

CRITICAL SHOPPER

Colors to Match Every Shade of Credit Card

By Mike Albo

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THE British-based “luxury shirt” outfitter Thomas Pink has opened a store on Wall Street, a block from the Cipriani Club and across from the Deutsche Bank building, very close to the Nos. 2 and 3 trains. I visited it last week a little after 5 p.m., when crowds were leaving their jobs and rushing into the streets with determined looks on their faces while decked out, typically, in blue shirts and dark pants.

A large flapping pink banner hangs off the corner of the imposing building that houses the store. Below the banner are two big limestone-framed doors that seem to be its official entrance, but they looked forbidding, so I went in a side door to the left.

Inside, the wood-paneled basement-level space, with a connected room for women’s attire, feels denlike and welcoming. Everything is presented deliciously. Warm light is cast over islands of shirts and glass cases displaying candy-bright silk knots and shiny accessories.



Casey Kelbaugh for The New York Times

Ties (\$100) are arranged on horizontal rods in a near-psychedelic spectrum of rich colors, along with formal black options and some white ones for weddings or Prince. Bow ties are sometimes folded into cochlear forms like fancy catering napkins. I couldn’t take my eyes off a male dress form that had various cravats draped over it, as if they were tropical butterflies. Like the flag outside, the store conveys a colorful economic optimism that seems to say, “Making money is a rainbow of fun!”

For the most part, the sales staff is made up of friendly guy’s gals with the dark hair and approachable smiles. My sales associate, as they are called here, was very nice, knowledgeable and didn’t seem at all put off to be helping me. She gave me a friendly tour, pointing out the traditional Black Label shirts, crease resistant items, the newish Slim Fit line and the Traveller shirt, which has a deep breast pocket for credit cards and slim communication devices. Most of these shirts are slotted in recessed shelves on the walls, organized by neck size and folded in complicated rectangles.

She also gestured at the new Casual line hanging on a rack: wrinkly, loose-looking button-down tops. Basically they are shirts that just have been washed, have no collar stiffeners and look as if they came off my bedroom floor.

My associate and I agreed I am a Slim Fit kind of guy. These shirts are narrower, but not in a clubby way, and still seem appropriate for the office. I selected many prints and colors, and my sales associate ran into the back and returned with unfolded versions for me to try on. She juggled all my subtly different choices — checked patterns, solids, stripes, crease-resistant, Slim Fit, blue, green — expertly.



Casey Kelbaugh for The New York Times

Even though the store opened last month, Thomas Pink Wall Street seems to have already hit a stride. Maybe it's the good juju: the building is the old headquarters of Brown Brothers Harriman & Company, the nation's oldest and largest private investment bank. Built in 1928, the building was sold in 2003 and converted into apartments with a designated commercial space.

According to the slightly vague biographical information available on the Web site, Thomas Pink was a tailor in the 1800's well known for his hunting coats. The company says that the expression "in the pink" originates with him. His legacy lay dormant in history until the 1980s when Peter, James and John Mullen, three enterprising brothers looking for an investment project, recognized the branding potential of his name and bought the rights to it. (I imagine the Peter, James and John to look like Jeremy Irons, Daniel Day-Lewis and Jonathan Rhys Meyers, in that order.) In 1999, the company was sold to the luxury goods conglomerate LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton.

The brand may be trying to evoke a sense of Dickensian craftsmanship with its purchased history, but the appeal of the store is more about the marketing ingenuity of the Mullen Brothers and the acquiring power of LVMH than the Victorian ghost-tailor. Buying a luxury shirt here is buying into their vibrant view of the work world and celebrating how they transformed the name of an obscure clothier into a very successful franchise that boasts outposts in places like China, Dubai and Dublin. The bright natty shirts seem to flaunt a fearlessness and confidence in our global economy, especially if you are the kind who can invest in things and buy the rights to names.

This ploy works out fine, because the shirts are crisp and well made and attend to the right amount of detail without being tedious. In the dressing room I tried on a Slim Fit shirt in a subtle pale green check (\$175). It fit marvelously, even though I looked less like a cheery British industrialist than a washed-up Hollywood actor trying to clean up for a court appearance.



Casey Kelbaugh for The New York Times

But that makes sense because I suppose this isn't a store for people like me with money issues who go to Barnes & Noble and buy self-help books like "Credit Hell: How to Dig Out of Debt." These clothes are more suited for the hard-working finance types who have that Suze Orman glint in their eyes and who, when going to Barnes & Noble, select titles like The 48 Laws of Power and You, Inc.

Ever so gently, my sales associate encouraged me to buy the gorgeous pale green shirt. I politely declined. She said I could just try it out and return it after 14 days. I really wanted to do it, but that would mean I would be breaking some rule in one of my get-out-of-debt books, and I would have to punish myself by cutting up my credit card while crying. Instead I bought a collared gray sweater made of soft merino wool (\$195) because it also fit superbly. This made perfect budgetary sense at the time.

Thomas Pink

63 Wall Street (corner of Hanover Street); (212) 514-7683.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS The store, in the heart of Wall Street, looks imposing on the outside, but it is warm and denlike within, with connecting sections for men's and women's apparel.

COST ANALYSIS Prices for shirts range from \$150 (Black Label, crease resistant, Casual and Traveller) to \$210 for the 170s, which are named for the thread count. Personally Pink, the made-to-order program, offers four fabric options and 100 prints and colors, starting at \$275. Given that the shop is new and surrounded by potential customers with six-figure incomes, don't expect markdowns soon.

OFFICE HOURS Store hours mimic the workweek of a busy Prilosec-popping stockbroker: weekdays, 8:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.; Saturday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.