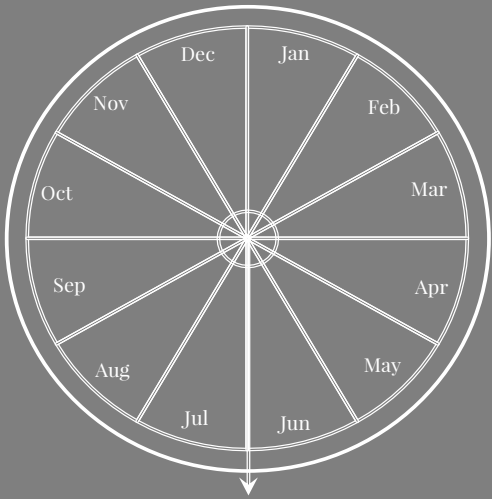


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## Notes

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### Welcome

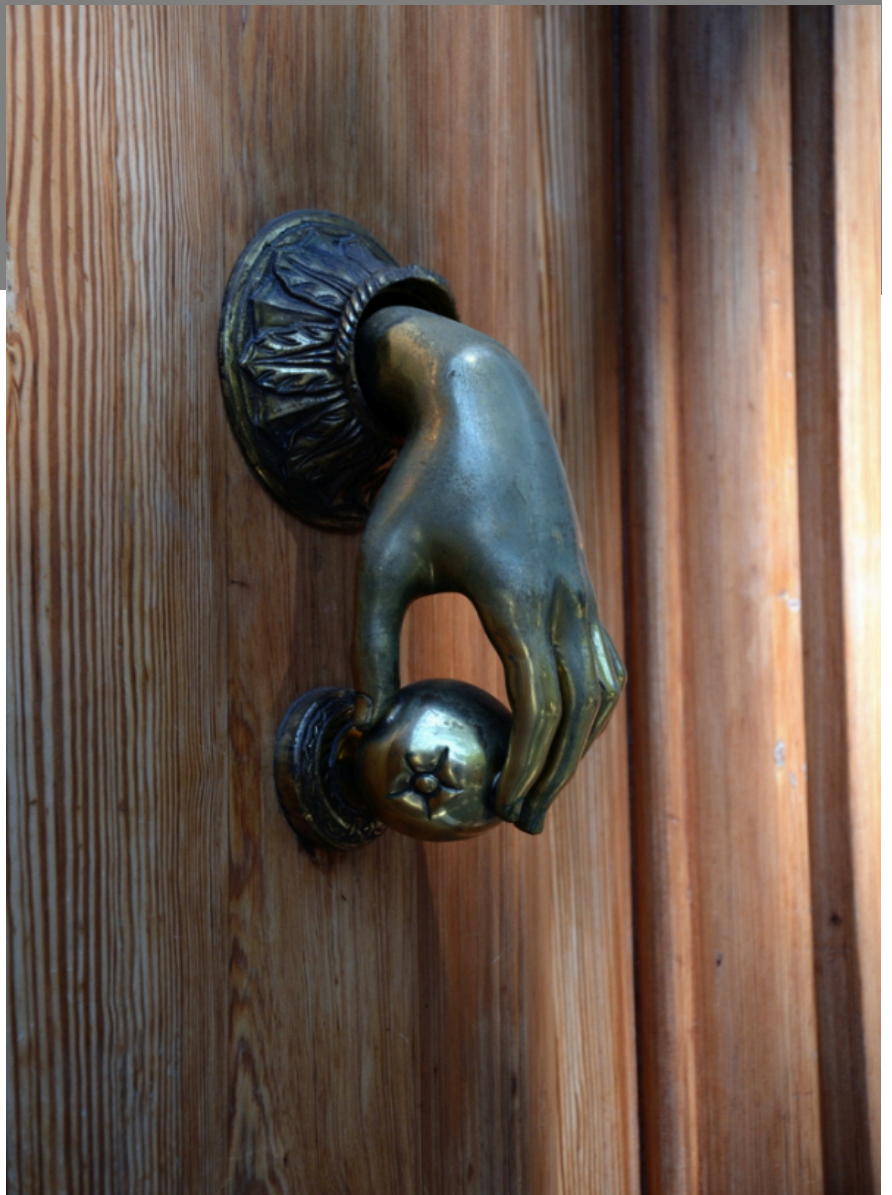
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# June 2020

Barton Founder & Principal,  
Winston Chesterfield

On the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020, Barton turns a year old. It is incredible to consider what has taken place in just a single year, and it makes Barton's anniversary all the more significant when you consider how the world has changed.

The "established order" is a phrase that has often been used by social scientists and economists in recent years, mainly because it is considered to be under threat. Political events are pointed to as evidence of the changing of the winds but in reality, we haven't witnessed anything like the kind of change seen in decades and centuries past.

As far as the earth is concerned, a year is inconsequential but for a new business, it is pivotal. I spoke to a client recently about the fact that the pandemic arrived a little over six months into the new life of Barton and that it was remarkable that it continued to progress, as many other far older, more stable businesses were on the verge of collapse. However, this is largely the luck of good timing. Running a lean shop is always sensible when starting out. Not taking on debt, keeping expenditure low and focusing on headline revenue growth is just what you should do. That it should be

the perfect state of affairs for small businesses in an economy which is reeling under the devastating effects of COVID-19 is extraordinarily convenient more than anything.

It has been a privilege for Barton to be closely involved in so many exciting projects over the past 12 months, with acquaintances and contacts new and old. It's also been delightful to have been invited to talk about Barton & luxury and wealth-focused industries by the likes of Stylus, Taylor Howes, ILTM & Traveller Made.

To a business, however, the future is always more interesting, and more important, than the past. It would be tempting to believe that the next 12 months couldn't be anything like as turbulent and unexpected as the last, but it would be foolish to do so. There are no guarantees. There is no permanence to any state of being.

If the last year has instructed anything, it is that we should always be prepared to roll with the punches and never give in because things change or challenges arise. Those give us the struggles that bring meaning, and yes, even enjoyment, to life.



Knowledge.  
Perspective.  
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Barton

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# THE DEATH OF

# ELEGANCE

Elegance is one of those concepts that acts like a coded language: those who understand it can read it and recognise it well, whilst others do not even know it exists. Whilst it is often referred to in looser terms, such as ‘good taste’, the meaning of elegance is more significant and can be universally applied. Taste is more subjective and leads to debates on what is good and bad and to whom – elegance is far more empirical.

There’s no doubt that, over the past few months, the aspiration to elegance appears to have receded. Therefore it was hardly surprising to note that focus groups conducted by *The Business of Fashion* with wealthy shoppers – to understand their post-COVID attitudes to luxury apparel and accessories – revealed that formal and elegant clothing is proving a tough sell in a world that is coming out of enforced domestic hibernation. After all, the world of suits, ballgowns and high-jewellery must seem like something from another age when all we have known is loungewear, baking, Netflix and Zoom calls.

However, this coming era of casualness has long been in the making. As an ertswihle menswear journalist, it was

always one of the topics on which I used to enjoy writing. For instance, the fact that the financial services industry moved from a pinstripe-suit-and-hat workplace to a shirts-and-chinos one in less than half a century provided plenty of material for penning articles bemoaning the rapid decline in elegance.

But fashion is just one part of the story. Societies as a whole have moved away from gracefulness, an approach to life that has its roots in propriety, dignity and social standing but came to be a way of living associated more with the house you resided in, the car you owned and the villa you rented on holiday. There was a time when aspiration was all about living to be better than you were born. This was the story of the Gilded Age at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when newly wealthy tycoons began family dynasties to burnish their family name with a greater respectability – following the early, often filthy generations of gold prospecting, oil drilling, rough-speaking and even rougher manners.

This world aspired to the genteel lifestyles and high-breeding of European aristocrats, so much so that they were invited to marry their children into British Earldoms and

# “the drivers of Rolls-Royce and Bentley vehicles are more likely to be wearing a tracksuit than a tweed jacket....”

Dukedoms, in exchange for vast sums of their ‘new money.’ This era began a new age and a new motivation for the newly wealthy; look like old-money, as quickly and as convincingly as possible.

However, the continued interest and belief in doing so relied upon a central principle: that ever-increasing refinement – the ‘engineers-to-artists’ phenomenon – would remain the central motivation of those who acquire wealth.

It’s difficult to pinpoint exactly where this motivation started to decay, but there is no doubt that it is no longer the driving force it used to be. Amongst the modern generation of wealthy luxury consumers, the evidence for this is everywhere – in the fact that trainers and lycra pants are worn from yoga sessions to smart brunches; in that the drivers of Rolls-Royce and Bentley vehicles are more likely to be wearing a tracksuit than a tweed jacket and that the athleisure market has exploded over the last two years – whilst the market for formalwear has plummeted. The old rule of becoming increasingly elegant or formal as time goes on no longer applies.

But does that mean elegance is dead? Or is what we define as elegance simply evolving? Luxury is always the best barometer for this as many consumers – rightly or wrongly – see buying luxury brands as being the equivalent of achieving a kind of elegance. Again, this points to aspiration, but it’s also a product of how our existence has changed. Which is why the widespread

working from home for the professional classes – who were the leading contributors to what remained of elegance in workplace attire – will have a huge knock-on effect for how we interpret what is appropriate, what is acceptable and what will become as anachronistic as the sea of bowler hats that once bobbed around Bank.

There are many industries in peril over this slide towards what could be generously called ‘comfort chic’, for they exist on the aspirations of a world fast disappearing. Jewellers thrived on the ambitions of new-money to appear old-money by selling them the kind of jewels that only kings, emperors and sultans had once owned. How they will fare in a world where multitudes of high-income and wealthy people are increasingly spending their days in soft leisure gear and trainers is a mystery. Tailors are also faced with the same problem, although the more intelligent ones have already recognised that the surge in smart separates rather than suits, due to a more relaxed and flexible work environment, need not be a cause for panic but simply requires a greater consciousness of a new age & an ability to adapt.

However, there is still a wider problem for luxury in that the lure of heritage, of timeless style, is under threat from a relentless consumer focus on brand status, novelty and contemporary relevance. New attitudes and behaviours are becoming entwined and influencing each other like never before. The age of aspiring to a bygone era, of cultivating an image of graceful respectability, is over and is now a minority pursuit. We are now in the ‘age of inelegance.’

# Sector updates



*Image: Reuters*

The erstwhile actress Emma Watson – most famous for playing Hermione Granger in the Harry Potter film franchise – has recently been appointed to the board of luxury conglomerate, **Kering Group**. Cynics have been quick to point out that her selection is a virtue-signal to Millennial consumers who will know Watson for her “self-partnering”, working with the UN as a goodwill ambassador and as the face of Good On You – which rates fashion brands on their ethical and sustainability credentials. Francois Pinault commented that her “knowledge and competence” will be an “invaluable addition” to the board of the world’s second largest luxury goods group. Barton isn’t sure exactly which element of her career is particularly attractive to Kering in this regard, but it will give the one-time Burberry model very privileged oversight on a wide variety of luxury mega-brands.

**VistaJet** – owned by global private aviation group **Vista Global** – have recently launched a jet-to-yacht program for wealthy individuals keen to spread their post-COVID wings and climb aboard a sea-going pleasure vessel for the rest of the summer. With a significant increase in global demand for private jet travel as a result of the pandemic, and membership sales at the group’s XO brand now triple last year’s total, it’s clear to Barton that the attraction of simple, on-demand private air travel has never been greater. The VistaJet-to-Yacht program is a refinement of this principle – only requiring members of the program to bring a passport and visa for access to Malta. The rest is taken care of through the concierge of the membership program including temperature checks, arranging passage of the yacht to the marina in Malta, thus making a potentially complex scenario remarkably painless.



*Image: VistaJet*



*Image: Savills*

According to a report released by **Savills**, Monaco remains the most expensive luxury residential market in the world, despite a slight annual decline in price of 1.3%. The new average price in the principality – which is about the size of Hyde Park in London – is now €48,150 per square metre. Hong Kong is the second most expensive luxury residential market, with an average price of €44,700 per square metre which leaves New York in third place, but significantly lower than the top two, with an average price per square metre at €24,300. Monaco also has one of the highest rental yields of €126 per square metre, per month – 60% higher than New York. Barton notes that, as always with articles on the Monaco residential market, little mention is made of the peculiar fiscal attraction to the city state and the fact that Monaco residents are significantly more likely than other cities’ residents to own real estate elsewhere.