insider reacted the same way at first, and even though it takes some time to “adjust” to Browne’s designs, they are surely becoming accepted like other designers that broke barriers of their time. “Sure enough, what once looked weird now seems oddly proportionate and correct...few men’s wear designers appear to have eluded Mr. Browne’s influence.”¹⁰ . If consumers thought the suit was shocking and unwearable in the time of its creation, they hopefully have adapted to the change because it seems as if many designers have followed Browne’s suit to slim down the figure. Although most may not be as drastic as to show their hairy ankles between their socks and high hemmed pants, the slim cut is definitely apparent.

On the subway, I recently noticed two men wearing high hemmed pants with socks. Keep in mind; this was on one of the coldest days of the winter with a wind-chill in the negatives. This alone attests that Browne had a hand influencing today’s fashions. Although one may view Browne’s garments on the runway and think of them as a shocking joke, he or she is the same person wearing a slim-cut suit or shorter hemmed pants and unknowingly engaging in a trend passed down by Browne himself. While Browne claims to disregard following or creating trends, he certainly has made a difference in breaking barriers. He redefined the suit and liberated its

⁹ Trebay, "Being Thom Browne."

¹⁰ Ibid.

beauty through the uniformity that he found so interesting. He continues to break barriers after the success of his suit, but through the styling and other looks that surround the suit. The suit remains the same and a foundation for his business. Regardless of the criticisms, Browne is a great and influential designer immersed in the menswear industry and probably in your closet even if you've found yourself chuckling at his looks.

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