



DEDEDA STEMLER FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

HOT SHOP VICTORIA GREENHAWK HARNESS AND EQUESTRIAN

BY CHRISTINA SYMONS

In the elite world of equestrian culture, there is a firm line between those who ride and those who do not, a huge divide between English and western styles and debates over rowelled spurs, whips and bolo ties.

But thankfully, the sexy, streamlined English riding habit is a look that never wavers.

The folks at Greenhawk Harness and Equestrian Supplies know this. Its newest franchised location is a hip new shop in Brentwood Bay, on the outskirts of Victoria, with a friendly vibe, even for poseurs (7154 West Saanich Rd., 250-652-1002). Heads up and heels down, there has never been a better time for a pony club crossover.

Timeless faux-equestrian accoutrements are routinely trotted out by the world's most classic designers. Catch the glint of Gucci's bridle-bit loafers and embellished hobo bags. Recognize the slim profile of knee-high, flat-heeled black leather Prada boots or the high-brow allure of a Hermès silk and cashmere halter shawl.

"Equestrian show attire is at once classic, formal and elegant," says Maureen Garrity, co-owner of the Brentwood Bay store. "Associated with an elite celebrity class and beautiful horses."

Enter Madonna's latest fetish, the formal dressage "top hat 'n' tails" dominatrix attire central to her \$195-million Confessions concert tour. Obviously, Madge rides.

So go on, pony up. Greenhawk is

the real deal, but not your average dusty saddle shop. Design of the Brentwood Bay store is geared to the chic, savvy consumer, whether they ride or not. This Vancouver Island locale is the epitome of horse country, with farms and a pastoral country-club scene. But if you are not on the island, there are 19 Greenhawk shops across Canada, or online at www.greenhawk.net.

Coveting this season's skinny designer trousers, shiny leggings, tiny tailored jackets and cropped, lace-up boots? At Greenhawk, you won't have to settle for designer co-opted equestrian knock-offs. Instead, you'll find gorgeous and authentic gems for home and closet — sized in tiers for a custom fit, tailored jackets, sleek stretch jodhpurs and real polo apparel, plus accessories

Greenhawk knows the horsey look isn't just for riders. The formal styles never change, save for technological advance; classic riding gear is now referenced by everyone from Gucci to Madonna.

such as fabulous hat boxes and saddle blankets — perfect for picnics, backseat car covers or sofa throws. They even have dog blankets.

Compared with the goods by the couture crowd, the collection at Greenhawk is not only authentic, it's a steal.

"We're not about hot pink and four-inch heels," says Ian Russell, chief executive officer of Greenhawk Inc. "But in our flat leather riding boots, you can look like a million bucks."

Greenhawk top picks include Ariat leather riding boots: field, paddock and dressage styles from \$109 to \$599; Elation cotton breeches from \$69.95; Elation double-vented riding jacket, \$89.95; Elation helmet case (a sleek-looking hat box), \$49.95; cheeky Mondoga half chaps, \$39.95; luxurious Shedrow fleece cooler blankets, \$69.95. Greenhawk can completely outfit a young rider from \$129.

"We've had customers come in and get fully outfitted with boots, breeches, belts, right down to the most exquisite leather riding gloves," says Glynis Schultz, co-owner of the Brentwood Bay store. And these people aren't necessarily riders, but attracted to stylish separates and accessories — jewellery such as bridle-bit rings, pendants and silk scarves along with bracelets and watches.

The equestrian look is the rock-solid heart of old-school fashion, says Russell, perfected by the likes of Prince William and Kate Middleton, Sloane Rangers who along with their tricked-out polo ponies, are perfectly turned out, often in bona fide equestrian attire.

Russell's theory to explain why the guise has endured through the ages is entirely practical. "If you think about it, 200 years ago the mode of travel was the horse," he says, reminding us that in those days, if you were anybody, you not only had to be properly dressed, but ready to put your foot in a saddle. "So proper attire became recognized as riding apparel, from hunt coats to breeches, hats, to tall boots."

In today's warp-speed culture, fashion also must keep pace. After all, who wants to run to the subway in four-inch heels when our sexy riding boots are just as stylish?

Now, about those whips . . .

Special to The Globe and Mail