

FINANCIAL TIMES

# How to spend it

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# A softly softly take on classic men's shoes

Classic shoes are walking to a new, less regimented beat as softer finishes and deconstructed styles become the word on the street, says Nick Scott. Photography by Omer Knaz

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In the 1930s, the most esteemed [tailors of Naples](#) began deconstructing the traditional English suit jacket. The spalla camicia, or shirt shoulder – created by removing the lining, canvas and pads – resulted in a garment that, while remaining smart, looked and felt better suited to la dolce vita than l'ufficio. Today, the phrase [Neapolitan tailoring](#) denotes the kind of unstructured, light, comfortable suiting that helps the denizens of warmer climates exude the casual élan of gentlemen at leisure. The fascination that captivated those pioneering artisans in prewar Naples is now gripping contemporary men's shoemakers. Menswear brands and shoemakers across the globe are creating lighter, less rigid and more comfortable [iterations of classic shoe styles](#).

“Men are looking for a more relaxed fit and feel for their business and dress shoes,” says James Ducker, co-founder and director of London bespoke shoe service Carréducker. Softer natural vegetable-tanned leathers, suedes and nubucks [Northington boots, £3,300], unstructured designs without lining, and a softer look and feel are increasingly popular among the company's bespoke clients. “We have one customer who likes a padded ankle on his Derby and Oxford shoes, trainer style,” adds Ducker. “Another has a quilted kidskin lining in his laced Oxford [boots](#) to cushion his ankles. Some clients opt for fabric quarters on their boots, which automatically gives them a softer look and feel, and we also use leather shanks rather than metal ones to give more flex in the arch and a softer foot strike on the ground.”



Clockwise from top right: Santoni calfskin monkstraps, £627. Berluti Venezia-leather Alessandro Spada shoes, £1,010. Bontoni calfskin Bellantonio Oxfords, £1,170. Loro Piana water-repellent suede Summer Walk shoes, £495. Carréducker bespoke nubuck Northington desert boots, £3,300. JM Weston calfskin Oxfords, £510. Selection of rugs from Amara.com and John Lewis

Bontoni – a third-generation shoemaker based in Italy's Marche region – takes the concept of softening its materials to a molecular level. “We place the hides in a special drying drum for a considerable number of hours,” explains co-founder Franco Gazzani. “After the leather has been removed from the dryer, we stretch each piece by hand in order to obtain the proper consistency throughout. The end result is a material that preserves the durability and strength of the original box calf, yet has the bonus of being far more supple, lightweight and comfortable.” A prime example is the brand's Bellantonio (£1,170), a lace-up Oxford in antiqued cognac.