

**STREET
STYLE**

Dr. Martens

A VISUAL HISTORY OF THE ICONIC BRAND

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The Spring Behind Every Step

It's hard to believe that an orthopaedic shoe could be synonymous with rebellious style around the world. Yet that is what the Dr. Martens brand continues to represent to millions of its ardent fans.

It can be challenging to maintain one's cool factor over the decades, but by intentionally aligning itself with subcultural style, the nearly octogenarian footwear manufacturer hasn't lost a single step when it comes to cultivating an alternative type of timeless footwear. Considering the United Kingdom also has a rich history of fine Savile Row tailoring, Scottish wools and ruggedly elegant Harris Tweeds, fashion houses like Burberry and tastefully tough outerwear from brands like Barbour, Dr. Martens is singular in that canon of classic British style. Indeed, Dr. Martens is a staunch iconoclast, a bastion of anti-establishment ideals for people who prefer to dress against the grain.

But despite the modern connotation of what Dr. Martens has become, its roots are built on a comfortable foundation. Dr Klaus Maertens first conceived of the footwear's signature 'AirWair' sole while recuperating from a World War II foot injury.

Finding his standard-issue German Army boot severely uncomfortable for his ailing foot, he utilised soft leather for

the upper and repurposed tyre rubbers to create an air-padded sole. The resulting shoe is equal parts built to last and equal parts built to live in. It's no wonder that punk rockers and hip-hop artists alike have graced thousands of stages in a pair of Dr. Martens over the years - it's a shoe made for those who live out loud. The story of how a purpose-driven product came to define one of today's most exciting lifestyle brands is one that spans a growing connection between clothing and culture. When you combine a timeless product with a chameleon-like ability to mean different things to different people, you get a shoe that is undeniably trend-proof.



ABOVE: A classic pair of Dr. Martens 1460 boots, broken in with wear.



The original pairs of Dr Maerten's AirWair shoes were still a far cry from the instantly recognisable models the brand is known for today. The uppers were much more minimal in execution and the soles were much wider with a very visible contrast thanks to a lighter-coloured sole.

The first mass-produced designs have more in common with a modern-day hybrid dress shoe than the sleek, utilitarian shapes of popular Dr. Martens styles, now set atop a semi-translucent lug sole. Perhaps that unintentionally fashion-forward aesthetic is one of the reasons why women gravitated towards them long before more conservatively-dressed men did. It's hard to imagine one trying to pull these off within the stricter dress codes of the 1950s, where leather-soled, dark hard-bottom footwear was still the norm for doing business. But looking back now, it set the perfect stage for what Dr. Martens would become: the ultimate anti-dress shoe.

LEFT: A modern pair of Dr. Martens 1460 boots.



The Birth of Bouncing Soles

Now that you've briefly had a glimpse at Dr. Martens' future, it's time to rediscover the past. How did a German-born brand become so distinctively British? That story begins in 1901. A man named Benjamin Griggs and his business partner Septimus Jones began a company to manufacture boots in Wollaston, north Northamptonshire. By 1911, they had incorporated as R. Griggs & Co. Ltd., eventually becoming the R. Griggs Group.

In just a couple of decades, Wollaston had become one of England's shoemaking capitals. As early as 1881, one of its shoe factories was established as a workers' co-operative of local cobblers (nicknamed 'The Duffers'), and it survives today as the Northamptonshire Productive Society, still making shoes as NPS, where it manufactures many well-known high-end footwear brands.

But the R. Griggs Group continued to flourish well into the 1950s under the leadership of Bill Griggs, who inherited the family business around that time. His fortunes would grow even more when he decided to take a risk in 1959. Building on the success of their fledgling footwear business, Dr Klaus Maertens and Dr Herbert Funk began soliciting advertisements for Dr. Maerten's AirWair Shoes in international magazines. Griggs saw the ad for this innovative air-cushioned sole by two German doctors and instantly recognised its potential. After

all, having grown up in factories his whole life, he understood the need for sturdy, robust work boots, but also knew how uncomfortable they could be.

Ironically, the rest of his family disagreed with his foresight, seeing the air-cushioned sole as a gimmick, the kind of flash in the pan that would fade out over time while leather-soled boots would be around forever. But he trusted his intuition and went ahead to meet with Dr Maertens and Dr Funk, fast developing a rapport with them and inking the exclusive licence for their AirWair-soled shoes in the United Kingdom.



ABOVE: Max Griggs, longtime owner of the R. Griggs Group that went on to own all of Dr. Martens.

Mod Squad

One of the most prominent British music subcultures to arise in the 1950s and early 1960s was the Modernist movement - or 'Mod' for short. Musical taste was just one part of the complete lifestyle. Mods were obsessed with clean-cut fashion pieces like polo shirts, mohair suits and military-issue M-51 fishtail parkas, especially ones emblazoned with the signature roundel of the Royal Air Force. It was a subculture focused on executing everything with intention - the hair you had, the clothes you wore, the music you listened to and the scooter you drove.

As avid fans of The Who, it's no surprise that Dr. Martens became an indelible part of Mods' uniform. The sleek lines of the boots looked good with suits and similarly complemented the minimal styles of the subculture, and could also be worn on the Mod vehicle of choice: the Vespa scooter.

RIGHT: Two scooter-riding mods take a breather outside Herne Bay's Amusement Arcade in 1980.



In contrast, the biker-obsessed subculture of Rockers who favoured leather motorcycle jackets, creepers, engineer boots and denim saw the Mod obsession with current fashion, jazz and R&B as effeminate, and numerous physical altercations between the two groups led to a moral panic about the rise of unruly youth. Style-wise, the Mods eventually won out as their way of dress slowly seeped into the British mainstream, leading to the Swinging London phase of the 1960s. But as all trends go, as one fad falls out of favour, another one is right behind it to take its place.