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Story by Robert Chalmers

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First located in a mews stable behind The Lanesborough hotel in London's Knightsbridge, and then in a second store on Conduit Street, Connolly was a "concept store" with "curated" content long before either term had entered the retail lexicon. It was the sort of place that other retailers and fashion leaders, when interviewed, would nominate as their favourite London location.

Connolly was a remarkable achievement. For a century and more, Connolly Brothers had supplied leather to British institutions such as the Houses Of Parliament and automotive marques including Ferrari, Bentley and Jaguar. Then in the Nineties, Isabel Ettegui, who was married to the legendary – now alas, late – fashion retailer Joseph, became fixated with the idea that somewhere inside this traditional British company was a modern luxury brand.

Thanks to her, Connolly emerged onto the international luxscape as the British Hermès and now, following a six-year hiatus, it is back. Connolly has reopened in a townhouse on Mayfair's Clifford Street, which thanks to Drake's and Anderson & Sheppard

Haberdashery is an important menswear address. Connolly was where one could find Loro Piana garments before the brand opened shops around the globe and the Original Car Shoe before it was owned by Prada. You could get Charvet shirts along with Elie Bleu humidors rather than having to go to Paris for them.

It also peddled a highly desirable line of leather jackets to which I became dangerously addicted as well as briefcases, belts and cashmere picnic rugs.

Over 20 years later, there is plenty to keep first-generation Connollistas happy – the store can still kit you out for the Goodwood Revival with driving jacket, car shoes, classic open-face crash helmet and leather-trimmed goggles.

The collection also has a contemporary edge. Technical fabrics are a big part of the offer and original Connolly concepts have been updated. For instance, one much-loved classic of the old days was a two-colour reversible leather blouson, which has been brought up to date as a suede blouson that when turned inside out becomes a water-repellent technical garment.

Essentials include the now-mandatory bedsheet-sized man-shawl, or airline scarf, so light to wear that they call it "cloud weight". Knitwear is particularly strong. Taking a ruggedly deluxe direction, there are Aran jumpers and a remarkable pullover that is cashmere on the inside against the skin, but hirsute and resilient Shetland on the outside. And while there is still a selection of Charvet shirts, the majority of the fashion is own label and designed by Marc Audibert

As one would expect, there is plenty of emphasis on leather, be it Belgian bridle, French box calf, cowhide from a tannery in Barcelona or suede of a silken softness made in northern Italy. Moreover, Connolly will be reintroducing Vaumol, a brand of leather from its archives that will be used to cover furniture – an interiors collection will be exhibited in the first floor showroom.

Personally speaking, I am delighted: my 20-year-old suede jacket is looking a bit scuffed, so it could not have reopened at a more convenient time. **GQ**

4 Clifford Street, London, W1. 020 7952 6708. connollyengland.com

'The collection has a contemporary edge. Technical fabrics are a big part of the offer and original Connolly concepts have been updated'

LUXURY:

Connolly – the king of concept stores – is restored in Mayfair where it reigns, true to form, as an emporium of continental treasures and technical excellence. **BY Nick Foulkes**



Clockwise from top left: Small wallet, £245. Medium wallet, £350. Large wallet, £765. Gloves, £300. Shoes, £420. Jumpers, £395. All by **Connolly**. connollyengland.com