



The brand holds young, fashionable consumers as its target audience and has already acquired a celebrity following which includes Jennifer Aniston.

CREDIT: OETZI3300THOMSON

A footwear brand inspired by shoes found on Europe's oldest mummy is using cork technology to create fashionable, design-led sneakers.

Stone age inspiration

In 1991, the mummified body of a man was found in the Ötztal Alps on the border between Austria and Italy. Nicknamed Ötzi, the body was carbon dated to 3300 BC and was wearing nothing more than the basic essentials he needed for survival; gear for protection and warmth, as well as a unique pair of shoes.

Dr Petr Hlavacek, a Czech university department head and footwear expert, was allowed to study Ötzi's shoes and spent years recreating them to further understand how they had been made. His findings were widely reported and one article found its way to Ludovic Malmoux, a US footwear producer in Los Angeles. Mr Malmoux was so inspired by the ancient shoes and the way they had been constructed that he decided to start his own "comfort sneaker brand".

"It was just too beautiful a story," he says. "Ötzi's shoes are the earliest ever discovered and all these different things are so interesting; the way they were constructed, how they were insulated and that the leathers were boiled to make them waterproof."

Ötzi's shoes are complex. The soles were made from bearskin which had been cured in a mixture of the bear's brain matter and fat from its liver. Deer hide was used for the top panels and was mounted on a mesh of braided linden bark. The bindings were made of calf leather. Straw was used for insulation and moss as a lining which

functioned like modern socks.

Mr Malmoux had the experience and knowledge necessary to start his own brand but lacked funding; however a chance meeting on an LA beach soon changed this. "I was walking on the beach with my dog, and bumped into a guy who was walking his dog. Our dogs happened to be the same breed but opposite in colour. Mine's white with black spots and his is black with white spots. So we started talking and he was asking me what I was doing and I was telling him about how I was putting together a proposal for a shoe brand." The man on the beach was interested in the brand and, after looking at Mr Malmoux's proposal, decided to invest.

Oetzi3300 was launched in May 2009 and its first shoes were in stores by October of the same year.

The Oetzi3300 office is based inside a plant nursery in Malibu, California. "We've taken over one of the greenhouses that used to be used for keeping plants, and so we're basically in a beautiful greenhouse facing the ocean and surrounded by plants," says Mr Malmoux. "Everybody in the company loves hiking, bike riding, surfing, all these things, and being close to nature. The closer to nature we are the happier we feel, so our greenhouse shed is exactly what it is – a 93 square metre shed."

When it came to the construction of the footwear, Mr



Oetzi3300 uses 100% veg-tanned suedes and leathers to produce its unique sneakers.

CREDIT: OETZI3300

Malmoux wanted to produce the shoes without using solvents, and looked to Ötzi's own shoes for inspiration. One of the most prominent items in the autumn-winter 2010-2011 Oetzi3300 collection is the OTZ1-Troop boot, which has a 1.8mm thick, 100% veg-tanned leather, an internal sock membrane and a water-resistant coating. "We've created a way of making our shoes which is really quite unique and is directly taken from the way Ötzi's shoes were constructed; we stitch the upper directly to the sole," says Mr Malmoux. "And it's a TPU injection sole so we don't have to use solvents."

Mr Malmoux says that, by using injection TPU as an outsole, there is also far less waste. "As opposed to standard methods, in which there's always waste cut and thrown away, there's basically very little waste in using an injection TPU," he says. "As much as other manufacturers try to recycle all the material they can, the reality is there is still way too much waste out there."

"We're trying to improve the way that we make the shoes and to limit the waste that we generate. Unfortunately it's difficult to make waste-free product in any kind of way, but we definitely try to promote a better process of making things."

Oetzi3300 shoes are produced in China, in the same factory that manufactures shoes for Terra Plana, a British footwear brand that aims to create sustainable shoes.

The design and style of the Oetzi3300 brand is aimed at young, trendy consumers, but the main aspect, according to Mr Malmoux, is the comfort and practicality afforded by using cork in the footbed. "We tag our brand as a 'sneaker comfort brand' because there is a fashion angle to our shoes. I've come from the footwear fashion industry, so there's an element of street fashion that I just love. Everything we do is very design conscious; form follows function. So we

really think about the ergonomics, the practicality of things, and we delete everything that is unnecessary.

"But really the essence of the shoe is about the comfort and the cork technology that we're using. We use a cork footbed and have created two technologies; one is 'cork light' and one is 'cork fit'. They use two different types of constructions based around corks.

The first advantage of working with cork as a footbed is that it moulds to your foot, and the second is that it has antimicrobial properties so you can wear the shoes barefoot and it's a beautiful, comfortable ride."

Another footwear brand that comes to mind when thinking of cork footbeds is Birkenstock, and Mr Malmoux admits that Oetzi3300 has been inspired by that company's success. "The only brand that has really exploited cork technology is Birkenstock," he says. "They're the company that have brought cork technology to the world and I admire everything they do, they make fantastic sandals. Unfortunately they don't make sneakers that look like something a 20-year-old would wear. But their sandals are amazing, so that was definitely a big drive for me – to provide a product range that complements what Birkenstock has done in the past but to do it from a young, inspiring way as opposed to more the orthopaedic footwear that they do."

The Oetzi3300 brand is not yet two years old, but has already attracted a steady following of discerning consumers, including celebrities such as actress Jennifer Aniston and musician Jacob Dylan, Bob Dylan's son. Mr Malmoux says the company has no marketing budget but instead relies on word of mouth and online social networking websites such as Facebook and Twitter. And with approximately 100 retail locations in the US and stores in Japan, Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore and Israel, it must be doing something right. The European market is the brand's next target, and it is already expanding its range of products to include t-shirts, rucksacks and backpacks.

Mr Malmoux believes that finding the right consumer is key to the brand's success and will further establish its popularity among young, fashionable and environmentally-minded shoppers. "We do have some indie artists who are fans of the brand, which I'm really excited about because that's really what our brand is about. We don't have a corporate structure, we're a small indie brand and we like working, we enjoy what we do, and if we have followers that are likeminded that makes us really happy."

