

Suit you señor... tweed goes to Spain

Graham Keeley Madrid
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A brand traditionally at home on British country estates is aiming to conquer the high streets of Spain, as the maker of Harris Tweed hopes to prove that tweed is the new black.

The largest producer of Harris Tweed, which hails from the Outer Hebrides, is planning to target European fashionistas by pushing into Spain, where King Felipe is said to be a fan.

An event hosted at the British embassy this year to introduce representatives from Harris Tweed Hebrides, the biggest of three Harris Tweed mills, to potential clients who could help the British brand to conquer the boutiques of the Basque country and the markets of Madrid. Brian Wilson, the company's chairman and a former Labour energy minister, hopes that the handwoven wool will be a natural fit for fashionable Spaniards in the colder climate of the north.

King Felipe and his father, Juan Carlos, have always worn suits made by Jaime Gallo, a tailor in Madrid, who said yesterday that he had worked with Harris Tweed since the 1970s.

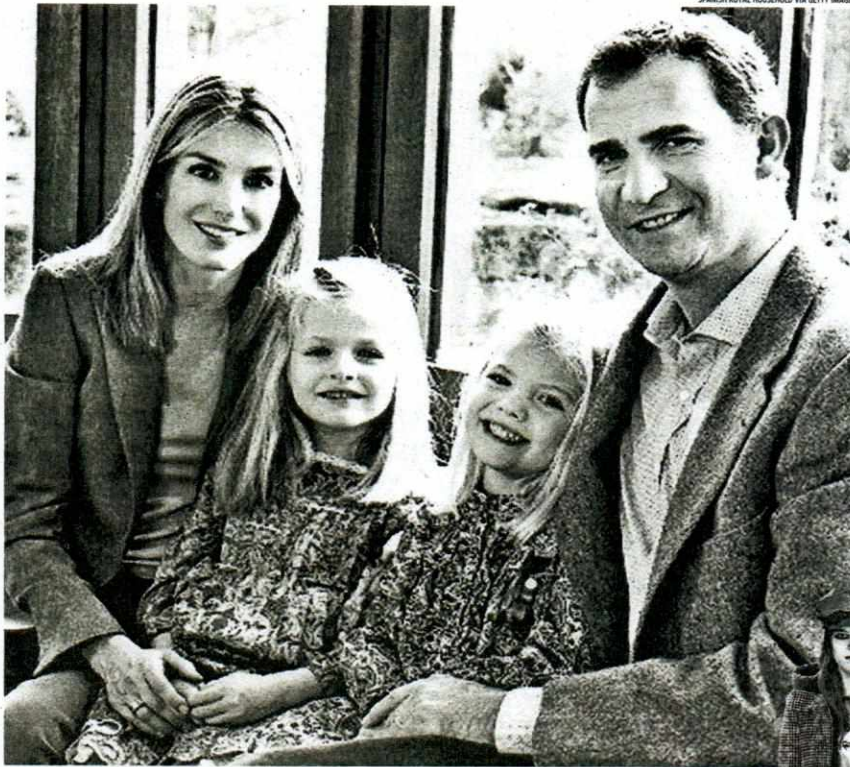
Originally the fabric was woven by crofters for their own use, ideal for protection against the climate of the north of Scotland. Surplus cloth was traded or used as barter, and eventually became a form of currency on the islands.

The company's products have been seen recently on the catwalks in alliances with labels such as Prada, Chanel, Dolce & Gabbana and Ermenegildo Zegna, and it plans to expand into Spain, France, Italy and Japan.

Mr Wilson, whose company produces 75 per cent of all Harris Tweed, said that Spanish tastes in fashion made the country a potentially lucrative market.

"Our fabrics have traditionally been identified with an older person who liked countryside pursuits," he said. "Now we believe there is a younger generation below the age of 40 who, once they get to know our fabrics, will come to like our classic look. In Spain, these are the readers of *Hola!* or *Vanity Fair* who admire that pseudo-aristocratic look."

"Another reason for targeting Spain is it is not all about the costas and the Mediterranean heat. It gets pretty cold here and it has weather similar to



King Felipe, with Queen Letizia and their daughters Sofia and Leonor, is a fan of tweed. It is also a catwalk hit

Britain in many places, especially in Madrid."

Last week the Spanish edition of *Vanity Fair* interviewed Mark Hogarth, creative director of Harris Tweed Hebrides, and wrote: "If this cloth made from virgin Scottish wool, with its irregular and hairy texture and rustic yet soft look, has found a gap in the 21st century market it is down to Mr Hogarth's work."

Asked how the plan to expand into

Spain was progressing Mr Wilson said: "We took part in a UK embassy event earlier in the year introducing us to a good range of potential clients, with some in the Basque country. It's a step-by-step process. We think it's an interesting challenge as it's a place we could do well. Now it's just about getting it in front of the well-dressed Spanish consumer."

The company is in talks with Man 1924, a premium Spanish menswear

business whose main export markets are Japan and the Far East, and with El Corte Ingles, a department store chain.

The company showcased its wares at Bilbao International Art & Fashion last week.

The company, which employs 200 staff at mills in the Outer Hebrides, re-

The fabric of our nation

Behind the story

It might wax and wane on the catwalks, but tweed is a hardy perennial in the fashion canon, whether as coats or suits, or as part of a more abstract concept of what it is to be British (Harriet Walker writes).

Victoria Beckham, Mulberry and Topshop Unique have used it recently: tweed has a nostalgic yet revolutionary feel that never fails to seduce all ages.

Barely an issue of British *Vogue* goes by without a bright young thing draped in the sort of jacket her grandfather might dig out for the Glorious Twelfth.

Coco Chanel adopted tweed as a signature at her Parisian label in the Fifties and tweed became a chic standard on the Continent.

In 1987 Vivienne Westwood gave Harris Tweed a reboot when she used it to dress punkish models. Since then it has been the stuff of princes and showgirls alike.

Never underestimate the *Downton Abbey* effect on the international palette for British garb and heritage fabrics: after *The Crown* streamed on Netflix demand for tweed, waxed jackets and homely knitwear soared.



recorded pre-profits of £2.2 million in 2015 and turnover of £10.9 million.

Once it used 90 per cent of its fabric to make menswear, but this proportion has fallen to half because the company has diversified into accessories and womenswear. Two thirds of its tweed is exported to 66 countries.

TV cook behind 100m nuisance calls

Kaya Burgess

The joint owner of a company given a record fine for making almost 100 million nuisance calls in 18 months has been revealed as a former contestant on *Come Dine with Me*.

Keurboom Communications was fined £400,000 last week after the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) said the company had created "upset and distress" by making 99.5 million automated calls. It was, however, placed into liquidation soon after, meaning the owners may not have to pay.

The calls related to schemes such as road traffic accident claims and compensation for mis-sold PPI and prompted more than 1,000 complaints to the ICO. The watchdog said: "Some people received repeat calls, sometimes on the same day and during unsociable hours. The company also hid its identity, making it harder for people to complain."

The fine was levied against the company, registered in Dunstable, but not against its director, Gregory Rudd, 51. Mr Rudd was also a director of Allied

Telecommunications, which was linked in 2005 to 16 companies fined a total of £1.3 million for making thousands of nuisance calls. That company was also placed into liquidation.

He and his wife, Rachael Tooher-Rudd, 47, are Keurboom's only shareholders, according to documents filed with Companies House. They live in Cambridge and have three children.



Rachael Tooher-Rudd appeared with a topless waiter on *Come Dine with Me*

Mrs Tooher-Rudd, a former primary school teacher, appeared on the Channel 4 show *Come Dine with Me* in 2006, where contestants compete for a £1,000 prize for cooking the best meal.

She was introduced on the show as a "supermum", appearing on an episode that featured a topless waiter. She said on the show that her house was filled with ornaments from various holidays,

joking that the décor is "a bit like me: all over the place". She is understood not to have been involved in the day-to-day running of the business, working two days a week as a primary school counsellor. The couple did not respond to requests for comment yesterday.

Keurboom Communications has been placed into voluntary liquidation and the information commissioner can fine the company but not its director, which means the family home in Cambridge is not under threat.

An ICO spokesman said: "The ICO is committed to recovering the fine by working with the liquidator and insolvency practitioners." The ICO's powers will be further strengthened when the government introduces a new law allowing it to fine the company directors behind nuisance call firms.

"Making directors responsible will stop them avoiding fines by putting their company into liquidation."

Mr Rudd was fined £1,000 and Keurboom was fined £1,500 in April last year at Luton magistrates' court after failing to comply with demands for information from the ICO.

School sports day cancelled after rabbits dig up the field

A school has had to cancel its sports day after its playing fields were invaded by rabbits.

Staff at Cranborne Middle School, in Dorset, said that the population of the animals in the area had surged this year. Pupils hurt themselves falling over the burrows, and attempts at filling in the holes proved futile. Gassing, shooting and using ferrets to kill the rabbits have all failed.

Health and safety fears mean that the 400 pupils at the school are no longer allowed on the field, Craig Watson, the headmaster, said.

In a letter to parents, he wrote: "You may be aware of the ongoing timeshare arrangement we have with rabbits and our school field. We have always shared the field with our furry friends, but this year there are significantly more than ever before and they are digging countless holes. As fast as we fill the holes, more are dug."

A similar problem has been recorded elsewhere. Jan Lloyd, 52, from Kintbury

in Berkshire, said a "plague" destroyed her vegetable plot, adding: "They're swarming everywhere. They've raided my garden and got through my lettuces as fast as I can grow them this summer."

After the Second World War, it was estimated that there were more than 100 million rabbits in Britain, but the myxoma virus, which leads to fever and skin tumours, brought the numbers down significantly.

In the past few decades, a fall in the number of the animals' predators and warmer winters mean that the population is on the rise again. It is believed that there are 60 million now.

A spokesman for the National Farmers' Union said: "The number of rabbit complaints from our members has certainly been rising."

Natural England said the European rabbit had "once again established itself as the major vertebrate pest of British agriculture". It estimated that the cost of rabbits destroying farmers' crops amounted to £50 million a year.