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UPCLOSE COMFORT



Ecco Breaks the Mold

Limited-edition Vitrus collection redefines the men's formal dress shoe.

ECCO, A COMPANY known for re-engineering and reinventing how shoes are made, has reimagined the men's formal dress shoe—namely to be more versatile, comfortable and stylish. The effort is led by the Vitrus International Agenda, a limited-edition collection of just 500 pairs in seven different variations: one representing each day of the week and the business capitals New York, Tokyo, Shanghai, London, Moscow, Amsterdam and Copenhagen. The cities also represented where select stores introduced the collection this fall. In New York, it was Nordstrom's new Midtown men's mecca.

Felix Zahn, product director for Ecco Americas, says the idea behind the limited-edition launch was to create awareness of the broader Vitrus men's dress collections and present the brand in a more premium light. "Ecco is a key player in this category," he says, noting that most other brands put all their innovations in sneakers. "We wanted to innovate a true formal product with a sneaker-like feel."

Led by Ecco's Fluidform direct comfort technology that uses unique liquid materials to follow the anatomical shape of the lasts and form a flexible platform that cushions the foot and delivers rebound time after time, the shoes also feature a breakthrough shank design that creates a cupped, cushioned heel with excellent stability and fit. Additional features include a suspended welt construction that uses a full leather wrap, which improves comfort and durability; a strobel sock formation that offers higher flexibility and strength; and a moisture-wicking cork layer on the forefoot that improves breathability.

Looking at the history of classic silhouettes like the Derby, Oxford and wingtip, Ecco Design Director Niki Tjestensen believed the best way the brand could reinvent the men's dress shoe, without disrupting the traditional handcrafted style, was through comfort upgrades. "Our innovation had to come from the fit," he states, crediting Fluidform as the breakthrough. It enables the injection of soft PU straight through the shank. "This allowed us to offer the same comfort you would get in a casual sneaker while maintaining the formal look on the outside," he says. The injection process also reduces the weight and delivers out-of-the-box comfort, i.e. no break-in period.

As for the styling of the limited-edition collection (SRP: \$300 and \$350 for the boot), it pays homage to old-school shoemakers. For example, the premium full-grain leather uppers are individually hand polished and buffed to bring out the natural grain, warmth and luster. "The Vitrus man understands he shouldn't have to compromise on his style and comfort just to wear a more traditional, handcrafted style," Tjestensen states. "He knows he can have the best of both worlds in one Ecco Vitrus shoe." —Greg Dutter

Green Machine

OrthoLite introduces two eco-friendly insoles.



CONTINUING ITS DECADES-long effort to improve sustainable production practices, OrthoLite is debuting two new insoles featuring recycled materials. One is made of 100-percent recycled waste foam and trimmings and the other, the OrthoLite Hybrid, consists of a patent pending blend of 5 percent recycled rubber and 15 percent production waste. Dan Legor, director of marketing, notes the Hybrid material can be added to any insole a brand desires, which is expected to give it a more than 80-percent adoption rate in the market.

While Legor notes OrthoLite has been including recycled rubber in its products from day one, the demand to be greener in all facets of production is only increasing. "Brands want to tell this eco-friendly story even more, and we're in the perfect position to help," he says.

OrthoLite can help because it controls every aspect of its production process, enabling it to work with brand partners individually on the eco-content formulation that best suits them. With Millennial and Generation Z consumers, for example, the more eco-friendly the product, the better. "Having just 1 percent of a shoe be of recycled material is not enough," Legor says. "Brands are looking to increase the eco ratings of their products, and OrthoLite insoles are a great way for them to do that while maintaining performance standards. We are seeing it in everything, from high-performance running shoes to dress to kids products."

As with all OrthoLite insoles, these newest versions meet the same performance and durability standards for density, tear strength and fitness. And while the processes to produce these insoles cost more, OrthoLite believes it's a worthy investment. "You have to invest in innovation if you want to continue to grow and service customers at the level they expect," Legor says, noting the investment its making in a new, eco-friendly factory in Vietnam that is expected to open next year. "We want to find solutions that help us be more environmentally responsible across everything we do," he says. Like water conservation and solar power in the new factory. "Our brand partners are excited, and they're asking what's next?" Legor adds. "We've got a lot in the works, be it working toward becoming carbon neutral and making biodegradable products. We look forward to coming up with solutions for everybody." —Aleda Johnson