

# Triumph for Harris Tweed as style goes global with movie display

Special report by Katie Macleod in New York

**A**fashion show, a CIA agent and American adoration: April was an eventful month for Harris Tweed Hebrides, as the Shawbost-based company launched a new North American marketing strategy with high-profile events in New York and Toronto.

Central to this strategy is new social media website, Need For Tweed. Created in cooperation with New York-based advertising agency Leo Burnett, it was the launch of the Tumblr site that the Harris Tweed Hebrides events aimed to emphasise.

The one that really set the press abuzz was the lunch where CIA Agent Tony Mendez – played by Ben Affleck in the Oscar-winning movie *Argo* – was guest of honour. Hosted at the Wyeth Hotel in the hip Williamsburg area of Brooklyn, the event on April 8th saw Mendez presented with a new Harris Tweed jacket as recognition for his contribution to the reputation of the brand.

Thanks to Mendez, Harris Tweed has reached Oscar-worthy status. In *Argo*, which won Best Film at this year's Academy Awards, Ben Affleck is seen wearing a grey Harris Tweed jacket during the covert CIA operation in Tehran – an accurate imitation of his real-life counterpart.

Mendez revealed in a recent interview with the *Guardian* that he was not the only CIA fan of the Harris Tweed jacket. "That was our uniform," he told Washington correspondent Ewen MacAskill, describing the outfit favoured by the undercover Americans who worked against the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

"Tony and his wife Jonna turned out to be delightful guests with a genuine enthusiasm for Harris Tweed," says Harris Tweed Hebrides Chairman Brian Wilson, who was in New York for the festivities. The new blazer will join the four already hanging in Mendez's wardrobe – one being the very same grey herring-bone he wore in Iran all those years ago. It was clearly a favourite, as the lining is so worn by use that the weaver's number on the label is now illegible.

These links between Mendez, Harris Tweed and an Oscar-winning movie made for an even more exciting marketing move for Need For Tweed in Manhattan. The site itself is aesthetically appealing, featuring photos of Harris Tweed designs and classic ads of the *Clo Mor*. "Everything looks better in Tweed" says the site's front page, a theme that runs throughout the posts of the products, featuring everything from Tweed earphones ("Music sounds better in Harris Tweed") to scarves ("your neck looks better in Harris Tweed").

As Brian explains, "it is hoped it will become a major tool in promoting the fabric, particularly in North America, by sharing information about current use of Harris Tweed as well as vintage material about its rich American heritage." Creative Director Mark Hogarth adds that the site is already seeing internet success. "It is a very slick presentation of Harris Tweed and is gaining a big following from within the Tumblr community and across online media."

The announcement and launch of Need For Tweed tied in neatly with the news that Harris Tweed Hebrides is making a comeback in the mainstream American market. "It's a big step forward," says Brian of the company's biggest American order to date, placed by an undisclosed U.S. store. "The high end deals generate interest, and this cascades down to the high street." Or main street, as the Americans prefer to call it.



On the catwalk... the official Scottish-Chinese tartan  
Picture: Katie Macleod

It's a similar story in Canada, where Harris Tweed Hebrides recently secured a deal with Canada Goose, a brand known for their stylish outdoor-wear. "Canada used to be a huge market for Harris Tweed but it fell off a cliff in the 1980s and has never come back. Our best recent collaboration has been with the Canada Goose company and we hope this can be repeated," reveals Brian. "It was cold enough in New York before the weather changed but it was absolutely freezing in Toronto, even in early April. So there should still be a market in Canada for that reason alone! We have a lot to follow up on."

Present at the Toronto Need For Tweed event were guests from the media and fashion world as well as interior designers and TV presenters, Colin McAllister and Justin Ryan. The two Scots – both fans of Harris Tweed for personal and interior use – made their name on daytime TV in the UK before crossing the pond to Canada, where they now host their own show on popular home design channel, HGTV.

Back in Manhattan, Colin and Justin proved their preference for Scottish textiles by walking the runway at *From Scotland With Love*, the annual charity fashion show held during the city's Tartan Week celebrations. Harris Tweed Hebrides were also there to make their mark, alongside designs from the likes of Vivienne Westwood, Judy R Clark and Obscure Couture.

Billed as "the biggest and most prestigious Scottish fashion show in the world", this year's affair merged Scottish, American and Asian influences. As part of a pivot to the Pacific due to the region's economic growth, this year's theme was 'Scottish Lion Meets The Asian Dragon' – a fitting formula for a Scottish company with a large Asian client base, now embarking on an American advertising push.

The Asian edge was apparent in the judges' attire, the models on the runway, and the elegant outfits on display. Harris Tweed Hebrides, however, stole the show with their extravagant entrance. After the male models in Harris Tweed coats had strutted down the runway, they revealed t-shirts stamped with 'I love Scotland'; t-shirts that were soon ripped off to reveal bare chests emblazoned with Eastern-inspired dragon tattoos.

"The clothes are presented in a jovial context so it is best to make an impact at that level," says Mark, who was the mastermind behind the Harris Tweed Hebrides segment. Mark himself certainly made an impact – not unlike last year, when he pulled off a pose with a Tunnocks Caramel Wafer.

Clad in a grey Glen Isla-Ogilvie Harris Tweed kilt outfit, Mark danced down the runway, on his knees as well as his feet, entertaining the onlookers and kissing the hosts on his way out. No-one was going to forget him – or Harris Tweed – in a hurry. "For me that was the obvious and less embarrassing thing to do," he admits. "If you develop a persona then it is easier to do these things."

"Harris Tweed is beginning to re-establish itself in The North American market," Mark continues. "We try to make an impact at two levels. Firstly we try to access designers and brands, secondly we try to get into the consciousness of the consumer and it is here where the 'From Scotland with Love' show and press features are important."

With Need For Tweed, the company is interacting directly with consumers at all levels, providing a platform where fans can find all the latest Harris Tweed fashion and design from across the globe. The site's tagline was ringing true across America last month: from CIA Agents to male models and Creative Directors, everything looks better in Harris Tweed!



HTH Creative Director Mark Hogarth is seen with 11-year-old Ruaridh McDonald from Aviemore, the youngest star of *The Kist* which is Fiona Kennedy's live music, stage production directed by award winning actor and Director John Bett and featuring an outstanding cast. Songs range from upbeat ancient tribal chants to modern ones by Paulo Nutini and KT Tunstall.



Scots abroad ... TV home design stars Colin McAllister, left, and Justin Ryan right, with Mark Hogarth at the Harris Tweed event in Toronto



Canada Goose and Harris Tweed



Vintage look ... the DJ at the Highland Heart event in New York in a 1950s Harris Tweed jacket



Frank Moir, the former president and present membership secretary of the St Andrews Society of Toronto is kitted out with a new jacket by Mark Hogarth and Colin McAllister

**Harris Tweed**  
Woven by Hand in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland

Harris Tweed Hebrides manufacture the finest range of traditional and contemporary cloth. To view our collection including garments, accessories and interiors visit us in store or on-line.

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