



STYLE

HOW J.CREW GETS IT RIGHT

THE LUDLOW SUIT IS A SHINING EXAMPLE OF HOW EASY SHOPPING CAN BE

There is, at first glance, nothing extraordinary about J.Crew's Ludlow suit. Most commonly it is navy or charcoal, comprising a two-button, single-breasted jacket and flat-front pants. But the suit has been an unlikely sensation for J.Crew—a brand that customers request by name, and the *raison d'être* for new, dedicated Ludlow shops in Manhattan and Boston. This month, J.Crew launches two new menswear boutiques in Toronto (Vancouver and Edmonton already have them), and Canadian men might wonder, why all the fuss?

Certainly, the suit's fabrics are impeccable: one flannel-wool blend comes from England's Fox Bros. & Co., the 240-year-old Savile Row supplier that essentially invented the flannel suit. It's well-built: unlike most off-the-rack fare, each suit has a floating canvas chest piece and a hand-finished collar. But above all, the tailoring is clean: slim but not edgy, classic

but contemporary and almost always flattering.

In other words, there *isn't* really anything extraordinary about the Ludlow suit, which debuted in 2008 and retails for about \$800. But it embodies everything that super-CEO Mickey Drexler has done to turn J.Crew into a 300-store retail superpower since taking the helm in 2003. With the Ludlow, J.Crew has proven itself upmarket but not extravagant, specializing in putting smart modern spins on classics. "Look, in technology, you're changing, in automobiles, you're changing, but in apparel, sometimes the original can never be improved upon," says Drexler in the 2012 CNBC documentary *J.Crew & the Man Who Dressed America*.

As such, J.Crew's Canadian shops devote space to its In Good Company series of collaborations with brands like Timex, Ray-Ban and Filson, heritage brands that, according to Frank Muytjens, J.Crew's Dutch-born head of men's design, "do what they do

best, and have been doing it forever." Similarly, J.Crew's own collection of designer staples act as a greatest hits collection of men's clothing: merino V-necks, cashmere cardigans, oxford-cloth button-downs, broken-in chinos, selvedge denim and more. "It's all about classic menswear," explains Muytjens. "We make small tweaks to the colour, the wash, even things like stitches per inch."

Case in point: that Ludlow suit. It's available in 27 varieties, from Irish linen to shawl collar tux. "The fit doesn't change," says Muytjens, "so if you like it, then you can come and pick any other fabrication." And therein lies the real secret of J.Crew's success: the retailer caters to guys who like clothes, but not shopping; who like fashion, but not trends. In that way, they've made dressing well simpler than it's ever been. That in itself is pretty extraordinary.

Benjamin Leszcz lives in the still J.Crewless U.K. but restocks during visits to Boca Raton

FOUR BRANDS
J.CREW MADE
NEW AGAIN



Red Wing

(Est. 1905)
6" Moc-Toe boot
\$346



Barbour

(Est. 1894)
To Ki To military
coat
\$1,154



Globe-Trotter

(Est. 1897)
Centenary suitcase
\$2,122



Thomas Mason

(Est. 1796)
Point-collar dress
shirt
\$158

J.Crew: iStock