



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

Over the years since he resurfaced, *World Leather* has followed the post-mortem history of Ötzi. Now the shoes he was wearing at the time he was killed are the inspiration behind a new footwear brand.

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 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 upper, 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 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." ☺

Unlike the real Ötzi, Oetzi3300 founder Ludovic Malmoux doesn't use bearskin to make his shoes, but he does make sure the leathers he uses are the right ones for the product. "One of the most important components of making shoes is using materials that best suit the price points your brand represents," he says. "In our case, quality of comfort, quality of materials and quality of craftsmanship are all integral in making Oetzi3300 the brand it is."

Asiatan is a tannery based in Jiangmen, China. It supplies 1.8mm suedes to Oetzi3300, ranging from:

- Oiled suedes with 18% oils content which is used across the brand's core collection.
- Silky suedes that provide a unique nubuck-like surface finish.
- Shaggy suede with an extra long, hair-like surface finish that is lightly tipped to provide a two-tone effect. (above)
- Weathered Rootbeer: this has an effect which ages with grace.

PrimeAsia tannery in Vietnam supplies all of Oetzi3300's full grain leathers and suedes, including:

- 'Relax'. A 100% vegetable retanned leather. The process of making Relax uses less water, energy, and petroleum-based products with no VOC chemicals added. Oil content 18%.
- 'Nature Floater'. Natural waxes give this leather a silky feel, and a long milling time makes it soft. Oil content 8%.
- 'Bello'. A soft leather with a semi-glazed and tipped look. Oil content 16%. ☺

