

EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH

DREAM WEAVER

TJ Brown, a master craftsman at Savoir Beds, takes a good night's rest to a new level.

BY TARAJIA MORRELL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JULIA GRASSI

YOU GOTTA GO by the grain," a Jamaican tailor once told TJ Brown, who at 17 had just sewn himself a pair of pants and didn't understand why the new trousers weren't hanging properly. This basic advice would prove seminal for Brown, now 71, whose career trajectory has been anything but traditional.

Born in 1945 in Clarendon, Jamaica, to a cobbler and a housewife, Brown listened to early ska and reggae music and moved to the U.K. when he was 19. An avid piano and organ player, he eventually played keyboard for reggae legend Desmond Dekker on the U.K. leg of his world tour in the late '60s and toured with various bands in the '80s before going solo. Over the years, he also worked as a DJ and designed clothing on the side.

In 2000, after moving away from the music industry, Brown, who was working as a tailor in Ascot, England, saw an ad for a job making bespoke beds at the Savoir Beds atelier in Shepherd's Bush, London. "I love nice things, expensive things," Brown says, explaining his attraction to Savoir—its beds range from \$10,000 to \$350,000, and the company counts Oprah Winfrey, Clive Owen and Emma Thompson as fans. "I'll be an asset to your company," Brown told Savoir owner Alistair Hughes. "He rung me up the next day and said, 'When would you like to start?'"

Recognizing his new hire's adeptness at sewing patterns, Hughes quickly moved Brown through all the phases of Savoir bed making, from binding the springs to base building to creating the top pad of hand-teased South American horsetail. "TJ's



SAVOIR FAIRE
Artisan TJ Brown at Savoir Beds' London atelier. Below: Each bed takes nine to 11 weeks to complete; the top pads are often made of South American horsetail.

keyboard skills come in handy when he's setting down the horsehair layer," Hughes says.

"It's very important that it's completely even, because otherwise you would feel it when you lie on the mattress," Brown explains. "It's what people pay for: It's a human sensitivity component. A machine couldn't do that."

Every bed, which takes nine to 11 weeks to build from scratch in Savoir's London or Wales ateliers, is constructed to the exact specifications of its owner by master craftsmen such as Brown, who has made approximately 900 beds over the past 16 years.

Dressed in a faded vintage Calvin Klein denim shirt with a silk-ribbon bow tie, custom leather waistcoat, two silver-tipped belts, a pin-embellished canvas cowboy hat, knee-high leather boots and worn-in Levi's, Brown (who describes his look as "crazy in a good way") is as focused on the details of his

clothing as he is on the intricacies of the beds he makes. Brown and his fellow craftsmen adhere to a process developed by esteemed London upholsterer James Edward Ltd. in 1905. The company designed beds exclusively for the Savoy Hotel, which has counted Giacomo Puccini, Sir Winston Churchill and Marilyn Monroe among its guests.

Artisans know whose bed they are building (making one for Elton John was particularly satisfying for Brown) and proudly sign their initials into each completed mattress. Hughes encourages his employees to sleep on Savoir beds, which they build for themselves using excess materials. ("I sleep with the angels," Brown says.)

When asked whom he'd most like to build a Savoir bed for, Brown doesn't miss a beat: "I'd really love to make a bed for Barack Obama. He deserves a good night's sleep."

