New York City. Was it back in 2004, when Thom Browne opened his men’s wear shop in the meatpacking district? Was it in 2005, when Michael Bastian left his job at Bergdorf Goodman to start his own label? Was it in February 2006, when Rag & Bone first showed its tailored clothing; or in March, when Tim Hamilton started his own line; or just last week, when Adam Lippes outgrew his Adam + Eve underwear line and showed a collection for the first time?

It may be hard to say when the moment came, but not that it has arrived — that is, when the words “American men’s fashion” could be uttered in the same sentence.

For almost 30 years, men’s style in the United States has been dominated by two ideals. There was Ralph Lauren, seductively recalling the glory days of WASPy privilege and old-school haberdashers. And there was Giorgio Armani, projecting a slickly tailored vision of cool for the Euro-conscious urbane. And never the twain did meet.

“Never,” said Tom Kalenderian, the vice president for men’s wear at Barneys New York. “When you came into Barneys, you either went to the American House or the International House. You would never have considering mixing the brand lists of the two departments. It would have been very confusing.”

But the lines have blurred in the last few seasons. In the wake of the astonishing rise of Thom Browne, whose men’s wear shows are as imaginative and mind-bending as anything seen on Paris runways (as if the artist Matthew Barney had been let loose in the Polo design studio), young designers have cropped up in New York who are creating a look that combines the arch stylishness of European labels with the comfort and class that made American style what it is.

In so doing, they are challenging two rules that have been hard to shake. One, that American men’s wear must be conservative and blandly preppy, as much of it has been for years. Two, that a fashion-conscious man will wear only men’s wear from Europe.

“I was that way for a long time,” said Gary Fischer, a human resources executive at a media agency in Manhattan who was for years a devotee of Prada and Gucci. “I felt like nothing was happening in America. Now it’s changed 100 percent with all these guys. Michael Bastian is like the men’s wear version of Ang Lee’s ‘Ice Storm.’ Everything reminds me of growing up in Rhode Island in the 1970s.”

Most refreshingly, none of the fellows in question — Mr. Bastian; Mr. Hamilton; Mr. Lippes; Marcus Wainwright and David Neville of Rag & Bone; Adam Kimmel; and Patrik Ervell — are trying to design like Europeans. Rather, they are taking the American men’s wear vocabulary and spinning it with a European sensibility. The results are classic clothes, but with a fashion-consciousness that focuses attention on luxurious fabrics and a slimmer cut (at Michael Bastian); an unexpected color palette and a weathered feel (at Tim Hamilton); an artsy silhouette and offbeat detailing (at Adam Kimmel).

This is not merely a New York-Los Angeles phenomenon, either. The lines are being sold across the country, and Mr. Bastian has signed up to design men’s wear for Bill Blass, just as Mr. Browne has designed a line for Brooks Brothers.

Still, the epicenter of the seismic shift would have to be the third floor of Bergdorf Goodman Men, where Thom Browne, Michael Bastian, Adam Kimmel and Adam Lippes are all sold. Tommy Fazio, the men’s fashion director, has cultivated these designers as fashion forces, as distinct from the sea of young men’s labels that focus on cool jeans and T-shirts.

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“They’re creating their own collections,” Mr. Fazio said. “They take that element of fashion and give it a sense of reality. They add a little nostalgia and put it together as a total package.”

“The European designers should really sit up and take notice,” he added. “A lot of our customers are Europeans, coming here to buy Jil Sander or Prada, and now they’re looking at these guys, who are making clothes that guys want to wear.”

Whether that means Mr. Bastian’s preppy-sophisticate sports-wear, Mr. Hamilton’s clean-cut bad-boy threads, Rag & Bone’s raffishly Anglophilic wear, the new American look is one that has been to Europe, bought the T-shirt and moved on.

THERE is a true American sensibility that is really cool,” Mr. Browne said. “And it’s nice to see that these guys are all mining it in their own ways. That hasn’t really been appreciated, I think, and that’s what is making this scene that much more interesting.”

Building almost unconsciously on the Man Friday ideal — that is, dressed up enough to go to work, but dressed down enough to go out after — these designers are creating clothes not out in the ether, but with both feet on the street.

“I do think this was started by premium denim, which elevated the level of acceptance for contemporary clothing,” said Mr. Wainwright of Rag & Bone. “People buying a pair of Rogan jeans for $300 gave us the ability to create the clothes we’re making now. I am not sure if in 2001 the American public would have bought a shirt for $250 that wasn’t made in Italy by someone with a foreign-sounding name.”

It seems they will now — or at least, the $250-shirt crowd will. What does it mean for European Union style? Stay tuned.

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Left, Michael Bastian double-breasted navy military coat, $2,495 at Jeffrey; pink cotton dress shirt, $345, and sleeveless navy wool vest, $510, at Saks Fifth Avenue; herringbone olive tweed pants, $520 at Bergdorf. Right, F.S.C. three-piece suit (jacket not shown), $2,600, cotton dress shirt, $158, and corduroy jacket, $298, at Freemans Sporting Club.

Left, Patrik Ervell hooded wool jacket, $500, and wool pants, $460, at Blessing; cotton dress shirt, $310, and wool toggle sweater, $425, at Opening Ceremony. Right, Adam Kimmel wool cardigan, $810, cotton dress shirt, $375, and wool pants, $585, at Jeffrey New York and Bergdorf.


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