

To make its shoes suitable for the wet streets of London, Harrys of London worked with Vibram to develop the Windsurf sole.

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For the wet streets of London

The first half of 2015 was a busy time for luxury men's footwear company Harrys of London. It completed a project with French designer Christian Lahoude to come up with a new concept for its flagship London store, saying it plans to roll out the new design across all its stores at a later date.

In October 2014, private equity firm Palladin Consumer Retail Partners acquired a controlling stake in Harrys to fund future growth. The footwear brand was founded in 2005 and now has three London stores as well as franchise partnerships in Dubai, Kuwait, Qatar and Saudi Arabia and global distribution through an e-commerce platform. The brand's shoes and accessories are also available from department stores in more than 20 countries. Its flagship store in the Burlington Arcade in the West End of London, unveiled its new look on July 9.

In the past, Christian Lahoude has worked on architectural

With new materials, new ideas, a redesigned flagship store, new investors and experienced industry professionals at the helm, Harrys of London is confident it can provide stylish shoes that function well in all conditions.

design projects for Alexander Wang, Jimmy Choo, Tiffany and Gucci and, on this latest project, worked collaboratively with Harrys of London creative director, Kevin Martel. Mr Martel was appointed as Harrys of London's creative director in 2005, bringing with him over 20 years' experience



All Harrys of London shoes are handmade in Tuscany and, even with extensive global expansion now, the company has no plans to change its approach.

designing men's accessories and footwear for well known brands. He started his career in 1993 when he joined the Cole Haan design team and stayed until he moved to Ralph Lauren in 1998 as the design director for men's footwear. Two years later he joined Giorgio Armani as design director for men's accessories, leaving in 2005 to help set up Harrys of London.

Like a library

On announcing the redesign project, Mr Martel said: "As Harrys of London expands internationally, I wanted to evolve our original Mayfair 'library' concept into something that reflects our combination of craftsmanship and innovation. Christian Lahoude has exceptional taste and understands luxury retail for a global audience." For his part, Mr Lahoude said he had begun his work on the project by examining in detail the design of historic London libraries. He said the end result was "London design made relevant for a global audience".

Only weeks before this, the commercial director of leathergoods brand Mulberry, Steven Newey, left that company to take up the position of chief executive at Harrys of London. Prior to Mulberry, Mr Newey held positions at Berluti, Loro Piana, Alfred Dunhill, Tommy Hilfiger and Hermès. He took up his new position on June 1, saying: "I am joining this business at an extraordinary time of expansion and global growth and I'm delighted to be working alongside an experienced team. The next six months promise to be exciting and challenging as we take Harrys of London to new territories and new audiences."

Imagination

Its shoes are all handmade in Tuscany and the company insists that it has no plans to change this during the expansion it is going through at the moment but, from launch, Harrys of London said its aim was to "re-imagine traditional men's shoe designs with the use of technically advanced materials". This led to the creation of a

number of lines, including two that it says have become "iconic", the Downing and Basel loafers. The first uses mostly calfskin tanned in Italy, but the material of choice for the Basel is kudu suede.

In some models, the company also uses a signature outsole called Windsurf, which it developed with soling technology specialist Vibram. Based on a design used in performance windsurfing shoes, the two partners adapted the idea for the wet streets of London, providing Harrys shoes with flexibility, traction and high levels of abrasion resistance. In collaboration with another technical partner, Technogel, Harrys of London has also developed a gel innersole that it says provides a soft, stable and pleasant feeling for the foot.

Quality raw material

Mention of the special soling materials helping the shoes work well on the wet streets of London may spark questions in the minds of some readers about the advisability of using suede in the uppers. Supplier of the special kudu suede, Leeds-based tanning company CF Stead, argues that, although there is a common perception that split suede is "less effective" in applications such as shoe uppers in temperate climates like the UK's, this is not necessarily accurate. "There is a difference between suede split and a sueded antelope skin, and we supply both," explains David Bailey, the company's sales director. "If you buy good-quality, degraed suede split, you can still get a superlative product. It's all about the quality of the raw material, how it's been prepared and how it's been tanned."

His interpretation is that Harrys of London was looking for something unique for shoes such as the Basel loafer collection and certainly found it with the kudu suede. It's from a game antelope and the buffing technique used to make the grain side into a nubuck serves only to enhance its interesting and unusual natural characteristics, while the reverse side makes suede. For the Basel, Harrys of London has opted to have the nubuck side next to the foot and the suede side on display. There are, of course, different finishes that a tanner can apply to make the suede more water-resistant, but Mr Bailey is of the opinion that most of these are likely to take something away from the natural material, which he refers to as "the nicest, softest, most lustrous suede you can imagine".



For the Basel, the brand uses kudu suede, tanned by CF Stead in Leeds. The leather producer says the material provides the softest, most lustrous suede imaginable.