

WORLD FOOTWEAR®

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THE MAGAZINE FOR THE INDUSTRY



Suede, the special one

Advances in adhesive
Next-generation materials
Warholm is one to watch



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In celebration of suede's special status as the material of choice for the ever-popular retro running shoes, José Mourinho features on the front cover of this issue. The famous football coach is sporting adidas Samba shoes from a collection the brand has launched in collaboration with Canadian design studio JJJJound.

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Global news

France German sports brand Puma is nurturing its ties to France with the launch of a capsule collection entirely made in that country. The purple-themed range includes hoodies, T-shirts, cargo shorts and Puma's popular Clyde shoes. This is the second such collection, which the company says is driven by a desire to support the local industry and emphasise its attachment to fashion and innovation. The campaign was led by footballer Thierry Henry and Olympic sprinter Wided Attatou.

UK The Outdoor Show, which bills itself as the industry's only exhibition in the UK, was held in Liverpool in June. More than 130 brands travelled to the Liverpool Exhibition Centre on the city's waterfront to showcase footwear, clothing, backpacks, tents, walking poles and other equipment for sports and outdoor activities of all kinds.

Spain Footwear fair Futurmoda will hold its 52nd edition in October in Elche. Notable features will include a refreshed visual identity and the return of the Green Planet area, promoting eco-friendly practices. The most recent edition of the event in March attracted more than 5,000 visitors and 230 exhibitors, with 30% participation from companies outside Spain.

Germany Swiss company Arklyz AG has completed its acquisition of Lloyd Shoes GmbH, a premium German footwear brand with over a century of history. The move is part of Arklyz's strategy to diversify its portfolio and enhance its presence in the global sports and lifestyle market. Lloyd will continue to operate under its established brand and its headquarters will remain in Sulingen, Germany.

Italy Italy's footwear sector experienced what national industry association Assocalzaturifici has called a sharp slowdown in sales in the first quarter of 2024. In a new report, Assocalzaturifici said its member companies had reported a decline in export revenues of 9.7%, with export volumes falling by 10.3% compared to the same quarter in 2023. Italian footwear producers earned almost €3.2 billion from exports in the first quarter of this year, shipping 51.9 million pairs overseas.

Nigeria Comfort Stevens Industries, a local footwear company, plans to establish a factory in Abia with a capacity of 15,000 pairs per day. The initiative aims to boost local production, create jobs, and reduce poverty and will involve partners from the US, Brazil and China. The company aspires to become Africa's leading indigenous footwear manufacturer. The government has pledged support, including training for local shoemakers and improving the transportation infrastructure.

Yemen Global sea-freight service provider AP Moller-Maersk has said the tensions and violence in the Red Sea are still "creating challenges for supply chains". There has been widespread disruption to container shipping in the region since the Houthi movement began to attack ships off Yemen's Red Sea coast in late 2023, forcing vessels to take longer routes around the Cape of Good Hope when sailing between Asia and Europe.

Pakistan Pakistan's footwear manufacturing sector is set to receive substantial investment from China. A delegation from the Association of Guangdong Shoe Manufacturers visited Pakistan in June, visiting factories and holding meetings with local footwear industry leaders and officials. The association will invest an initial \$7 million in shoe companies in Pakistan. In a second phase, it will invest a further \$70 million for new technology for shoe design and construction.

Colombia Thirty-four Brazilian footwear companies signed up to take part in a trade mission to Colombia at the end of June. Brazilian footwear companies have been travelling on trade missions to Colombia since 2018, but the group that went this time was the biggest ever. Shoe brand representatives took part in a preliminary seminar to learn more about the local market. Participants then travelled to Bogotá to talk to Colombian media and then, in a series of matchmaking meetings, presented their collections to buyers and retailers.

Puerto Rico Adidas has worked with rap star Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio, who performs as Bad Bunny, to design a new version of the Gazelle shoe for its Originals collection. As a tribute to Bad Bunny's place of birth, Puerto Rico, the new shoe is called the Gazelle San Juan. Reflecting the blue cobblestones that are visible in some streets in the old city of San Juan, the shoes use blue materials across the upper, including a blue suede toecap and heelcap.

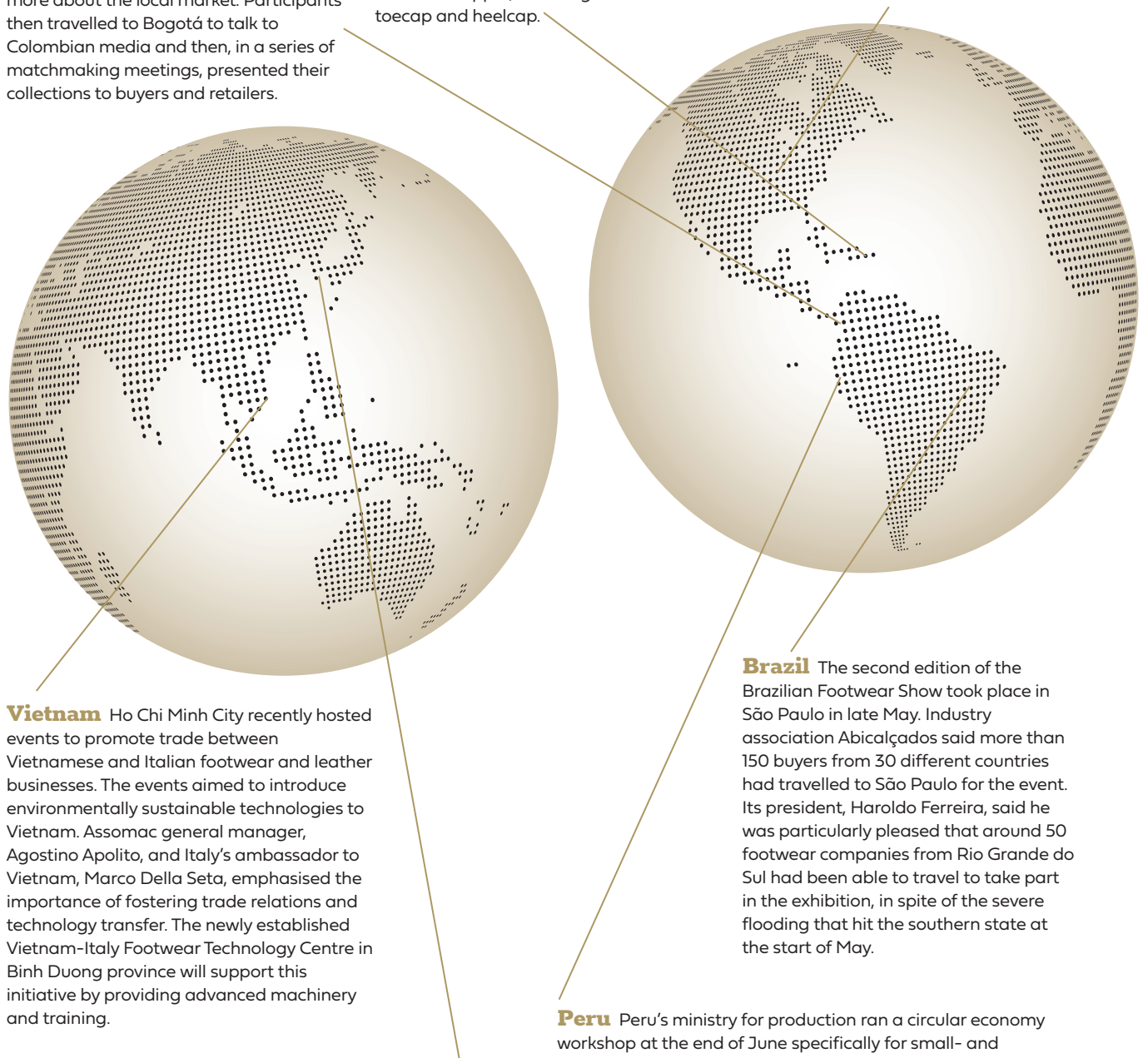
US Sports shoe and apparel group New Balance officially launched its first footwear for American football at the end of June. The company presented its first two models for the sport, Prodigy and Fortress, in Detroit in April at the National Football League's annual player selection meeting. It made these models available for sale in limited-edition colours at the end of June and then launched additional colours in mid-July.

Vietnam Ho Chi Minh City recently hosted events to promote trade between Vietnamese and Italian footwear and leather businesses. The events aimed to introduce environmentally sustainable technologies to Vietnam. Assomac general manager, Agostino Apolito, and Italy's ambassador to Vietnam, Marco Della Seta, emphasised the importance of fostering trade relations and technology transfer. The newly established Vietnam-Italy Footwear Technology Centre in Binh Duong province will support this initiative by providing advanced machinery and training.

South Korea A total of 55 Italian footwear, leathersgoods and garment brands travelled to Korea in early July to take part in the Italian Fashion Days event in Seoul. Brands displayed collections for spring-summer 2025 at the event. President of Italian footwear industry association Assocalzaturifici, Giovanna Ceolini, said South Korea was the twelfth biggest export market for high-end Italian footwear exports. Italian companies exported more than 360,000 pairs of shoes and boots to the country in the first quarter of this year, bringing in revenues of €68.6 million.

Peru Peru's ministry for production ran a circular economy workshop at the end of June specifically for small- and medium-sized manufacturers. The ministry reached out to companies in the footwear and leather manufacturing industries to invite them to take part. It has linked learning about the circular economy to a national procurement programme. The programme, Compras A MyPerú, aims to promote the inclusion of SME manufacturers of materials and finished products in government procurement programmes.

Brazil The second edition of the Brazilian Footwear Show took place in São Paulo in late May. Industry association Abicalçados said more than 150 buyers from 30 different countries had travelled to São Paulo for the event. Its president, Haroldo Ferreira, said he was particularly pleased that around 50 footwear companies from Rio Grande do Sul had been able to travel to take part in the exhibition, in spite of the severe flooding that hit the southern state at the start of May.





Footprints



Stan Smith shoe comes to cycling

Sports group adidas has launched yet another version of its perennially popular Stan Smith shoes. The new shoe, the VeloStan Smith is "reimagined for city cyclists and commuters", the group says.

It says the shoe retains "the unmistakable silhouette of the original Stan Smith", while incorporating a two-bolt SPD-cleat system for clipless pedal cycling. The shoe also has a rigid nylon plate embedded into a synthetic sole, which has been adapted to cover the front two-thirds of the sole, providing stiffness for efficiency of movement while cycling, and flexibility and comfort when walking.

The shoe uses a soft, full-grain leather for durability, while the familiar green foam heel and perforated three stripes bring through the signature accents of the original silhouette. In honour of this special edition, the tongue has been embossed with a golden portrait of Stan Smith on a racing bike.

Adidas began working with **Stan Smith** in 1978 and, in the 46 years that have followed, it said the collection had "reimagined what a sport shoe can be".

"It has been a joy to watch adidas evolve and reimagine the shoe," the 77-year-old former tennis star said. "As someone who loves the adventure cycling offers, it is exciting to see how these small but mighty additions can continue the silhouette's sporting legacy."

He said that, by bringing Stan Smith to cycling, he hoped to encourage more people to "find freedom through the bicycle". ■

Berlin Fashion Week speaker slot

The executive chairman of tanning group ISA Next-Gen Materials, **Tom Schneider**, took part in a high-level event during Berlin Fashion Week at the start of July. He was one of the speakers at the eighth edition of the Berlin Fashion Summit, which had regenerative fashion as its main theme.

Mr Schneider spoke about the carbon impact and consequences of brands replacing leather with synthetic alternatives and also shared his insight on the commitment and resilience required to develop new regenerative materials as alternatives to plastic.

Hall of fame

The founder of insole materials developer OrthoLite, **Glenn Barrett**, has been inducted into the US National Sporting Goods Association hall of fame. NSGA said it made the decision as a result of the impact that OrthoLite's open-cell foam insole solutions have had on footwear. OrthoLite said Glenn Barrett had "revolutionised the footwear segment of the sporting goods industry from the inside out".

New BFA chief

Richard Shetliffe has been named the new chief executive of the British Footwear Association (BFA). With over 30 years of experience in the footwear industry, including leadership roles at prominent brands including Dr. Martens, VF Corporation and Havaianas, Mr Shetliffe brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to the position. **Jane Wilson**, chair of the BFA, praised the new CEO's appointment, citing his experience and track record of success.

Permanent move

The World Federation of the Sporting Goods Industry (WFSGI) has made **Emma Zwiebler's** appointment as its chief executive permanent. She took up the role on an interim basis in November 2023. A former sports lawyer and international badminton player for Scotland, Ms Zwiebler joined the WFSGI six years ago as its vice-president for strategic and external affairs.

DTC appointment

Sports brand Puma has appointed **Erik Janshen** to lead its direct-to-consumer (DTC) business. This includes the company's stores worldwide, its own e-commerce site and several other online marketplaces. Mr Janshen has previously held similar positions at Tommy Hilfiger and Calvin Klein. Puma said that improving the quality of its distribution is one of its strategic priorities.

Materials that ISA has developed include HyphaLite, which is 100% biobased, crafted from natural latex and regenerated cellulose fibres. Footwear brands including Puma, Saucony and Camper have used the material in recent collections. ■

Awards event

The Worshipful Company of Cordwainers announced the winners of its 2024 Cordwainers Footwear Awards at an event in London in June. The ceremony featured 16 student finalists from the London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London, and De Montfort University, all vying for the prestigious Cordwainers Footwear Award Trophy.

The 2024 judging panel comprised notable figures, including **Joachim Sedelmeier**, head of shoe design at Paul Smith, **Charlotte Olympia Dellal**, international footwear designer, **Katie Greenyer**, creative director at Pentland Brands, and **Joanne Jørgensen**, former footwear design director at Nike's London design studio.

The first prize was awarded to **George Nikiforakis**, with the second prize going to **Ethan Robinson**, both from the London College of Fashion. The Sue Saunders Award for Excellence, which honours outstanding contributions to the footwear trade, was presented to international footwear designer **Sophia Webster**. ■

French shoe brands should learn from Italy, entrepreneur says

Paris-based footwear entrepreneur **Philippe Zorzetto** has said only 1% of the shoes and boots that consumers in France buy are locally made now.

He said there had been a time when French shoe factories, operated by brands including Clergerie, Charles Jourdan and Stéphane Kelian, had led the global footwear industry. "Then our country began to dream of a factory-free economy and sold its manufacturing to Asia."

He said he was committed to continue manufacturing in France the shoe collections of his own-name brand, which he set up in 2008. In addition, he said he believed there can be a wider footwear revival there, especially if French companies set out to emulate their neighbours in Italy, who, he said, had succeeded in preserving their high-end footwear manufacturing sector.

He added: "It's more important than ever for us to preserve our creativity and our savoir-faire. We have to offer consumers high-quality products that are imbued with beautiful values and bring benefits to all." ■

Veja appoints new sales director for Europe

Footwear brand Veja has named **Anthony Bunn** as the sales director for Europe, the Middle East, and Africa (EMEA).

Mr Bunn's career started in 1994 as a sales manager at Timberland. He has worked for several notable companies including Ferrero, L'Amy Group, Quiksilver, VF Corp, and Royer. Since 2020, he has been an independent consultant. He takes over the position from **Artaud Frenoy**, who is now the sales director for Asia.

Veja, established in 2005, manufactures shoes in Brazil and Portugal and operates eight stores in France, Germany, the US and Spain. The brand is present in nearly 3,000 retail outlets worldwide. ■

Marketing move

Saucony, a subsidiary of Wolverine Worldwide, has named **Joy Allen-Altimare** as its new global chief marketing officer. In her role, she will lead global branding initiatives, including brand positioning, direct-to-consumer strategies, digital marketing, advertising, and international growth.

Ms Allen-Altimare will report directly to **Rob Griffiths**, Saucony's global brand president, and will join the senior leadership team. ■

Senior cuts

According to local media, Nike recently announced lay-offs affecting 732 senior positions, including 32 vice-presidents, 112 senior directors, and 174 directors. These senior roles represent more than 40% of the total jobs cut. In April, Nike laid off approximately 740 at its global headquarters in Oregon.

Repair relived

Co-founders of specialist repairs service provider The Restory, **Vanessa Jacobs** and **Emily Rea**, have launched a new software company that will operate in the same arena, calling it Circulo. Ms Jacobs and Ms Rea are now using their "battle-tested" knowledge and experience to launch Circulo, with software development specialist Karm Khanna, and a former colleague at The Restory, **Vipaasha Sheel**.

A new world

Luxury brand Loewe has launched a new collection of athletic clothing and footwear in partnership with On. The collection includes a new version of the Swiss brand's Cloudtilt shoes. Loewe's creative director, **Jonathan Anderson**, said working with On had allowed him to try "something new and unexpected", resulting in what he called "a modern fusion of functionality and aesthetics". He said he regarded himself as a big fan of On and that its concept of design had "opened the door to a new world" for him.

Central role

Puma has appointed **Bas van den Bemt** as its managing director for Central Europe, replacing **Nina Graf-Vlachy**, who will pursue opportunities outside of the company. He has been with Puma since 2009 in various management and sales positions. He oversaw the Benelux business for more than eight years and most recently worked as the managing director of Puma UK and Ireland. **Lucynda Davies** will take over in that market. ■



Industry & Innovation



CREDIT: NIKE

Wearable tech boosts warm-up and recovery

Sportswear brand Nike and Hyperice, a manufacturer of compression and recovery products, have jointly produced boots and a vest to help wearers warm up and cool down.

The Nike x Hyperice boot offers heat and air-compression massage for feet and ankles. The shoe contains a system of dual-air Normatec bladders bonded to warming elements that evenly distribute heat throughout the upper. This is designed to drive heat deep into the muscle and tissue, helping athletes move, perform and recover much faster.

Tobie Hatfield, senior director at Nike Athlete Innovation, said: "Recovery is an important part of any athlete's journey, but we're hearing from athletes that this concept of 'pre-recovery' is equally important. The footwear and vest that we've developed with Hyperice help get the body ready for activity." ■

European expansion

Insole materials developer OrthoLite is expanding its European operations to reinforce its vertical integration strategy.

Further expansion of its Almansa facility in Spain will increase capacity, innovation, and local production solutions for European brand partners, the company said. Investment in new technologies will support manufacturing advancements, operational efficiencies, and capacity growth. The factory will adopt lean-line production, automation and continuous modernisation to meet rising demand.

Since 2021, OrthoLite has quadrupled production capacity at the Almansa facility. The facility serves various footwear sectors with insoles and technical products, including leather and textile lamination, moulded insoles, and the unique OrthoLite O-Therm technology. ■

Version five of Ultraboost offers more

Sports group adidas has launched a new version of the Ultraboost shoe. This is the fifth iteration of the shoe, which it introduced in 2015.

For version five, it said it had redesigned the shoe "from the ground up" and had developed a new midsole construction with an extra 9 millimetres of foam that will offer runners a higher energy-return than any previous version of the style. ■

Digital efficiency

Specialist developer of moisture management materials for footwear Faytex has joined Weev, a platform that connects brands with suppliers on a shared platform. The aim of this partnership is to make the footwear and finished goods creation process faster, more transparent, and sustainable. Sales manager, Katie Stangl said: "The landscape of our industry is changing, and while we are still a 'touch and feel' business, we believe that initial product views can be done digitally for efficiency."

On a plate

Spanish sports brand Joma has launched new trail-running shoes called TR-6000. These are the company's first trail-running shoes with carbon-plate technology. Other technology incorporated into the shoes includes proprietary energy-return material called Fly Reactive in the midsole. Runners including Inés Astrain, Víctor del Águila and Gemma Arenas worked with Joma on the development of the shoes.

Virtual footwear try-on

AI technology company ZERO10 has unveiled a new virtual try-on feature for footwear. The technology uses a mirror camera to capture images of users' feet and then overlays virtual 3D shoes onto the image. Features include a 'pants over shoes' option allowing virtual shoes to be placed under real pants, making the experience even more realistic, according to the company.

Ten times TPU approval

Chemicals group Huntsman has secured Bluesign approval for ten of its Irogran thermoplastic polyurethane (TPU) products. Huntsman said that Bluesign approval for its ten products indicates that it has used "sound environmental practices" to prepare them and that the products meet Bluesign's ecological and toxicological requirements.

Spray-on uppers are revolutionary, On claims

Sportswear brand On has introduced a footwear upper technology that sprays on a recyclable material in a single step using a robotic arm, in a novel process the Swiss brand claims is "revolutionary".

LightSpray has been developed at On's labs in Zurich and will make its first appearance in the Cloudbloom Strike LS (LightSpray) high-performance running shoe.

The fully automated process reduces waste and produces an upper with 75% fewer carbon emissions than On's other racing shoes, offering the potential to make shoes closer to the customer. A patent-pending thermal fusing technology allows LightSpray uppers to bond to the midsole without the need for glue, and the ultra-thin and seamless design eliminates the need for laces. ■

Wood waste into uppers

The founder of a start-up that uses a cellulose-based slurry to create footwear uppers has said she has patented a way to make natural fibres cost-competitive with synthetic fibres by simplifying the manufacturing system.

Simplifyber's founder, Maria Intscher-Owring, worked as a high-end fashion designer for more than 20 years, but left to "shake up the system".

She told *World Footwear*: "I wanted to find a way to make natural fibres cost-competitive, so this system shortens the supply chain so that it's more efficient and more automated, and that cuts the cost of the manufacturing."

"We use the materials when they're at the beginning of the supply chain, so they're the cheapest they'll be. That combination makes our unit economics work better than plastic when you hit the thousands of products. Even taking into account the cost of moulds and tooling, it becomes cheaper. I really think that's the only way we're going to change the industry."

Simplifyber's slurry is predominantly composed of wood fibres and wood pulp – from certified forests or waste paper – but other inputs can include waste wool, agricultural waste and hemp. ■

Decathlon launches 'start-up studio'

Sports group Decathlon has set up an investment arm, Decathlon Pulse, to identify and support next-gen technologies and business models that have the potential to drive long-term growth. Franck Vigo, who has been leading the company's new business initiatives since 2019, was named head of the new entity this July.

The new division has been given a three-fold mission: to develop new ideas and concepts that can become independent entities within the group; to invest in high potential start-ups working on innovative and sustainable business models for the sports industry; and to acquire forward-thinking equipment suppliers, brands and retailers.

The group says that since 2018, it has already invested close to €400 million in various start-ups and SMEs. ■

Campaign aims to push consumers towards repair services

Alliance France Cuir recently began an online campaign to help consumers learn how best to look after leather shoes and accessories, and to learn more about the services available from repair shops.

It worked with bodies representing shoe repair services providers across France to put the new campaign together. Alliance France Cuir said information from a consumer attitude survey it carried out last year made it confident the campaign on reparability would strike a chord with consumers.

In the survey, 86% of respondents said they already knew that shoes and other finished products made from leather have high levels of reparability. However, 48% of consumers said they never take their shoes to a cobbler to be repaired. ■

At the core

Developer of soling technology for sports and outdoor footwear Cobo has launched a new collection called Tresezero (360). It said the collection had a dual thermoplastic polyurethane (TPU) outsole "at the core of its innovation". A first layer of double-injection TPU provides the product with structure and stability, while another layer of low-density TPU as a filler offers lightness and comfort, Cobo explained. It added that it could also make Tresezero outsoles using recycled TPU.

Slow sales

The main representative body of Italy's tanning and footwear machinery manufacturers, Assomac, has reported a fall in revenues for 2023 of 4.6% compared to the year before for exports of machinery for making footwear. This was in spite of a good performance in the Americas and Oceania, it said. It also warned that 2024 had started poorly, with exports falling by more than 20% in value in the first two months of the year.

Athlete insight

Performance foam manufacturer Dahsheng Chemical (DSC) has launched its own athlete engagement programme, aiming, it has said, to increase its understanding of athletes' footwear needs. "By collaborating closely with athletes, we gain invaluable insights that empower us and our brand partners, to develop cutting-edge foam materials that set new industry standards for performance and comfort," said Dahsheng Chemical's chief executive, Johnson Chang.

Crucial market

Sports group Puma has opened a new distribution centre in Arizona. It said the new facility would support growth "in the crucial US market". It said this was one of the company's strategic priorities. The new warehouse, located in the town of Waddell, around 40 kilometres from Phoenix, covers an area of around 110,000 square-metres. It will use the distribution centre to process orders from wholesale partners and for orders for products from its golf subsidiary, Cobra. ■



Backtrack

25 July 2024

Allbirds strengthens design team with outdoor heavyweights

24 July 2024

State to boost Calcutta Leather Complex

23 July 2024

Basketball deal for New Balance

22 July 2024

H1 results bring Stella pledge to increase capacity in Bangladesh

19 July 2024

Better second quarter than expected for adidas

Growth and distribution celebrated in the French leather industry

17 July 2024

Skechers files lawsuit against L L Bean

16 July 2024

Asics boosts forecast after strong results

12 July 2024

Yue Yuen impresses at investor awards

11 July 2024

Seal of approval for OrthoLite products

10 July 2024

Puma launches premium leather Mostro

09 July 2024

Positive first half appears likely for Anta Sports

03 July 2024

Teva introduces trail running sandal

02 July 2024

Ferragamo recognised for global sustainability

28 June 2024

Flat revenues but still a \$51bn year for Nike

27 June 2024

Elvis's iconic shoes at auction

26 June 2024

Zellerfeld unveils rapid sneaker platform
Summer mountain project secures Scarpa sponsorship

World Footwear's publishing cycle and limitations on space make it impossible for us to run more than a carefully selected sample of news from across the industry. However, we publish hundreds more stories on www.footwearbiz.com. The site is updated every day with news from every continent and every part of the industry, making footwearbiz.com one of the most comprehensive archives of news anywhere on the web for the global footwear industry.

We list below just a few of the headlines that have appeared on the site in recent weeks — www.footwearbiz.com allows you to read the news items you may have missed.

24 June 2024

New York fashion brand co-designs New Balance boot

Bangladesh footwear exports see shift

21 June 2024

Rubber boots show up well at Paris Fashion Week

Deadstock collection introduced by Grenson

20 June 2024

Job losses expected at Clarks

18 June 2024

Vietnam demand drives US wet blue export growth

17 June 2024

Expo Riva Schuh celebrates 101st edition
EU court rejects Nike's trademark

14 June 2024

Portugal - Footwear industry invests boldly

13 June 2024

New majority stakeholder for Dr Martens
Primary data helps Equip improve its carbon footprint calculations

12 June 2024

IPO will give valuation of around €1.75 billion for Golden Goose

11 June 2024

Running solutions launched by Coats Footwear

10 June 2024

Carbon fibre certification for Teijin Europe
Ortholite joins The Conservation Alliance

07 June 2024

Future Fabrics to debut Footwear Innovation Hub

06 June 2024

Champion brand sold for \$1.2 billion
Dolomites mountain guides choose Aku

05 June 2024

Retailer designer Brands in optimistic mood

04 June 2024

Millet ushers in local and high-tech made trail running shoe

03 June 2024

'Fresh assortments' give Foot Locker confidence

31 May 2024

Capri pledges to complete Tapestry deal as revenues decline
Birkenstock lifts forecast amid strong demand

30 May 2024

ISPO Award for next-generation version of Keen sandal

29 May 2024

EU approves new Ecodesign Rules
Vietnam tannery will begin production this year, Sadesa says

28 May 2024

On trots out new Cyclon references
Consumers in France are prepared to pay for good shoes

24 May 2024

Turnaround required at Vans as VF revenues fall by 10%

23 May 2024

Insite Performance hires innovation director



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A special type of adhesive that ASICS has developed in house bonds together the materials that make up the Nimbus Mirai, but only until the shoes reach end of life.
CREDIT: ASICS



A solution for a sticky problem

The push towards circularity involves almost all brands, all products and all materials, but each faces its own specific challenges. One that applies to footwear more than to apparel, for example, is the extensive use of adhesive in shoe construction. For recyclers, this complicates the necessary separation of materials at end of life.

As part of a recent Black Friday campaign, sustainability-focused shoe brand Vivobarefoot said that 90% of the footwear produced each year worldwide will end up in landfill, much of it within 12 months of being purchased. This means consumers are discarding billions of pairs each year, with the complex material mix in many of the products contributing to lengthy biodegradability times.

Advances in adhesive technology are opening up new possibilities for recycling athletic shoes.

Sports shoes in particular often have a complex mix of fibres and fabrics in their composition, taking into account uppers, midsole, outer soles and other components. As well as making these products difficult to recycle, the diverse materials can be difficult to bond in the first place. Adhesives manufacturers such as Henkel insist that flexible adhesives are often the best option for shoe

manufacturing because of their high workability and high productivity. But Henkel admits that this comes at a price. "The environmental concerns about the adhesives used by sports and running shoe manufacturers have also become more complex and acute," the company says. Its portfolio for shoes includes polyurethane hot melt and quick-drying cyanoacrylate adhesives.

First tasks

The ability of these adhesives to bond layers of rubber, polyester, thermoplastic polyurethane, ethylene-vinyl acetate and other materials to one another is what makes footwear hard work for recycling specialists, for whom separating out the different fibres in any product is always one of the first tasks.

Attempts at circumventing this hurdle have led creative companies like Clarks, with its Origin collection in 2021, and Nike, with the ISPA Link Axis launch in 2023, to create glue-free shoes, with recyclability and circularity in mind.

Glue-free shoes

Origin shoes were made for easy disassembly at end of life. Five pieces made up each shoe, with recycled content in the sole and the laces. Other pro-recycling components were mono-material nylon thread for the stitching. Clarks acknowledged from the outset that the inclusion of glue in shoe construction is what makes footwear difficult to recycle and said this was why it made the Origin collection glue-free. Clarks has confirmed to *World Footwear* that this collection is no longer commercially available.

Nike's more recent ISPA Link Axis collection is still available at the time of writing. In the sports brand's announcements about the Link Axis, it emphasised the shoe's recyclability. It said: "A good shoe is flexible and durable. Designers use glue and other bonding elements to achieve these aims, but that makes a shoe nearly impossible to disassemble and recycle. Every part of the Link Axis can be recycled. The design uses interlocking components, as few materials as possible and zero-glue."

Stuck in reverse

These examples are the exception rather than the rule. Almost all shoes do still have glue, but in spite of this there are other avenues along which the footwear industry can move towards circularity. If glue is going to continue to be an important part of the construction of most footwear, it is a good thing that innovative people are now working hard to improve adhesive technology to make it more recycling-friendly. One clever idea that has come to light in 2024

Nike made its 2023 ISPA Link Axis collection using interlocking components, as few materials as possible and zero-glue.

CREDIT: NIKE



Shoes are notoriously hard to recycle. Glue gets a lot of the blame. Clarks made an early attempt to create something more circular with its glue-free Origin shoe in 2021.

CREDIT: CLARKS

is that of so-called reversible glues, adhesives that bond effectively for as long as a product is in use, and then stop working when you want them to. In this way, the separation of the fibres and fabrics in a shoe will become much easier.

Earlier this year, Dr Barny Greenland, an academic at the University of Sussex with a specialist interest in developing responsive polymeric and supramolecular materials, spoke to the BBC about adhesives that debond on demand. He describes the ideal outcome as a glue that will work well for as long as we want it to, but stop working "at the flick of a switch".



“A magnetic field will pass through the object and interact only with the glue; you can heat up the glue and de-bond your object.”

DR BARNY GREENLAND, UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX.

He explains that the concept is all around us, as anyone who has had to remove old wallpaper from the wall of a room in their house will readily recognise. Paste that has kept the paper attached to the wall for decades will unstick quite easily if you apply the right amount of heat and the right amount of moisture, Dr Greenland explains. Moving from interior decoration back to shoes, though, generating the right amounts of heat and moisture to glue can be problematic, not least because shoes bonded with adhesives that respond in this way could function poorly in a hot and humid climate. Athletic footwear is a global market, after all.

Control mechanism

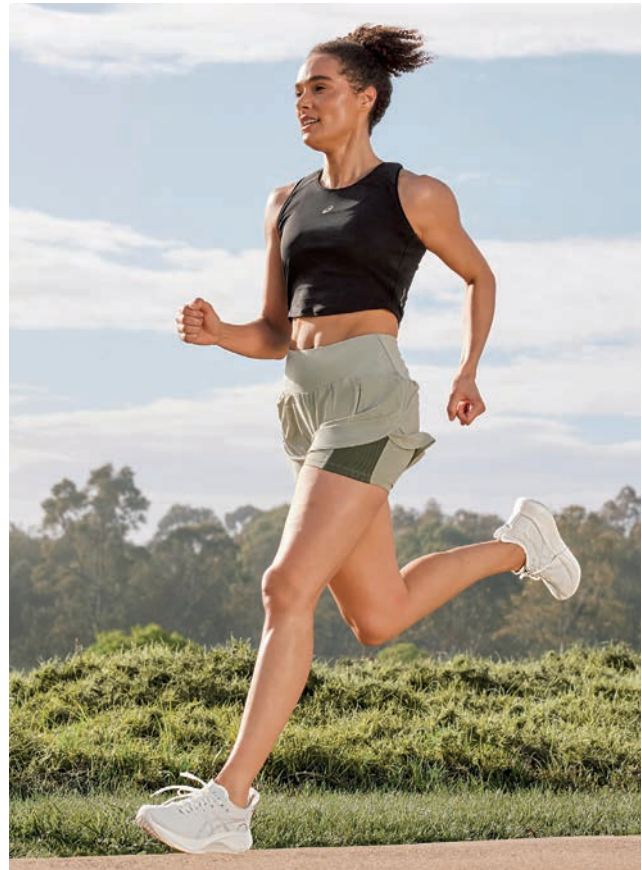
This has led Dr Greenland and his team to search for “more controlled” ways to achieve the reversibility of adhesives. An early idea that the University of Sussex team investigated was a glue that “responds to a specific chemical”. A shoe with a leather upper and a rubber sole is one of the applications the academic mentions in connection with this. At end of life, you can immerse the shoe in a liquid containing the specific chemical. “The glue will break down and you will be able to recycle the leather in one stream and the sole of the shoe in another,” he says.

There are practical challenges with this, though. How big would the tank need to be to treat a whole batch of discarded shoes? What effect might the chemicals have on the materials you are trying to reclaim for reuse?

Inspired, curiously, by kitchen appliances, the team has come up with an idea that offers a much more controlled way of triggering an end to the glue’s stickiness while avoiding any degradation of potentially important recycled raw materials. An induction hob will put heat directly into the base of a metal saucepan, while the hob itself stays cool. “We thought we might be able to use this idea as a way of transferring energy into glue,” says Dr Greenland. “This means heating up the glue, but not the materials surrounding it. The way that you can do this is by adding very small particles of iron or iron oxide into your glue and then sticking the surfaces together. You will later be able to unstick objects, even when you cannot get to the surface with the glue. A magnetic field will pass through the object and interact only with the glue. You can heat up the glue and de-bond your object.” He says this principle is not dependent on special new glues; any thermo-responsive adhesive will work in the same way.

Ready to be remade

By coincidence, in the same week in which the BBC broadcast these comments from Barny Greenland, athletic footwear brand ASICS, on the other side of



ASICS has made the Nimbus Mirai shoes for runners to use extensively and then send back for deconstruction and recycling. CREDIT: ASICS

the world, announced the Nimbus Mirai. The Japanese company described its new product as the most advanced shoe it has ever made. It wants runners to buy the shoes, use them extensively and then return them to the company at end of life so that the materials in their construction can be made into new products. Therefore, even at end of life, the product will have a future; the name Mirai means ‘future’ in Japanese.

Its construction comprises a uniform polyester material and the upper has no overlays. Unlike in the Clarks and Nike examples, glue comes into this story, too. ASICS has used “a special type of adhesive”, created in-house, to provide durable bonds while the shoe is in use. But this adhesive is reversible, so it also makes the upper easily detachable from the sole during recycling processes. The whole of the upper will go through recycling, ASICS has confirmed, and be retrieved as a new polyester material, “ready to be remade to run again”.

Designing for circularity means knowing, before you make anything, how it can be unmade and remade at end of life. Reversible glues are on course to be an important part of designing shoes and other products for the circular economy, Dr Greenland insists, because they will make it much easier for brands to build collections that are easy to take apart again when the time is right. ■



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A cure for the PFAS problem

Textile finishing specialist (GTT) is taking its PFAS- and water-free Empel textile finishing platform into footwear.

Developer of water repellency solutions Green Theme Technologies (GTT) has said interest is growing in its Empel platform. Its process is free from per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and does not use water. Instead, it applies the chemicals that help keep materials dry directly onto fibres and uses thermal curing to create a molecular covalent bond between the polymers and the fibres in fabrics. When exposed to heat, molecular bonding and polymerisation occurs, creating long-lasting protection from moisture. Garment brands have already brought Empel-enabled jackets to market, but GTT has told us that the keenest interest it is experiencing at the moment is from footwear brands.

Years of hard work and deep thinking have gone into the technology, prompted by the PFAS debates of 2012. That was the year in which campaign group Greenpeace published a report called 'Chemistry for any weather', in which it criticised the ongoing use of PFAS by outdoor brands. Clothing companies soon began to impose restrictions on these traditional durable water repellency (DWR) finishes, based on C8 chemistry. These have chains of eight fluorinated carbon atoms. When the search for alternatives began in earnest, there was much talk about shorter-chain C6-based solutions. The message was that these were more sustainable owing to a faster breakdown in the environment of potentially harmful by-products.

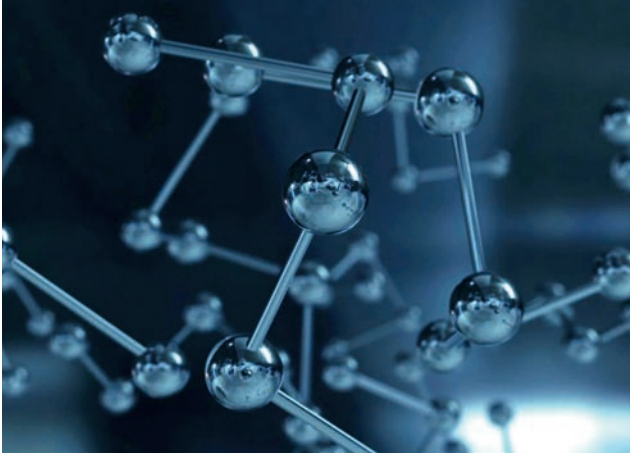
For example, chemicals group Clariant announced in that same year, 2012, that it was investing €8 million in an expansion of production of C6-based fluorochemicals at its Gendorf plant in Germany to help its textile customers "make the switch" from C8.

Bonds that don't break

"The information on C6 was incorrect," says the president of business development at GTT, Martin Flora, now. "C6 is no better because it still has carbon and fluorine at its core. Fluorine forms the strongest bonds of any element in the periodic table. If fluorine bonds with carbon, it won't unbind for thousands of years. That's why these chemicals don't break down."



CREDIT: SHUTTERSTOCK



GTT's technology has at its core polymer chains that can encapsulate each fibre in the fabric of a shoe upper or garment.

CREDIT: GTT

Other options that have come to market subsequently include non-fluorinated CO solutions, but these present challenges, too. CO is a bad name, Mr Flora argues. It has zero fluorine attached, but it still has carbon at the foundation of the polymer chains. These technologies are water-based. And if water-based solutions wash in, they will also wash out. He adds: "The whole of the textile industry is based on the use of water as a solvent for applying chemistry to non-water-soluble fibres. All synthetic fibres are essentially hydrophobic by nature. They can absorb some water, but not enough for a complete covering. It's like putting a band-aid on a big wound."

Wider discussion

This is the context in which GTT started its bid to offer a better alternative. Work began in 2016 to introduce the market to the technology that founder, Dr Gary Selwyn, had developed; the company incorporated the following year. Its first commercial successes came in Taiwan, a widely recognised centre of excellence for producing performance materials. Applications in stain-resistance and in water-free dyeing applications are in the pipeline too now. "We have continued to pick up brands," Martin Flora explains, "but it's also true that there is still some resistance to the move to non-fluorinated chemistry, especially in certain countries. For example, Japan is mostly using fluorinated chemistry still and is just starting to convert."

His view is that PFAS is only one component of a much wider discussion about the environmental impact of the clothing and footwear industries. It is really this bigger topic that inspired the setting up and ongoing push of GTT. Martin Flora describes himself as being evangelical in campaigning for this deeper and broader change and, in this, he says PFAS is only a beachhead into a broader conversation that the global market is now starting to engage in. "We cannot use traditional manufacturing techniques," he says. "We have to be more innovative." He argues that GTT has been creative and innovative in developing Empel and in applying the chemistry directly to fibres, without any "washing in or washing off" because the molecular bonds that form are durable.

Test success

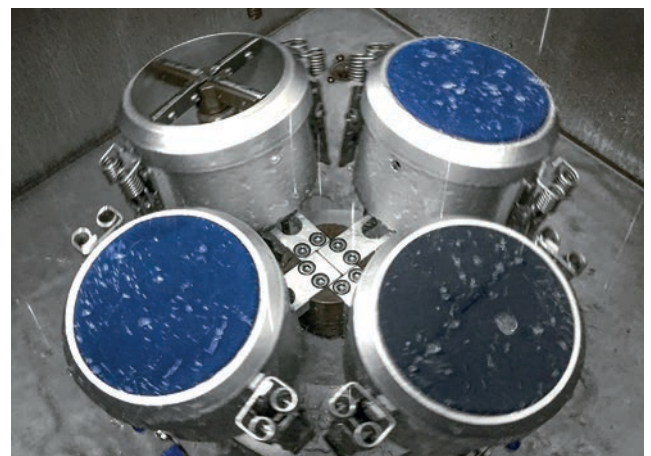
Tests have shown this and have demonstrated Empel's ability to outperform other DWR technologies. WL Gore established an industry standard for keeping footwear upper materials dry. "Gore is a partner and has subjected fabrics to its wet-flex test for us," the GTT business development president says. "The test involves putting fabric under water and subjecting it to stress to break it down a little bit. Gore does that for 3,000 flexes and then puts the fabric into a dye-bath to see if moisture will draw into the fabric after two hours. It has tested our fabric technology for 6,000 flexes, double the amount of stress, and for 24 hours, and it still performs."

He explains that this shows the fundamental difference between direct chemical application and water-based systems. Empel reduces the uptake of water by 75%, GTT insists, saying that this is the result of the uniformity of its application to fabric. The treatment encapsulates each of the fibres, as opposed to top-coating. It also avoids the problem of 'bridging' that often occurs with wet-finishing; this is when the chemistry sticks between fibres.

In terms of durability, fabrics with Empel have retained their water repellency functionality after as many as 50 washes, which will help keep finished products in use and out of landfill for longer.

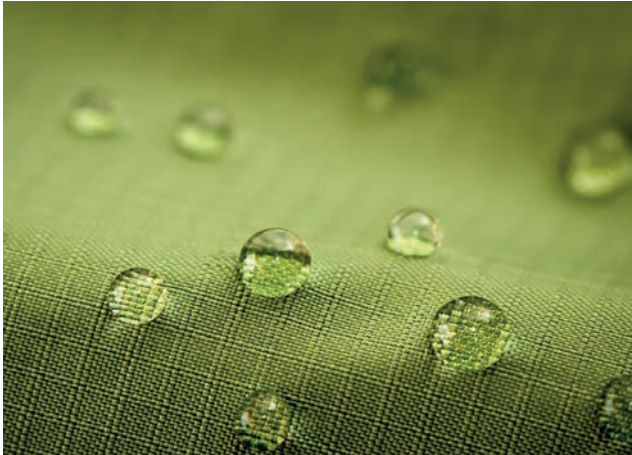
Stable and effective

Returning to footwear, he says the performance to date in helping to keep feet dry of C6 and CO technologies has been poor and that brands are searching for something more effective to meet the needs of consumers. With many shoes using knitted or woven fabrics as upper materials now, GTT's position is that Empel can meet that demand. Mr Flora says: "Mills are coming to us and saying that they need a stable process [for DWR], one that meets the needs of the brands consistently. And the brands need something that meets the needs of their consumers. We are working with almost every major footwear brand out there. There are major brands that are making big waves with our technology. One prominent footwear



Tests have shown that the technology continues to perform after 6,000 flexes and 24 hours' immersion.

CREDIT: GTT



Empel-treated fabrics show a 25% lower uptake of water because of the uniformity of its application to fabric. Encapsulating each of the fibres works better than top-coating. It also avoids the problem of 'bridging' that often occurs with wet-finishing.

CREDIT: GTT

brand will have products with this in the market in the coming fall-winter season and we are in the development phase with a second brand."

Direct application

In principle, applying the technology platform to material for footwear uppers works in exactly the same way as for garments. The process is the same: direct application of chemicals to fabrics with curing at the point of application, rather than attempting to wash the functionality in and then dry it.

Working with WL Gore on testing indicates that GTT sees much to admire in that pioneering provider of solutions for keeping feet dry in wet conditions. Martin Flora says he would like the market to begin to regard GTT as "a baby Gore". But he quickly points out important technical differences, saying: "Gore technology primarily uses a membrane as a barrier against moisture, EMPEL is membrane-free, more breathable and resists water pass-through four times more than any CO or C6 solution in the market."

His view is that membranes work well in situations in which people have prolonged, heavy exposure to water, but that this applies only rarely. In most instances, the key question footwear and apparel brands and their customers need to ask centres on drying time. When the fabric gets wet, which it will when you run in the rain or hike on a snowy forest trail, can it continue to offer the wearer protection while it dries out? And does it have enough air permeability to let go of moisture from the inside? These questions are as old as the performance fabrics business itself, but they are still worthy of discussion in 2024, Martin Flora believes.

"This is where a membrane-free technology will have an advantage," he says. "If you are getting wet on the inside because the air permeability cannot keep up with how fast you are sweating, you will not feel comfortable. This is simply the way the human body has evolved; it uses evaporation as a cooling mechanism. As moisture transfers from water to vapour, it takes heat off your body."

Greater benefit

Wicking involves the spreading of the moisture across a wider area of fabric and some technology providers argue that this is of greater benefit. GTT's position is that allowing air flow around the feet or the body is better because evaporation from the skin will deliver a higher level of comfort.

The focus at GTT is firmly on synthetic fibres at the moment, but the company has also achieved interesting results in tests with wool, currently popular as a fibre for knitted footwear uppers. This suggests future applications in protein-based fibres are possible. Focusing on synthetics, though, is partly to prove to the wider footwear industry that this technology platform can offer the performance that brands and consumers want. If it can work successfully in the upper materials that brands use most widely, its chances of changing the market increase. ■

Success in Asia

A Taiwan-based supplier of materials for footwear, Gold Long John, announced in late July that it has begun applying Empel to fabrics at its mill in Vietnam and intends to expand its use of the Empel platform to other production facilities.

The Empel platform, developed by US company Green Theme Technologies (GTT), uses no water and is free from per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). With Empel, anti-wicking chemistries are molecularly bonded to footwear, protecting shoes and wearers from wet weather.

Gold Long John installed proprietary Empel machinery at its Vietnamese mill in 2023. This equipment is now in use there and the fabrics producer has said it will also install the technology at a facility in Taiwan.

President of Gold Long John, Kevin Wen, said: "GTT and its Empel products will help us stay at the forefront of global sustainability solutions, allowing us to supply footwear brands with highly innovative, cleaner, better-performing materials for their products. We see this as a win for us, for our partner brands and for global sustainability efforts."

For his part, GTT's president of global business development, Martin Flora, explained that Gold Long John is the first major footwear mill in Asia to adopt Empel. He said the Taiwanese company had been "instrumental in providing the commercial readiness needed for major footwear brands to easily adopt Empel".

He added: "Empel creates the highest-performing finishes available. Because of Gold Long John's contribution and input, we are now able to scale our clean chemistry throughout south-east Asia and make a real difference in the fight against water, carbon and chemical pollution."



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Retro meets innovation with the recent Puma Re:Suede, crafted from Zeology-tanned suede – a leather that can be composted after use.

CREDIT: PUMA

The material behind the retro trend

In the realm of footwear manufacturing, material selection plays a pivotal role in determining the quality, visual appeal, and market acceptance of the final product. Suede and nubuck, boasting similar visual characteristics, stand out as premium options that have experienced a resurgence in the athleisure market, especially through retro-inspired styles introduced by brands including adidas, New Balance, Nike and Puma. The enduring charm of suede and nubuck stems from an aesthetic and performance that are difficult to replicate. Unlike synthetic upper materials, these favourites offer a look and tactile sensation that is inherently distinctive. This individuality adds to their allure, making them sought-after choices for discerning consumers.

An introduction to suede

While many may associate suede with Elvis Presley's rendition of 'Blue Suede Shoes', originally penned by Carl Perkins in 1955, the material's roots lie in Europe. The term 'suede' originates from the French term 'Gantes de Suède', translating as gloves from Sweden,

In recent months, a particular style of athletic shoes has experienced a significant resurgence in demand. A look at the material that is helping to make them popular again.

for which craftsmen had mastered a technique to create a velvety texture, known as 'nap', on the reverse side, rather than the grain side, of gloving leather.

In modern manufacturing, bovine suede leather, distinct from nubuck, is often a co-product of the leather-making process. Typically, footwear upper materials like suede or grain leather are expected to be between 1.2 and 2.0 millimetres thick. However, most bovine leathers are heavier and require thickness correction during manufacturing to achieve a uniform grain leather. The excess material, known as the split,

for which more detail is explained later, can then be repurposed to create suede by other manufacturers.

Through standard tannery processes, suede leather is crafted from the fibrous middle section of the leather, known technically as the corium, which exhibits a fibrous appearance on both sides. The desired aesthetic, whether a short or long nap, is achieved through a combination of process chemistry and physical processing.

In the case of suede, a rough nap is created through abrasive buffing with sandpaper. Contrastingly, nubuck is produced from grain leather, the upper part retaining the hair follicle pattern. Buffing the grain results in an exceptionally fine velvety nap, made possible by the unique fibre structure of the grain layer of the leather.

In the competitive realm of suede and nubuck, pigskin nubuck emerges as an intriguing option, esteemed for its luxurious texture. Positioned as a direct competitor to split suede, pigskin nubuck is touted by some manufacturers as offering a superior tactile experience, thereby enhancing the perceived value of footwear made from this material. However, navigating challenges related to cultural and religious sensitivities underscores the importance of exercising awareness and sensitivity in its utilisation. This issue came to the forefront in 2023 when a leading brand had to recall certain products owing to the use of pigskin in its shoes, compounded by a lack of labelling to inform consumers.

Yield goals

Yield is a pivotal factor in the manufacturing process for any industry, and leather production is no exception. However, navigating the landscape of leather manufacturing can be perplexing. Raw materials (hides) are purchased by weight, undergo processing, and are then converted into materials sold, in most cases, by area. Therefore, it is in the manufacturer's best interest to maximise yield through any available means.

When making suede, tanners use process chemistry and drying techniques tailored to optimise returns while producing a tight fibre suitable for the buffing process and achieving the desired nap. Although a soft leather with excellent yield may initially seem appealing because of its increased surface area, the open fibre structure it creates may not be the most conducive to quality suede.

In modern leather manufacturing and its associated supply chain, companies often prioritise yield in their claims. Chemical suppliers pledge yield increases, while machinery companies assure no loss of yield, or even yield gains. However, suede production deviates from this. To achieve the desired nap, some degree of yield loss is not only acceptable but sometimes necessary. It is not uncommon for manufacturers to experience upwards of a 15% shrinkage in area.

Grading challenges

For bovine suede and nubuck, grading poses different challenges and these materials require careful assessment to meet quality standards. The selection of premium hides is crucial, as the raw material's inherent characteristics greatly impact the final product's



Adidas Gazelle shoes first introduced in 1966 as a training shoe, have stood the test of time. The suede upper delivers a vintage look.

CREDIT: ADIDAS

appearance and durability. Nubuck demands a clean grain, as minimal corrections can be made, leaving little room to conceal imperfections such as healed scars, insect bites or more problematic branding marks. This elevates the competition for raw materials, often overlapping with full grain leather productions.

In the case of suede leathers, where grain characteristics hold lesser if any, significance, the presence of veins becomes a major concern. Again, minimal correction or covering can be applied and in certain circumstances, the presence of veins within the corium structure may not be visible until after thickness alteration. For these reasons, the relationship between the tannery and the supplier is paramount.

Since most suede is derived from splits, its supply is closely tied to fluctuations in the grain leather market. As demand for grain leather varies, the split market encounters challenges in maintaining a consistent supply, highlighting the delicate balance required to sustain an uninterrupted supply chain for bovine suede. Many prefer US-sourced material owing to its consistent quality and price stability, though alternative sources exist. These alternatives often struggle to compete on price, reinforcing the dominance of US-sourced material in the market.

Clyde Leather in Scotland is one of the companies supplying suede to top athleisure footwear companies. Managing director, Richard Harris, has told *World Footwear* that the biggest and most important issue with suede sourcing now is competition from collagen and gelatine buyers. These buyers pay a premium and purchase the largest volume of split material. He emphasises the need for high-quality raw materials and good tannage to produce consistent suede, noting the technical challenges of maintaining consistent quality when using different sources of raw material and varying splitting techniques.

Regarding suede splits, there exists a notable global price disparity in terms of quality and availability. Despite the impact of covid-19, prices for decent suede material have remained relatively stable, experiencing a slight uptick in the early part of 2024 because of increased demand from Asian split tanneries. Industry commentators say this price trend is primarily driven by limited supply rather than by excessive demand, with much of the material, globally, being held in full substance until grain orders are received.

Wet blue splits are categorised into two main types: split in the wet blue and split in the lime. Split in the wet blue is preferred for light- to mid-weight suedes, often marketed as drop splits, with top-quality prices currently ranging from \$1.40 to \$1.50 per kilo.

On the other hand, split in the lime refers to heavier material, typically used in automotive applications. Prices for this type of split vary significantly. Northern European material without branding marks or holes, suitable for heavy suedes and leathers, can command prices as high as \$2.90 to \$3.00 per kilo. Argentinean or Uruguayan material, with holes and brands, falls within the price range of \$1.80 to \$2.10 per kilo.

Retro resurgence

Sportswear brands are using retro designs from past decades, tapping into nostalgia that older consumers feel for classic styles. Simultaneously, these designs are captivating younger generations who are encountering them for the first time. The revival or reimagining of older styles is viewed as a reliable strategy for expanding market presence, similar to the trend among filmmakers

of rebooting beloved classics.

Nike, adidas, Puma, and New Balance are among the footwear brands at the forefront of the retro revival, putting suede in the limelight once more, often replacing synthetic alternatives that previously replaced leather.

Puma made history with the introduction of the Puma Suede shoe in 1968. Initially it was known as the Puma Crack, drawing inspiration from a term for a highly skilled individual. This marked the commercial debut of suede sneakers. Other companies were experimenting with suede as an upper material for athletic shoes around the same era, but Puma's unveiling of the Suede Classic remains a seminal moment in sneaker history.

Adidas has contributed to this trend with the introduction of its Gazelle shoe, crafted from kangaroo velour, a type of reverse suede using the flesh side of kangaroo leather. Similarly, Nike left an indelible mark with the Nike Blazer in 1973, featuring suede uppers.

The material's softer, more luxurious texture compared to conventional materials like canvas or grain leather, gives the shoes a stylish and upscale aesthetic. Robustness and flexibility further enhance its appeal. Since suede lacks a grain layer to scuff, any scratches on the material often go unnoticed and can be easily removed with sandpaper if necessary. Its high level of breathability, the result of its uncoated surface, makes it ideal for athletic pursuits, a concept that predates the emergence of 'athleisure'.

Celebrity status

Initially favoured by sports enthusiasts for their performance and the athletes who endorsed them, these shoes have gained widespread appeal in recent times. Good sustainability credentials, strategic collaborations and social media influence have all played crucial roles in this renewed interest. Additionally, the rapid introduction of fashionable colour variations has further propelled their popularity.

Celebrity preference, as opposed to direct collaborations, has played a significant role. Singer Harry Styles' preference for the adidas Gazelle has notably boosted sales of the shoe. During a recent tour, he wore various pairs of the special-edition re:sui including personalised black pairs worn by him and his band. ■



The signature New Balance 574 featuring suede upper.
CREDIT: NEW BALANCE



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Tipping the needle

The pendulum has started to swing on “next-generation” and lower-impact materials, as companies begin to seriously analyse their raw material selections and consider how to shift the manufacturing juggernaut in a more sustainable direction, according to the organisers of London’s Future Fabrics Expo (FFE). They say they are witnessing “huge changes” in how many brands and companies are taking sourcing more seriously, as well as a growing number of start-ups in the sector, commercialising new materials at a quicker pace.

The expo, launched in 2011, bills itself as a “wraparound experience”, rather than a trade show. The materials and suppliers are vetted using strict criteria, with 6,000 fabric swatches on display, as well as booths, “innovation hubs” showcasing start-ups, and educational spaces. “We exercise the ability to curate the suppliers and materials but we don’t necessarily have to take the whole collection,” Amanda Johnston, curator and educational consultant of FFE, tells *World Footwear*. “We’re trying to get the absolute best practice because we are in a critical moment in history as regards our raw material dependencies and how they impact on environment, societies and climate change.” The incoming EU legislation around fashion, circularity and traceability have created a strong impetus for brands to learn more about materials and their supply chains, she adds. “It’s all starting to create a situation where people are now, with urgency, wanting to change. We feel that although there are problems, there are also massive opportunities.”

London’s Future Fabrics Expo curated a separate area for footwear for the first time, as companies speed up commercialisation of ‘next gen’ materials and new manufacturing process are touted.

Shoe complexity

For the first time, the show in June featured an area dedicated to the footwear industry, showing new and innovative materials, analysing shoe recycling and circular patterns of material use. The overarching theme of the show was waste – or looking at it from a new perspective, in terms of “recovering nutrients”. Working with partners, organisers set out a “waste mapping” visual for fashion products, and wanted to add a specialised one for footwear. This would address not only the mountains of waste but also look at ways of adding value, they say, sparking ideas in the designers and brands that visit. “We thought this was a really interesting area,” says Ms Johnston. “It’s not just industrial and post-consumer product waste, it’s also thinking about unique waste areas, such as start-up Arda Biomaterials, which is taking a slurry of beer waste and making a beautiful material, as well as Canopy,

which is working with agricultural waste. We've seen lots of really interesting materials using waste streams that did not have any value attached to them."

One such company is Authentic Material, which wanted to address waste that was left over by leathergoods makers near its hometown in France. It patented a process to turn leather offcuts into a material that can be used for accessories, interiors and footwear components. It grinds down the pieces of leather into a 'sand' and mixes the powder with polymers – offering recycled and biobased options – at a blend of around 50%. The resulting pellets act in the same way as other plastics, and can be moulded and shaped to offer various properties, depending on the end use, according to Noemie Dumesnil, director of operations. "Leathergoods manufacturers told us they did not know what to do with this waste," she tells *World Footwear*, "they cannot destroy the scraps any more." The material can be used to make heels and counters, and the leather powder can also be combined with rubber to make soles. Chanel has now invested in the start-up.

Bananatex from Swiss company Qwstion uses waste from the agricultural sector. Made from 100% abacá, a native banana species grown as a commercial crop in the Philippines, the fabric is made by turning fibres into paper, which is spun into yarn and then woven in Taiwan for applications such as bags and footwear. Balenciaga created a limited-edition footwear run and at the show, Qwstion launched a 100% Bananatex denim, made by an Italian mill.

French company CORKonLINEN uses cork from Portugal and linen from France, spun in Poland and woven in France, for a new natural footwear upper. The linen and cork are bonded with a water-based glue, then there are three steps of manual sanding to get the smooth surface to create a naturally water repellent, antibacterial and breathable upper. "My background is as a designer, I wanted to make my bags more sustainable, I started searching and created this material," founder Ronja Nielsen tells us, adding that shoes wouldn't need a lining because the linen adds comfort. The material helps to use all parts of the plants not used in other sectors. "All the cork is used, even the dust is burnt and used to heat the machinery. The same with the linen, 100% is used, with lower-grade fibres being used by the pet industry, so it's a completely circular story."

Rethinking the process

One of the main aspects the Footwear Innovation Hub wanted to address was design and manufacturing, presenting companies that are rethinking how shoes are made. Twelve designs were selected that show both new

Simplifyber's cellulose-based upper can be composed of various feedstocks, and is designed to use locally available waste and create shorter supply chains.

CREDIT: SIMPLIFYBER



materials and ways of assembly – some that are on the market, some prototype and some speculative. "That is really future-thinking because you're changing both the materiality and the manufacturing process," says Ms Johnston. "We wanted to show that thinking, because it isn't just a set of materials, it's the integration of design, materiality and how you make. Of course, footwear has attendant issues in that most fashion products don't have that many different materials, but between 26 and 40 materials can be in any one shoe. Designing shoes has got more in common with designing a car than it has designing a dress."

The founders behind US start-up Simplifyber are on to this, having patented both a new material stream and way of manufacturing. The feedstock is a cellulose-based slurry made from waste from the wood industry, but can include everything from recycled paper to waste wool or materials, such as hemp. Co-founder Maria Intscher-Owring worked as a high-end fashion designer for more than 20 years, but was unhappy with the level of impact she was having. "I wanted to find a way to make natural fibres cost competitive, so this system shortens the supply chain so that it's more efficient and more automated, and that cuts the cost of the manufacturing," she explains. "We use the materials when they're at the beginning of the supply chain, so they're the cheapest they'll be. That combination makes our unit economics work better than plastic when you hit the thousands of products. Even taking into account the cost of moulds and tooling, it becomes cheaper. I really think that's the only way we're going to change the industry." The company works with footwear factories and sole suppliers near its base in North Carolina, US, to offer a full shoe. The uppers can be coated with various finishes to make them durable and waterproof. It aims to provide its slurry and machinery to manufacturers globally, so local supply chains can be set up and use waste from different industries to create the upper.

Nature's garden

The desire to move the fashion industry away from petrochemicals was one of the main themes of the show. US company NFW (Natural Fiber Welding) finds its solutions in nature. Its Mirum upper material is described as a "plastic-free alternative to leather", made from natural rubber, plant-based oil, natural pigments and minerals and is created using a patented plant-based curative. Outsole material Pliant is derived from the sap of the *Hevea brasiliensis* tree from certified responsibly managed forests. When cured, the material is naturally circular and mechanically recyclable, says NFW. The company counts Stella McCartney among its supporters.

Other companies in the Hub included Vivobarefoot and its tie-up with French company Balena, which supplies a bio-based material to create a 3D printed shoe, custom made from a scan of a customer's foot (see *World Footwear Issue 1, 2024*). The bio-based sources are from castor plants and polysaccharides, bound with a biodegradable polymer.

A bit further away from commercialisation is Modern Synthesis. The company was founded in 2019 by former adidas designer Jen Keane, and has since grown to employ 22 in its London headquarters. The company works with bacteria that naturally produce nanocellulose, with the aim of growing the top of an athletic shoe. It has backing from Ganni and has won awards including the Mills Fabrica Techstyle prize and the LVMH Green Trail award.

Show curator Claire Weiss, who looks after innovation and technology, comments that the fact they can show 50 fresh start-ups in the Innovation Hub each year demonstrates the willingness of investors to support nascent technologies. "In previous years, there has been a bigger focus on earlier-stage companies, whereas now they seem to be getting to a solid proof of concept a lot quicker," she tells us. "The rate of innovation is speeding up and ideas are coming to market relatively quickly. These are the companies that are asking all the right questions to make sure that what they're doing is actually best practice and what they're considering, when scaled, is going to have the positive impact that they aim to have. Chemical and technological advancements have also allowed quicker implementation of certain technologies."

High-end impetus

Exhibitors who we spoke to commented on the high number of luxury brands that had attended the show, with some viewing the sector as being the driver of "next gen" material adoption, with more flexibility to invest in innovation and higher margins that can absorb some of the cost that is inevitably associated with new materials and processes. LVMH curated a section to demonstrate some of its collaborations with new products and companies, including a tie-up with Parley for the Oceans, Bananatex and Nature Coatings, which makes a black dye from wood waste. The group presented its first "eco designed-shoe", the LV Charlie, made of what it describes as 90% sustainable materials: the outsole is made of bio-sourced plastic, the upper from recycled polyester and materials made from non-food corn, while the labels are made from Econyl, a recycled nylon.



UK brand Vivobarefoot has displayed a 3D printed shoe designed from a foot scan, using a biodegradable material by Balena.

CREDIT: WTP

Ultimately, the changes need to come from deep within companies, starting with the CEO and board, as trying to pull the footwear-making sector away from petrochemicals and towards natural or lower impact materials and processes will need both investment and action. Remaining on the path of the status quo would be easier, but observers comment it will not be viable in a business sense, with changing regulation and attitudes – notwithstanding the moral impetus to move away from non-renewable resources or polluting practices. A report launched at the show by Quantis, Boston Consulting Group and Textile Exchange, 'Sustainable Raw Materials Will Drive Profitability for Fashion and Apparel Brands', suggested not switching to new raw materials could impact a company's profitability by up to 8%.

Many brands have also set ambitious targets for using recycled or lower impact materials. Adidas, for instance, said in 2021 that nine out of 10 products should be 'sustainable' by 2025, including reducing its CO₂ footprint per product by 15%. Retail giant Inditex has said by 2030, 100% of its textile products will be made exclusively from materials with a smaller environmental footprint. Currently, polyester makes up 54% of global fibre usage, according to The Textile Exchange, with nylon and other oil-based synthetics 11%, cotton 22%, man-made cellulose 6%, other plant-based 5% and protein-based 1%. "Companies can change their supply chains but it needs to come from the CEOs, then all the designers and product development teams need to be on board," adds Ms Johnston. "We've got the solutions there for them to change and we are looking towards the next generation, or those materials that are on the cusp of becoming commercially relevant. If everybody gets on board, that will tip that needle and change our raw material dependencies. We're trying to change hearts, minds and practice in the fashion industry, that drives everything that we do." ■

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Defending Olympic 400-metres hurdles champion, Karsten Warholm.

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Paris on a plate

In the build-up to his final Olympic Games in Rio in 2016, athletics superstar Usain Bolt said that the only way he could make it look easy to run 100 metres in less than 10 seconds was to put in years of hard work beforehand. "It's all about getting things right on the day," he said. He has eight Olympic golds to his name, which means his hard work clearly paid off. He will not compete at Paris 2024 this summer, but he is an inspiration to many.

A fellow Puma-sponsored athlete, Karsten Warholm, said before the most recent summer games in Tokyo that Usain Bolt was someone he had looked up to for many years. "He became bigger than the sport itself," the Norwegian 400-metres hurdler said, "and that has been amazing for track-and-field." As his role model was bowing out, Karsten Warholm was, at the age of 20, a semi-finalist in Rio. Five years later (the Tokyo games were delayed by a year because of covid-19, remember), he became an Olympic champion too, winning gold with a new world record time for the 400-metres hurdles of 45.94 seconds.

His preparations for Paris appear to have gone well, culminating in a gold medal at the European Athletics

Championships in Rome in June; naturally, lots of hard work on and off the track has preceded this, but he did not have to do all of this work on his own.

Championships in Rome in June; naturally, lots of hard work on and off the track has preceded this, but he did not have to do all of this work on his own.

Norse inspiration

For his upcoming race at the Stade de France, for which the competition begins on August 5, Warholm will wear special Puma shoes with a thought-provoking Norse-inspired name: evoSpeed Berserker Nitro Elite Spikes. In Norse myth, the Berserkers were warriors who went into battle "in a trance-like fury". He and his

coach, Leif Olav Alnes, may be aiming for control rather than out-and-out fury on the track, but certain aspects of the hurdler's previous performances chime with the name Berserker.

He goes through an animated routine of slapping himself hard on the shoulders and on the face while bouncing up and down at the starting-blocks. He wore a Viking helmet to celebrate his first World Championship gold medal in London in 2017. And when he won his first Olympic title in Tokyo, he wanted to rip his shirt to salute the stadium crowd and the global television audience with a bare chest, mimicking, according to some scholars, the Berserkers' armour-disdaining appearance in combat. "It was a bit embarrassing," the champion said afterwards, "because it took me two goes to rip my top."

Revolutionary combination

Puma put extensive thought into the evoSpeed Berserker Nitro Elite Spikes. The brand's vice-president for innovation, Romain Girard, points out that this product combines "the best of Puma's technologies". He lists the group's nitrogen-infused thermoplastic foam Nitrofoam Elite, its Pwrplate carbon fibre plate, which is engineered to stabilise the midsole while maximising energy transfer, and its Ultraweave upper material. "The technologies are combined in a revolutionary way," Mr Girard tells *World Footwear*, "allowing a huge improvement in energy return at each step, from the first touchpoint moment to the last millimetre before taking off."

Working on this project with Puma is part of the programme that the athlete put in place to prepare for Paris and the defence of his Olympic title. He says he enjoys seeing not only the result, which in this case is the Berserker shoe, but also being able to witness all the hard work that has gone into creating the product.

Biomechanically relevant

Milan-based research laboratory Moon Rabbit Adaptive Lab also played a role in developing the new shoe. It used its know-how in computational design to help the brand achieve the revolutionary combination of technologies that Romain Girard refers to. It used data that the Puma innovation team collected from lab-based tests that Warholm took part in. These tests

subjected his running and hurdling style to detailed scrutiny and analysis.

Moon Rabbit's founder, Jesús Marini Parissi, says the company tried to put all aspects together in a virtual environment, including the materials in the shoe construction, the responsiveness of the track and, of course, the athlete's movements. This allowed the project partners to engineer digital models that made it possible, he claims, to simulate a race environment "in a way that was biomechanically relevant". Contrary to what many athletics fans might imagine from watching a 400-metres hurdles event, these models show clearly that it is the midfoot that takes all the strain when Karsten Warholm clears a hurdle and springs seamlessly into the next set of strides. This helps explain the shoe's appearance. It has even less heel than hurdlers' spikes usually have these days, while it has a distinctive claw-like set of spikes at the tip of the upturned toe to boost rebound.

Mr Parissi, who worked as a freelance design consultant at Puma before founding Moon Rabbit in 2023, admits that it was a thrill to see the Norwegian athlete make a winning start with the new shoes at his recent Rome triumph. "To help him shave off even milliseconds is to help him achieve his goals," says the computational design engineer.

The one everyone wants to win

All that remains is for Karsten Warholm to repeat the feat at the event everyone wants to win in Paris in August. His view is that coping with the pressure of having rivals from all corners of the world make it their top priority to take your place is an unavoidable part of reaching the top in any sport.

He says he has learned a lot from seeing how hard it is to defend the number-one spot. "You realise that this is not a position that you will have for ever," he says. "You need to do the right things to maintain it for as long as you can and you need to be willing to take risks. Even if you are the favourite, you have to tackle every race as though you were not." In race situations, he says he is always on the attack. He also makes the point that winning two Olympic gold medals is better than winning one, a fact that he says no one can deny. ■



The evoSpeed Berserker Nitro Elite Spikes. Detailed analysis made it clear that the midfoot does all the heavy lifting, which is why the shoe has practically no heel.

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In-house expansion

The executive chairman of luxury group Hermès, Axel Dumas, has paid tribute to the contribution of footwear to positive full-year results for 2023. Hermès reported revenues across all business segments of €13.4 billion, up by 15.7% year on year.

Its leathersgoods and saddlery business contributed €5.5 billion to the total, increasing by 11.8% year on year. Hermès counts sales of other leather items, including shoes, belts and gloves, in its clothing and accessories category, for which it reported revenues of nearly €3.9 billion, an increase of 23.1% year on year.

On presenting these results, Mr Dumas celebrated the strong growth that clothing and accessories continue to enjoy, picking out footwear specifically, as well as ready-to-wear, as having presented 2023 collections that have proved particularly popular with customers.

Homemade products

Across all categories, the group made 55% of its products in its own workshops last year and, in total, 74% of its products were made on home soil in France. This applies to its high-value handbags more than to footwear. It says its objective is to preserve and perpetuate a "responsible, artisanal production model". It also acknowledges how rooted it is in its home country, where it already has a total of 52 production sites.

Luxury group Hermès will continue its drive to open new leathersgoods factories in France in the next four years. But when it comes to footwear, it will be with partners in Italy that it builds up its in-house manufacturing network.

It created 2,400 new jobs in 2023, taking its total number of employees to 22,040, of which 13,700 work in France. It has brought on board a total of 5,400 new employees in the last three years, 3,300 of them in France; it has doubled its overall workforce in the last ten years. Across the company, 60% of Hermès employees are women. The group also runs eight training schools. It plans to open four new leather workshops over the next four years and to carry on recruiting at 2023 levels. "We are going to continue along those lines," says Mr Dumas. "We have no intention of slowing down."

For its leathersgoods division to continue to have success, the main constraints Hermès has to

overcome are limits to production capacity and to the availability of raw material of the high quality that the group requires. Its insistence on opening new leathergoods factories shows that it is planning ahead and that its plans are ambitious. This is because, the group reveals, each of the new factories adds 7% to its leathergoods production capacity. Four new factories in the next four years will, therefore, increase current production capacity by 28%.

Italy for footwear

Where does this leave footwear, about which the executive chairman has spoken so enthusiastically? If France is the place of choice for the production of its luxury leathergoods, Hermès relies heavily on partner manufacturers in Italy for producing its footwear collections. Products in its current footwear offering, such as its Veo Bottines men's boots, its Aphrodite pink Paris moccasins for women, and its Bouncing sneakers for both women and men, demonstrate the range's enormous variety. But something they all have in common is that they are made in Italy.

In 2023, Hermès talked about the importance, generally, of its partner suppliers and mentioned the idea of vertical integration. On presenting the full-year results, Mr Dumas said the group intends to speed this plan up now, and he singled out shoes as one of the categories for which he wants to bring production, at least partly, under the Hermès umbrella. He views this as part of the wider strategy of keeping production in house as a way of securing supply of key materials and products.



Hermès executive chairman, Axel Dumas.

CREDIT: HERMÈS.



Minority stakes

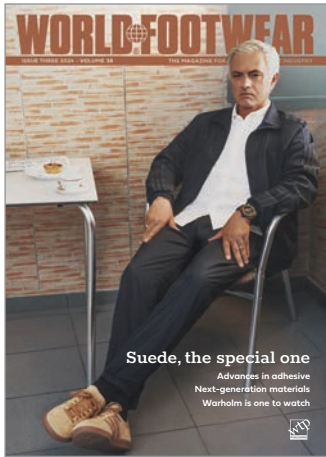
While the group's footwear manufacturing partners in Italy are creative, talented, reliable and able to offer the capacity required, they are also independent. If Hermès becomes an investor in these businesses, though, they can keep some of this independence and still become part of the in-house production panorama. Mr Dumas has stated clearly that Hermès will now seek to acquire a minority stake in "certain of our historical partner manufacturers". The group is proud of the strong, long-lasting relationships it has built with key suppliers, the executive chairman makes clear, with the length of time it has worked with its top 50 suppliers averaging out at 19 years.

Beyond that, he says it is in his nature to be optimistic and that he is confident about the future of the company. He points out that Hermès is in the business of creating desire. "We exist to give our customers opportunities to bring pleasure into their lives," he explains. "This is something that is impossible to turn into a bureaucratic exercise and we do not take for granted our ability to keep creating that desire among our customers." ■

Recent comments from Hermès have put footwear in the spotlight. Investing in some of the group's manufacturing partners in Italy is a possible next move.

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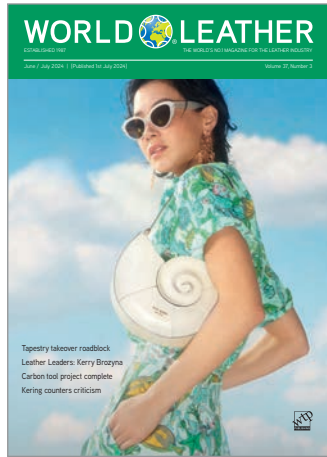
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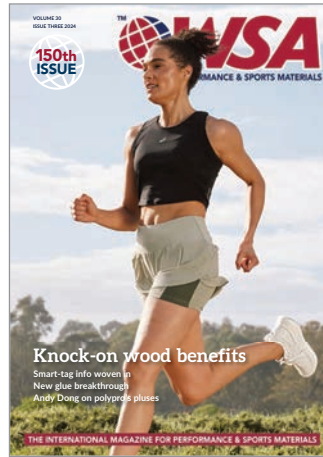
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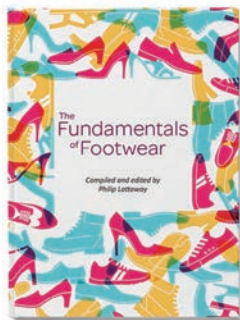


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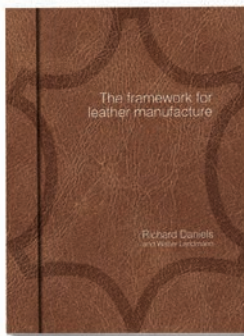
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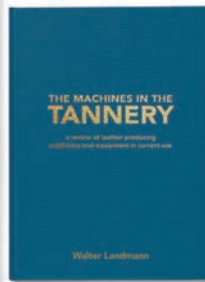
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