

# SPORTSWEAR

N T E R N A T I O N A L

UK £ 9.50 / USA \$ 12 / Rest of Europe € 14 / Rest of World \$ 15 DB7003



STIR IT UP!

FASHION'S JAMMIN' SUMMER 2003



# Retro's\_Future

**HAS THE PAST PASSED? AS SOME SPORTS SHOE BRANDS TIPTOE INTO THE LATEST TRENDS, THE RETRO ERA MAY BE HEARING FOOTSTEPS.**



A pair of booming years of retro style in sports footwear has generated a spawn of category synonyms: vintage, heritage, original, classic, nostalgic, throwback, authentic, revival... But as shoe brands continue to flirt with market saturation, designers and consumers alike consider the inevitable question: What's next? In the US the magic formula for "new" sneaker models seems to be "athleisure." This combination of athletic and leisure inspirations is considered to fill the gap between the comfort and functionality of performance sports shoes and casual, stylish sneakers to be worn every day.

"The market is already starting to transition to a more casual aesthetic that crosses the boundary of casual and athletic footwear," says Sung Choi, co-founder of California based Clae Footwear ([www.claefootwear.com](http://www.claefootwear.com)), one of the younger athleisure brands. Core brand Gravis ([www.gravisfootwear.com](http://www.gravisfootwear.com)) is often referred to as the athleisure brand focusing on skate-inspired sneakers with a comfortable and at the same time fashionable look for both guys and girls. And according to Ricardo Camargo, director of marketing for Gravis Footwear, the athleisure inspiration came from overseas: "Europe and Japan were one of the first regions to turn sport into fashion." Future plans for the brand to stay atop the crowding athleisure bandwagon include addressing the need for a comfortable dress shoe and considering some new women's line silhouettes. Brooklyn based label Yak Pak ([www.yakpak.com](http://www.yakpak.com)), a one-time beginner bag company,

want to address the athleisure issues of 24-hour style and comfort with its second season of footwear. "Who needs to haul an extra pair of shoes around?" asks Stephen Holt, the company's co-founder and president.

But for some, the "way through the middle" is not enough. The technology movement turns out to be the second big trend to follow—or complement—the retro rage. Defined by a focus on performance-oriented design, the tech movement may be reinforced by new tech styles from the industry's largest brands. Presto by Nike ([www.nike.com](http://www.nike.com)) launched an expanded style line in July and will release its classic Waffle Racer in brown and deep green in October and November in the US. Adidas ([www.adidas-salomon.com](http://www.adidas-salomon.com)) just aired its new worldwide TV commercial for its latest invention: the "a" Cushion, a shoe that cushions, supports and "leads" the foot and gives "more power to you" according to its slogan. "a" is a technology that will set a standard for adidas footwear for the next years," says Neil Simpson, head of adidas global advertising. Jogging along with the technology team is New Balance ([www.newbalance.com](http://www.newbalance.com)) whose collection for summer 2003 is focusing once more on its core segments: running and walking. Its technical highlight is the refined cushion system Abzorb SBS.

Even those brands that do not have a clearly technical approach see the new wave coming. David Nichols, European managing director at K-Swiss ([www.kswiss.com](http://www.kswiss.com)), says, "The next big trend will go back

to performance. Sneakers will again be appreciated for their comfort, support and materialization."

Still, at this point there seems to be no way around the retro magnet.

"Retro will always be part of the mix, because simple and clean always works," Nichols predicts. "Although you will see shifts even in retro — we are already noticing a move from retro joggers to retro court in the UK." One thing's for sure: everybody wants a piece of the retro pie.

KangaRoos ([www.kangaroos.com](http://www.kangaroos.com)) divided its collection for spring/summer 2003 into the segments "Lifestyle" (the three themes are retro, fashion sports and street) and "Original Sports" (themes include basketball and jogging). The LA Gear spring/summer collection combines innovative and nostalgically styled shoes "designed to meet every woman's need." Hallmark retro brands such as Pony ([www.pony.com](http://www.pony.com)), Onitsuka Tiger ([www.onitsukatiger.it](http://www.onitsukatiger.it)), the retro line by Asics, and Dutch label Quick ([www.quicktopstar.com](http://www.quicktopstar.com)) offer exact replicas of decades-old styles in countless color combinations.

Their challenge, however, may lie in finding ways to update the brand in the next few years.

"The day retro dies will also be the end of Onitsuka Tiger," says Rolf Preusser of Onitsuka Tiger's sales in Germany. "We've noticed, though, that technology is gaining in importance at our 'mother brand' Asics. A lot of brands are now turning to a combination of retro and design. That could also be a possibility for Tiger," he adds. >>