Coming up Short

From keeping cool on casual summer weekends to remaining relaxed yet dapper in hotter climes, the gent prepared to bare a little leg will find that shorts can be successfully deployed far beyond the beach. Herewith, a short history of above-the-knee attire, and tips on keeping it stylistically short and sweet.

> by g. bruce boyer photography munster fashion director esther quek

f course we have the good people of Bermuda to thank. Not for actually inventing shorts or anything like that, but for enlarging our vision of the garment's potential, putting it into a completely different category, upscaling if you will. Until the male Bermudian showed us by stunning example that we could wear shorts in a more formal way, we'd always thought they — the shorts, not the Bermudians — were either military, athletic, or generally just very casual resort items.

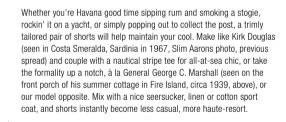
The 'Bermuda Experiment' — and that's just the name I'm calling it — of the early 1950s convinced us that shorts actually had a much wider sartorial range than we had supposed, and we began seeing them in a completely new light. I don't think it's stretching it to say they might be considered the first casual business wear. The experiment is only slightly mitigated in practice by never really having caught on much outside the British territorial island, but never mind that. It's still an incredibly interesting stylistic and

It's long been conceded, I suppose, that men dress more practically for cold weather, and women for warm weather. We









of shortened trousers appears to have begun in Africa for the Askaris in Kumasi in 1873 wore them." It's known that khaki shorts were worn by some British soldiers in India by the turn of the 20th century, and they undoubtedly wore them as mufti when they returned to Britain. These shorts were in fact copied from the dress of the famous native fighters in the Brigade of Gurkhas, the unit of the British army comprised of Nepalese soldiers who had fought with the British in India since the early 19th century. These fierce warriors were known for their deadly kukris, the long, curved knife they carried, and their wide, short trousers. You can see this garment quite clearly on a memorial statue at the Ministry of Defence in London of one such Gurkha soldier in their traditional uniform. The shorts are characterised by their wide leg and self-belted waist; sometimes, the hem was even cuffed. These comfortable and durable shorts continue to find admirers and are a solid summer component of the military-chic look we enjoy at present.

know that women have been the first to notice this, because for years now, they've worn trousers in cold weather for all but the most formal occasions. But men have resisted showing a bit of leg even in soaring heat and humidity. We're rather stubborn, I'm afraid, and not a little overly concerned for our dignity. We men seem to need an excuse — being on a basketball court, soldiering in the desert, or being on vacation — to shed 20 completely unnecessary inches or more of flapping trouser leg. You may want to argue with me about this, but I suspect there's still a bit of Victorian propriety clinging to this issue. I don't have a horse in the race, since I'm a bit long in the tooth to expose a lot of skin, but why shouldn't younger men working in warmer climes (whether seasonal or not) be both fashionably and sensibly as comfortable as they can under the circumstances? I merely ask.

Historically, shorts are related to sports and military uniforms, as so much of men's clothing is. According to A Dictionary of Military Uniform (Scribner's, 1977), "The idea

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Most guys get shorts wrong by wearing them too long and baggy. As the gentlemen here demonstrate, shorts always look best falling some distance above the knee. Just how far above the knee is a matter of personal taste — whether you choose to go super-short like George Hamilton (seen on the French Riviera, St. Tropez, in 1977, opposite, bottom left) or the sharp croquet-playing chap at right, or be slightly more demure à la Rake editor-at-large and renowned sartorial pundit James Sherwood (seen on a recent Spanish jaunt, opposite, top right) is your choice. Breadth of leg is another thing altogether: Shorts needn't necessarily be ultra-trim, as the Prince of Wales (seen super-yachting in 1990, opposite, bottom right) and Noël Coward (shown holidaying in Jamaica, circa 1953, opposite top left) demonstrate. Just avoid looking like a bedraggled frat boy in baggy, ill-fitting, over-long numbers - remember, they're called 'shorts' for a reason.

It makes sense that, from the military, shorts would make their way into a man's wardrobe through warm weather sports. As authors Robert Graves and Alan Hodge point out, in *The Long Week–End: A Social History of Great Britain 1918–1939*, the most popular sport of the '30s was hiking. Leisure, amateur sports came into their own after World War I. Hiking clubs were sponsored by local newspapers particularly popular in Europe in the 1920s since hiking was both a cheap holiday and considered generally healthful. Railways offered inexpensive fares to the countryside. The standard walking uniform for tramping about the Alps, Black Forest, Shropshire Dales, French château region, or the Piedmont was a stout knitted sweater, khaki shorts, heavy socks and sturdy country boots or shoes, and rucksacks. 'Ramblers', as they were called, seemed to be everywhere there was a molehill or meadow.

And then shorts turned up on golf courses. When it comes to dress, golfers have always had less inhibitions, and shorts on the





green were just the next step after the plus-fours already seen on every course in the world in the 1920s. And before you could say knobby knees, there they were on the tennis court. In 1932, Bunny Austin, Britain's top-ranked player, caused something of a sensation at the Men's National Tennis Championship at Forest Hills, Long Island, when he appeared courtside wearing white flannel shorts instead of the *de rigueur* white flannel trousers. Shorts had actually been worn for some time on tennis courts, but Austin gave the fashion his impeccable imprimatur. And the less restrictive, cooler garment may actually have helped his game. A study of the effects of costume on sports records has yet to be done.

By the 1950s, walk shorts entered the wardrobe of every American collegiate young man, to the point that some manufacturers began producing three-piece suits of coat, trousers, and walk shorts specifically for this market. It's argued that this fad died because air conditioning arrived about the

same time, obviating the need for shorts. I leave that for you to contemplate. But there was no doubt that shorts had now gained acceptance across the board, or that shorts could and would be worn on dressy-casual occasions of every sort, including country-club dances, boating parties, and other events of the weekend calendar. Fabrics and colours had come a long way since the khaki days of the '20s. Now it was all bold and pastel hues, and patterns of bleeding madras plaids, awning-striped poplins, cotton tartans, candy-striped seersucker, and bright, polished cotton twills.

Funnily enough, unwritten but rigid rules regarding this new staple of the men's wardrobe quickly evolved, and they all revolved around hosiery. At the most casual end of the style spectrum, shorts could be worn with almost any shirt (oxford button-down, polo, boatneck pullover) and any sort of slip-on footwear (deck shoe, moccasin, penny loafer) with short socks or no socks. But as soon as dark, over-the-calf hosiery entered the picture, the

Centre left: White cotton shirt, Paul Smith; Blue cotton shorts, BOSS Black; Navy and red ribbon belt, Tommy Hilfiger; Blue leather trainers, Tod's; Leather and stainless-steel necklace and bracelets, all Bottega Veneta; Maxi Marine Diver timepiece in stainless-steel case with matte black rubber coating, Ulysse Nardin.

Centre right: Blue windowpane check cotton shirt, Paul Smith; Green military-style cotton shorts and brown stripe suede belt, both Bottega Veneta; Dark brown leather loafers, Ermenegildo Zegna; Brown and black leather bracelets, both Hermès; Blue canvas-cotton laptop envelope with leather trim. Fabrix.

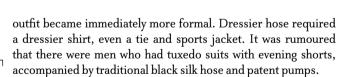
Legendary haute-monde-on-holiday photographer Slim Aarons captured the privileged and tasteful at play, often resplendently attired in tasteful iterations of the short, from the likes of Jean and Tony Ziluca (the great-grandson of Giuseppe Garibaldi, on Windermere Island in the Bahamas in 1980, opposite page, left) to Baron Lionel de Barbot (seen in Saint-Tropez, on the French Riviera in 1977, above, right).

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Navy blue mohair blazer and blue leather trainers, both Alfred Dunhill; Pink gingham check shirt and navy blue silk tie with pink flamingo print, both Brooks Brothers; Navy blue and white stripe shorts with anchor print, and brown leather belt, both Tommy Hilfiger; Tradition timepiece in platinum case, Audemars Piguet; Phantom black S5 Cabriolet with brown hood, Audi.

Blue and red floral print linen-cotton pocket square, Alfred Dunhill; Tortoiseshell Wayfarer sunglasses, Ray-Ban (both property of *The Rake*).



brown leather belt and brown leather loafers, all Ermeneglido Zegna; White cotton shorts, Tommy Hilfiger; Brown leather and stainless-steel bracelet, Bottega Veneta; Gold-rimmed sunglasses, Louis Vuitton; Maxi Marine Diver timepiece in stainless-steel case with matte black rubber coating, Ulysse

Nardin; Phantom black S5 Cabriolet with brown hood, Audi.

And since then? Well, the ubiquitous uniform nowadays seems to call for cargo shorts, T-shirt and hyper-designed running shoes. It's a decent enough look, I suppose, if your only goal is comfort. And all those expandable pockets do come in handy for all the stuff — water bottle, latest iPad or iPhone, keys, antidepressant medication — so many of us seem to cart around with us these days. Perhaps I shouldn't quibble. And, on the other hand, or leg, the neo-campus look has spurred a renewed interest in patchwork madras, seersucker, colourful cotton twills, linens, and other more fashionable members of the clan. Why not indeed wear a pastel chambray shirt, natty foulard bow-tie, and lightweight blazer with a pair of patchwork madras shorts? Or a softly creased, tobacco-hued linen pair with a cream-coloured safari jacket, a bright bandana tied at the neck? With a pair of either burnished benchmade slip-ons or espadrilles, of course. Now you're talking summer! ℝ



American designer
Thom Browne was key
in bringing the short suit
back into fashion, though
his ensembles tend to veer
towards the more adolescent,
collegiate approach to
short dressing (left). We
would advise an approach
more liking to our model
(seen above and opposite),
demonstrating how to do
the short suit in a sartorially
sharp, tasteful and decidedly
grown-up manner.



