STREET STYLE

Dr. Martens

A VISUAL HISTORY OF THE ICONIC BRAND

JIAN
DELEON

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A VISUAL HISTORY OF THE ICONIC BRAND

For Janice, Darren, Geoff, and everyone else
who proudly follows their own footsteps.
- **JDL**

JIAN **DELEON**

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The Spring Behind Every Step

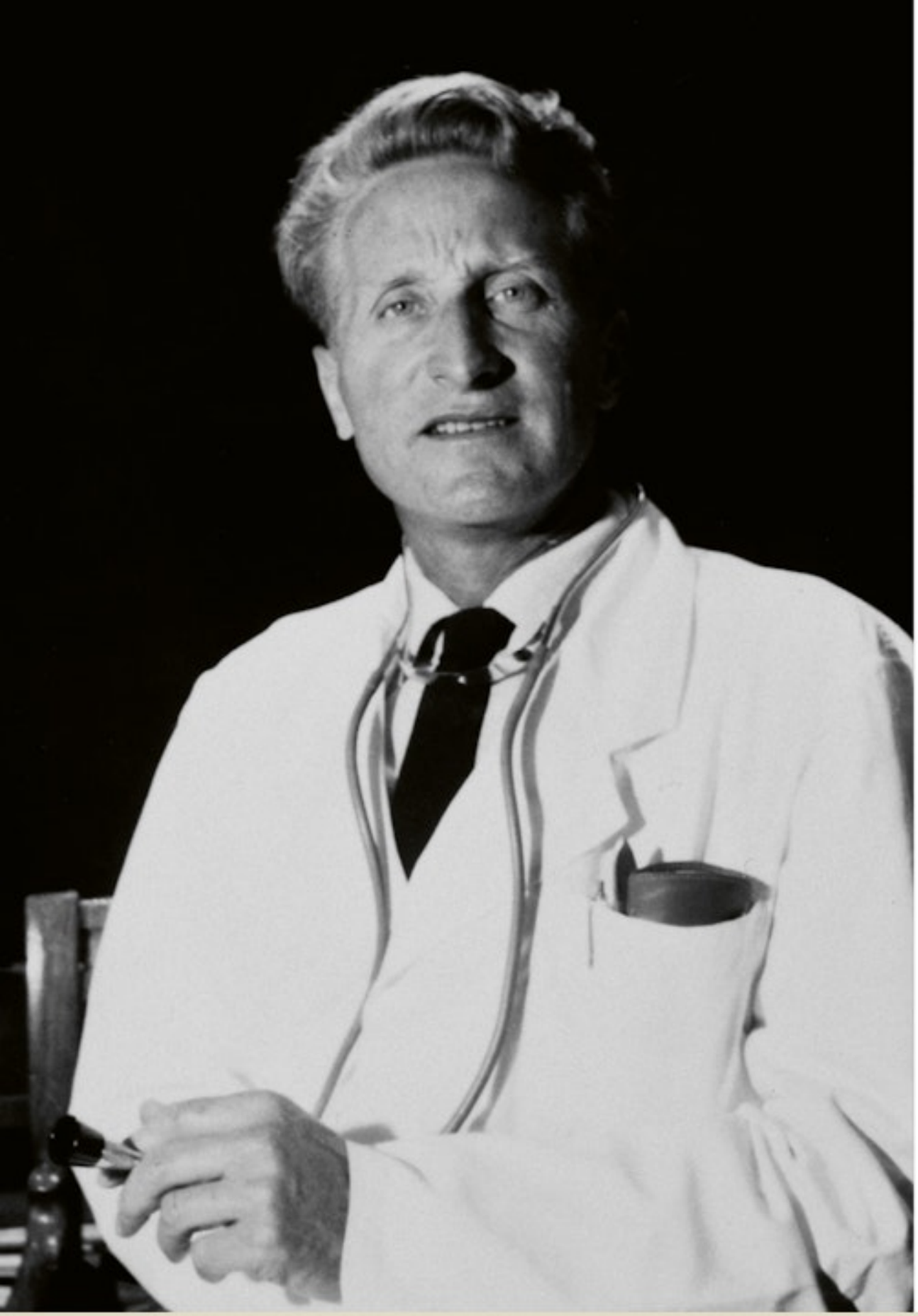
It's hard to believe that an orthopaedic shoe could be synonymous with rebellious style around the world. Yet that is what the Dr. Martens brand continues to represent to millions of its ardent fans.

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.



Who Was Dr. Martens?

Dr. Martens may not be a real person, but Dr Klaus Maertens certainly was. The brand as we know it today begins with him. A doctor in the German Army, he found himself in post-war Munich at the age of 25, nursing a broken foot. The year was 1945; World War II had just ended. He did not break his foot during his time in the service, however; this injury was one he earned from an unfortunate skiing accident.

As he was recovering from his injury, he found that the standard issue, leather-soled Schnürschuhe lowboots that had been part of the German Army uniform since 1937 actually hurt his feet more than helped them. Shoemaking and footwear styles were undergoing a similar shift. It had been a little over a century since the Industrial Revolution had commercialised the footwear industry, allowing for more mass production for a craft that was once exclusively handmade. Concurrently, strides were being made when it came to what was happening in the world of vulcanised soles.

American chemist Charles Goodyear discovered that heating up rubber and adding sulphur made it even more flexible. The vulcanisation process had many industrial applications, but it also made it much easier to make durable, rubber-soled shoes. Yet while canvas plimsolls and burgeoning sneaker companies like Converse were explicitly meant for athletic pursuits, Maertens saw an opportunity in making a shoe that had the classic, dressed-up appeal of a military boot, combined with the comfort and orthopaedic benefits of a rubber sole.

OPPOSITE: Dr Klaus Maertens, creator of the original Dr. Martens boot.

PREVIOUS: Dr Klaus Maertens and Dr Herbert Funk surrounded by early lasts and prototypes of their signature orthopaedic footwear soles.

The first prototype of what would become the Dr. Martens 1460 leather boot took design elements from the German Schnürschuhe and sat it on top of a unique, air-cushioned sole originally made from heat-sealed repurposed tyre rubber. He made his proof of concept using a salvaged cobbler's last and a needle, but it would still take a couple of years before his brand-new shoe business got any proverbial legs behind it.

RIGHT: Standard-issue German army field boots from World War II share similar details to modern Dr. Martens shoes. Details like the double-strapped gaiter – originally made to keep out materials like sand in arid environments – were eschewed in favour of a simpler design. Ultimately, the best part about what would become the Dr. Martens 1460 boot is the way it combines a casually elegant shape with a silhouette rooted in utilitarian functionality.

Maertens and Funk

It wasn't until Dr Maertens showed his prototype to Dr Herbert Funk, an old friend from university and an accomplished mechanical engineer, that the brand as we know it today would begin to take shape. Funk was initially intrigued by the new shoe design and saw its potential as a hard-wearing work shoe. The two began a partnership in 1947, using discarded rubber moulds and military supplies to make the initial production of footwear.

Operating out of Seeshaupt, Germany, the brand began with the name Dr. Maertens Airwair, nodding to the innovative technology in the sole. The shoes were an instant hit with an unexpected crowd: older women. During the brand's first year of business, 80 per cent of sales were to women over the age of 40. Although the target market was not the comfort-seeking men they may have first thought wanted an easier-to-wear boot, this success was enough for the brand to expand the business, outgrowing the small shacks, workshops and decommissioned army barracks they had first used for production, and open up a factory in Munich.

RIGHT: Dr Klaus Maertens and Dr Herbert Funk at one of their early factories.

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.

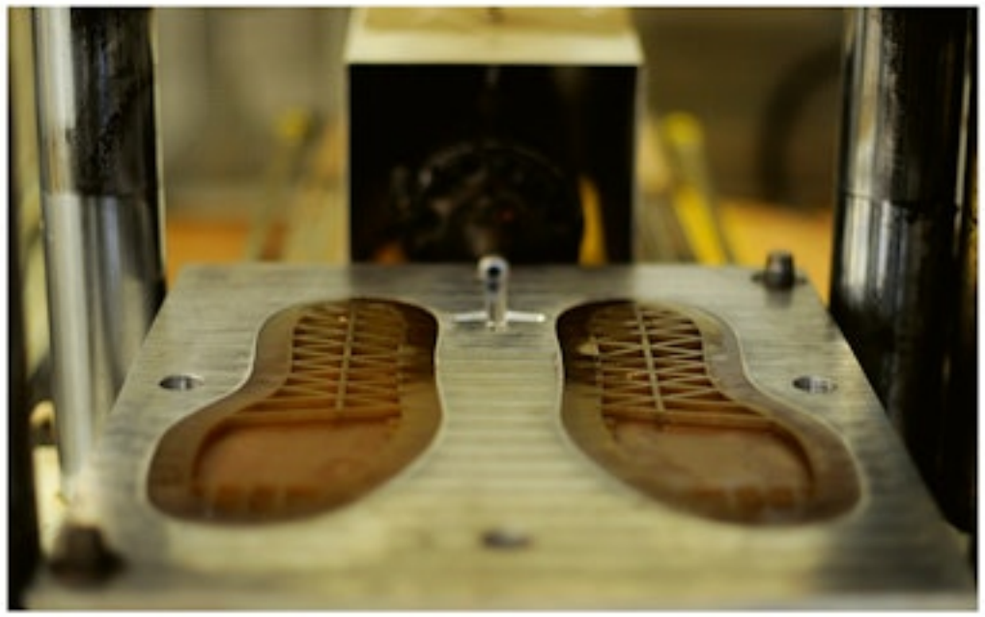
The first mass-produced designs have more in common with a modern-day hybrid dress shoe than the sleek, utilitarian shapes of popular Dr. Martens styles, now set atop a semi-translucent lug sole. Perhaps that unintentionally fashion-forward aesthetic is one of the reasons why women gravitated towards 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.

Behind the AirWair

Innovative comfort is at the core of what Dr. Martens is known for. When Dr Klaus Maertens first had the idea of making an orthopaedic boot, he utilised more flexible rubber instead of the common leather soles usually associated with proper footwear. In the beginning, this was accomplished by using heat-sealed rubber and combining that with a leather upper. Over time, and as manufacturing technology progressed, the materials evolved while the ethos has remained intact.

Modern day Dr. Martens 'AirWair' soles start off as tiny granules of PVC, a durable plastic. These are fed into a hopper and flow into a hot injection moulding machine that is poured into a metal mould. It's here that the air bubbles in the soles literally take shape, as the melted PVC cools to form air pockets that give the soles their signature bounce and comfort.



ABOVE: The moulds for Dr. Martens' signature AirWair soles at their factory in England.

ABOVE: A brand new pair of Dr. Martens 1461 shoes, ready to be placed into the box.

This process also reduces wasteful byproduct, as extra PVC can be recycled back into the production line. The result is a sole that offers excellent slip-resistance and abrasion – thanks to a material that is oil and fat resistant. Meanwhile, the air pockets in Dr. Martens' signature soles provide the long-lasting comfort and shock absorption that continues to please the feet of many of the brand's fans worldwide.

In order to attach the sole to the boot, a PVC welt is stitched to the upper, and then the welt and sole are welded together at temperatures in excess of 650°C, a process that uses a hot blade and pressurised rollers to force the components together, and upon cooling, the result is a shoe that has been put together without the use of any harmful adhesives. As part of the company's target to make its manufacturing more sustainable, Dr. Martens is investing into research and development for PVC alternatives that are not derived from fossil fuels, aiming to remove fossil-based chemicals from the entirety of its product line by 2035, and an even grander ambition to only use sustainable materials by the year 2040.

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.

This bold new idea presented challenges right from the get-go. In order to start production, Bill Griggs needed to bring in the unique machines that produced the AirWair moulds. And not only were they hard to find; they were incredibly expensive. However, Griggs hit a stroke of luck; when the factory the machines were situated in went bankrupt he swooped in and bought them. But even then, upon transporting the equipment to his Cobbs Lane factory, it was too large to fit into the door.

Undeterred, Griggs attempted to get permission to raise the factory roof from the local council, who refused. So, in a stroke of ingenuity, Griggs opted to have his team dig a hole in the factory floor to accommodate the too-tall machinery. A week later, he started production on a cherry red leather 8-hole boot that took its numeric name from the date it was first made: 1 April 1960. Hence: The 1460 Boot. Exactly one year later, production began on the low-top three-eye model, christening it the 1461.

The puzzle pieces for the Dr. Martens of today slowly began to fall into place. Among the first things that the R. Griggs Group did was anglicise the brand name from 'Dr. Maertens' AirWair' to the simpler 'Dr. Martens'. They also trademarked the AirWair sole, reshaped the heel for a more ergonomic design, added a more bulbous toe, and implemented a signature contrasting yellow stitch in the Goodyear welted strip on the outsoles of the boots. Finally, a black and yellow pull tab was added with the slogan 'With Bouncing Soles' on the shoes, in a script that resembled Bill Griggs' own handwriting. And with that, the writing wasn't just on the wall about the future success of Dr. Martens... it was also on every shoe.

LEFT: Stephen Griggs, Vice Chairman at R. Griggs Group, wears a giant pair of Dr. Martens shoes once owned by Elton John. They are a prop from the film *Tommy* in which the pop star played the Pinball Wizard.

Workwear Roots

With its rugged, utilitarian makeover Dr. Martens quickly found success outside of Dr Klaus Maerten and Dr Herbert Funk's initial customer base of women over 40. The first pairs of Dr. Martens shoes were sold as a £2 workwear boot (the equivalent of £55 today), and the working class became the brand's earliest adopters.

True to Griggs' prescience, factory workers eagerly wore the comfortable alternatives to foot-killing boots. Police officers and postal service workers - also no strangers to being on their feet for long periods of time - equally appreciated the soles that, well... saved their soles. To this day, Dr. Martens continues to manufacture a proper line of service and workwear offerings at more accessible prices to better serve its literally longest-standing customers.

LEFT: The tags on a modern Dr. Martens shoe made for industrial use.

OPPOSITE: A full view of a modern Dr. Martens shoe made for industrial use.

In fact, there's even a rare pair of Dr. Martens released in 2010 emblazoned with the logo of the UK's Royal Mail. The only way to get them? You had to be a postal operative. And while it may seem unlikely that a shoe fit for blue collar workers and police officers would eventually become a symbol for the type of people who would explicitly stand against authority, it's precisely the kind of story that encapsulates how repurposed uniforms gained a second life in subculture.

Around the same time in the 1960s era that Dr. Martens began to gain prominence on the feet of the establishment's foot patrol, a wave of counter-culture began taking the world by storm. From the hippies to the beatniks who began wearing military jackets and Breton-stripe shirts in an entirely new context, something was happening in music and culture in London that would give Dr. Martens an entirely new sense of timelessness.

AirWair and the Airwaves

The British pop culture boom of the 1960s brought London's bustling music scene to the forefront of the world. And while The Beatles popularised mop top haircuts, Cuban-heeled boots and sharp monochromatic suits, rock 'n' roll was becoming more daring, not just sonically, but stylistically. Bands sought to inspire shock and awe through harder-hitting music, and British youth found plenty to rebel against, not least the Conservative Party which had been in power since the early 1950s. The opposition party of Labour was elected in 1964.

Working-class youths in particular began to see Dr. Martens as a uniform for the downtrodden and began to proudly wear them as a way to express their discontent beyond their sleeve. One of Dr. Martens' most famous wearers in its early days was none other than Pete Townshend of The Who.

There was one instance in 1964, when The Who was playing their regular Tuesday night slot at the Railway Tavern, when Townshend cracked his guitar on the venue's low ceiling, snapping it at the neck. Yet, instead of instantly picking up his spare and playing on, he proceeded to smash it to smithereens all over the floor, giving a release to a mutual sense of pent-up aggression and signifying a pitch shift in rock 'n' roll.

Townshend's highly physical performances weren't just tiring, but also hurt his feet. So, it's not surprising that three years after that 1964 show, he became an ardent fan of the Dr. Martens 1460 boot, a shoe that would become synonymous with some of his best-remembered performances, but which also reflected a trend that came to define the musical uniform of an entire era of seminal British sound.

OPPOSITE: A group of punk youths outside Eric's nightclub in Liverpool wearing Dr. Martens in 1979.

RIGHT: Pete Townshend of The Who performs in Dr. Martens at a 1979 show in Copenhagen.

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.

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.

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

In the mid-1960s, Jamaican ska gained popularity with British youth. Taking elements of Caribbean calypso, jazz and R&B, the music is characterised by a walking bass line punctuated by rhythms on and off the beat. Meanwhile, evolving from the Mod appreciation for mixing tailoring with elements of military surplus, the MA-1 bomber jacket supplanted the M-51 fishtail parka as the go-to outerwear piece.

So-called 'skinheads' or 'skins' often shaved their heads or preferred close-cropped hairdos, and wore checked shirts from brands like Fred Perry, braces and cuffed drainpipe jeans. Dr. Martens were also an essential part of this new youth uniform, especially the cherry red 1460. Other accessories included pork pie hats and the look was largely influenced by the styles of Jamaican rude boys.

RIGHT: A gang of skinheads in Dr. Martens have a face-off with local police in 1982.

PREVIOUS: A scene from the 2010 film *Brighton Rock* depicting a group of mods descending on the seaside town of Brighton.

Despite the aesthetic and the term 'skinhead' being co-opted by racist right-wing movements, what's ironic is that the subculture itself started as a celebration of multiculturalism and appreciation for Jamaican culture.

However, when the Two-Tone boom began to take off in the late 1970s - reviving the old ska sound with elements of rocksteady, reggae, and new wave - groups like The Specials reclaimed the style to promote racial unity and remind everyone of the movement's truly inclusive foundations.

Doc Goes Punk

By the mid-1970s, a movement known as punk emerged in New York City and London. Building on the rebellious energy of the increasingly frenetic music that preceded it, combined with an overly complacent political climate in London, punk existed as a loud slap to the face of society. It championed anti-consumerist, anti-establishment views, political music from bands with names meant to instantly shock the average person, and an in-your-face style that valued individuality and ingenuity over any store-bought aesthetic.

The 'do-it-yourself' mindset informed ripped-and-repaired clothing held together by safety pins, trousers and jeans made even skinnier on a home sewing machine, and repurposed Royal Stewart tartan and other establishment iconography remade in a more rebellious fashion. Clothing associated with different kinks like BDSM and S&M became part of the uniform, such as bondage trousers with extra straps and buckles adorned all over, and explicit bootlegs of well-known cartoon characters like Mickey and Minnie Mouse.

OPPOSITE: Two young people wear typical skinhead outfits in 1969.

LEFT: A young gang of punks hang out in 1980.

The movement was especially prevalent in London's King's Road, the famous location of Malcolm McLaren's SEX boutique, which helped propel the fashion career of designer Vivienne Westwood to brand new heights. Punk's ethos was one of extreme inclusivity and individualism. Everyone was welcome, and the only rule was radical self-expression and a common stance against fascism in all its forms.

Bands like the Sex Pistols led the charge, and Dr. Martens was an easy pick for this new subculture's choice of footwear. It could be argued that this was the moment the shoes became something more than just a pair of shoes, but a proper symbol of rebellion. If the extreme mohawk was the flag a punk wanted to fly to express his or her individuality, then a pair of Dr. Martens shoes is the foundation they stood on.

RIGHT: Police arrest a punk protester in Dr. Martens during the 'Stop the City of London' demonstration in 1984. These protests took place against the military-financial complex and aimed to disrupt financial activity in the City of London. Activism and anti-establishmentarianism are two core tenets of punk culture, rooted in a heavy distrust of authority. Dr. Martens became part of this subcultural uniform by subverting the silhouette of a military boot but ironically outfitting those who rebelled against that power structure.

The Heartbeat of The Brand

Music helped give Dr. Martens a second life outside of being a utilitarian orthopeadic shoe. But instead of becoming a one-note label, the brand has embraced that heritage over the years and helped amplify numerous movements throughout the decades.

At first, the trends just so happened to fall in Dr. Martens' favour, but the more the brand began to understand why it continued to appeal to newer generations of artists, the more it was able to use its platform to empower up-and-coming musicians and movements. Here are some of the ways that Dr. Martens has proved its staying power in music and style.

RIGHT: A concert performance at SXSW (South by Southwest) festival in Austin, Texas sponsored by Dr. Martens.

New Romantics

Although the punk and skinhead trend carried on well into the 1980s, even seeing a bit of a revival in the ska and two-tone scenes thanks to groups like the Specials (who used their platform to promote a more inclusive subculture, taking it back to its roots), a bolder and more daring approach to style began to take root.

Emerging from the nightclub scenes in London and Birmingham, the New Romantic movement embraced flamboyant and eccentric styles influenced by musicians such as David Bowie, Marc Bolan and Roxy Music, fusing ostentatious cues from glam rock with the early Romantic period styles from the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Nicknames for its adherents included New Dandies, Blitz Kids and Romantic Rebels. Androgyny and makeup were key to some of the looks, exemplified by artists like Boy George, who made eyeshadow and lipstick part of his signature, gender-bending uniform. As a result, boots like the 1460 and low-tops like the 1461 took on a different meaning, grounding bold outfits in a comfortable way. Newer Dr. Martens styles have paid homage to the trend, implementing two-tone uppers reminiscent of saddle shoes.

LEFT: Boy George and the New Romantic-era band Culture Club in 1984. Widely considered one of the most influential bands of the scene, the English new wave group was known for its signature fashion sense. Boy George in particular favoured androgynous styles defying standard gender norms at the time, often wearing makeup, skirts and other items that modern pop stars and their fans certainly would no longer bat an eye at, but at the time were nonetheless considered controversial.

Streetwear

In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, subcultures like punk and hip-hop began to meld with each other in a new way, bringing along newer movements like skateboarding, graffiti, DJing and club culture. It turned out that the alternative-minded individuals had a lot in common. Rather than the strict, prescriptive uniforms of subcultures past, this burgeoning movement was all about finding like minds and connecting over shared values and tastes.

Keep in mind this was before the internet existed, and pockets of forward-thinking cognoscenti found each other by hanging out at the same places, frequenting the same skate spots, and of course, sharing similar tastes in clothes. But what was most important was that everyone wore it in their own way. The movement colloquially known as 'streetwear' got its catch-all name from brands that were inspired by many subcultures, but never fully tethered itself to one. A brand like Stüssy may have started in surfing, but never truly defined itself as a surf brand. The same could be said of its most prominent successor Supreme, which began as an elevated take on the neighbourhood skate shop and went on to become a global alternative fashion juggernaut.

While many of the brands in this milieu are known for their familiar logos on all manner of hoodies, T-shirts and baseball caps, a deeper dive into their histories reveals a similar set of codes you would find at a proper fashion house. Each one is informed by a very distinct set of inspirations but uses that foundation to tell different stories each season. And part of the modus operandi of doing that is making collaborative product.

After all, it's difficult for smaller brands to make items like footwear in larger quantities without having to make a big investment in factories, moulds and design. Working with existing brands and manufacturers was a shortcut for mixing a unique story with a product that was already up to snuff. The idea was born from the fact that if something as perfect as a Dr. Martens shoe already existed, there was no reason to try to make a new version of it, so why not partner with the best in the business to make small runs of something truly special?

ABOVE: Fashion influencer Bryanboy wearing Dr. Martens with a collaborative Louis Vuitton x Supreme pouch during London Fashion Week.

Stüssy

Founded in 1980 by Shawn Stüssy and his business partner, accountant Frank Sinatra Jr. (no relation to the famous singer), Stüssy began his design career as a trained surfboard shaper in Orange County, California. He learned the craft under some of the area's foremost craftsmen, cutting his teeth at Russell Surfboards in Newport Beach under a collective colloquially known as The Brotherhood. Stüssy's innovative surfboard designs were enhanced by his graphic tastes, implementing his musical influences from reggae, new wave and punk.

What's more, he added his hand-scrawled Stüssy signature to his work, a now-recognised logo partially inspired by his uncle, fine artist Jan Stüssy. He began applying that logo to T-shirts and hoodies, and slowly an apparel business was born. The term 'streetwear' didn't exist then, but early on the brand knew what it wanted to do to create its own lane in fashion.

As the brand became more successful, Stüssy took design influences from fashion houses like Chanel, Louis Vuitton, and Comme des Garçons, flipping their recognisable logos and design signatures into knowing nods for a burgeoning community of young tastemakers. One of the brand's first stockists in New York was an independent boutique called UNION, founded by British expat James Jebbia and his ex-partner Bianca Fusco. Jebbia saw the potential for a proper Stüssy flagship store and partnered with Stüssy to open their first store in New York's SoHo neighbourhood, which, at the time, wasn't the shopping capital it is today.

Although Shawn Stüssy left the company in 1996, the company has managed to keep the spirit of the brand alive through the way it continues to filter high fashion influences for a knowing audience at an accessible price point. Their myriad of collaborations with Dr. Martens feature nods to musical movements like hip-hop with iterations harkening back to rugged 1990s boots, as well as ska and punk with interpretations of the Penton Loafer in eye-catching animal prints and textures.

OPPOSITE: Stüssy's Dr. Martens collaboration from Fall/Winter 2021 paying homage to a classic New York City winter boot and hip-hop style staple.

BELOW: Stüssy's former New York City flagship located at Spring Street in SoHo.

Supreme

The first Supreme store opened in 1994 on Lafayette Street in New York's SoHo neighbourhood. Its proprietor, James Jebbia, was close friends with Shawn Stüssy and when the latter expressed that he was leaving his label, Jebbia saw an opportunity to start something for himself. Bucking the trend of gritty neighbourhood skate shops, the first Supreme store offered high ceilings and a more elevated environment akin to an independent fashion boutique, rather than the kind of digs you'd expect skate rats to hang out in.

The brand's simplistic box logo featuring 'Supreme' written in Futura Bold Italic set inside a red box was equal parts striking and iconic, drawing inspiration from the work of Barbara Kruger. From its earliest days, Supreme defied conventions and genre, mixing the work of artists like Rammellzee and Damien Hirst alongside collaborations with cult Japanese labels like visvim. Its box logo-adorned hoodies, tees and caps fast became a signifier of downtown cool. The brand's notoriety was furthered when people began sticking their bright red stickers on Calvin Klein ads featuring model Kate Moss, garnering an unexpected clientele of knowing fashionistas who understood what the brand was all about.

As the brand evolved, it became known for how malleable it was, creating novelty items from branded crowbars, fire extinguishers, nunchucks, baseball bats and even literal bricks embossed with their signature logo. These items served as commentary on how commonplace collaborations had become, but also were a testament to the strength of brand Jebbia built slowly over the decades. Perhaps Supreme's biggest asset is how hard it worked to maintain its credibility.

Even now, Supreme collaborations and its seasonal releases command long lines outside its flagship stores around the world. It continues to work with Dr. Martens on collaborative shoes each season. Beyond tasteful graphic placements on styles like the 1461, the brand has also resurrected silhouettes from the Dr. Martens archive, including the apron-toe 5-eye Oxford, and more recently, the Ramsey Creeper, rendered in deep purple suede and shiny silver leather.

OPPOSITE: Supreme's Spring/Summer 2023 collaboration injecting the Ramsey Creeper with bold purple suede.

BELOW: A line snaking around the block of Supreme's flagship store in SoHo.

UNDERCOVER

Influenced by the energy of American streetwear, a concurrent movement began taking place in Japan in the late 1990s. Led by Hiroshi Fujiwara, he arbitraged culture from different cities, bringing in music like punk and hip-hop to Japan while also drawing awareness to sought-after labels like Stüssy.

Fujiwara was instrumental in the establishment of NOWHERE, a concept store in the back streets of Shibuya's Harajuku neighbourhood, a quiet area that suited stores who peddled in-the-know wares like best-kept secrets. One of the partners of NOWHERE was Jun Takahashi, a Bunka Fashion College graduate who was obsessed with punk, even playing in a band known as the Tokyo Sex Pistols.

Takahashi began UNDERCOVER as a punk-influenced fashion label, taking cues from designers like Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren's seminal Seditionaries line. From its first day, UNDERCOVER's slogan has been 'We Make Noise Not Clothes', and that ethos continues to inform Takahashi's approach to design. An expert in cultural sampling, many of his collections revolve around music and pop culture references, taking films like *Star Wars* and *2001: A Space Odyssey*, TV shows like *Twin Peaks* and albums like Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of The Moon* and turning them into avant-garde clothes that toe the line between high-end merch and thought-provoking fashion.

Indeed, when Takahashi began working with Dr. Martens, one of the more memorable collaborations he made was an elegant interpretation of 1461 shoe done in patent leather. One of several special makeups made for the Fall/Winter 2019 men's collection, it features the words 'CHAOS' and 'BALANCE' in script on the toe box, a recurring theme for designer Jun Takahashi.

OPPOSITE: One of UNDERCOVER's Dr. Martens collaborations from the Fall/Winter 2019 collection, featuring the 1461 in elegant patent leather.

BELOW:UNDERCOVER designer Jun Takahashi.

BAPE

The other partner of NOWHERE was Tomoaki Nagao – better known as the mononym NIGO. As Takahashi's UNDERCOVER line began to take off, NIGO wanted to start his own clothing line as well. The two met during their time at Bunka Fashion College, but NIGO's interests were in hip-hop and vintage workwear.

A Bathing Ape – BAPE for short – began in 1993 as a line of graphic-focused streetwear. Its name was a reference to a Japanese idiom for excess: 'Like a bathing ape in lukewarm water', and its iconography was inspired by the hominids from the *Planet of the Apes* films. Mixing vintage denim, military and hip-hop style inspirations, the brand developed a following for its full-zip hoodies influenced by fighter planes, jeans inspired by the front embroidery of rodeo clowns, and sneakers that aped existing designs from brands like Nike.

One of BAPE's most-loved patterns is a camouflage that implements its signature ape head. Done by the mysterious Japanese artist Sk8thing, it remains a brand signature. It was even used for a Dr. Martens collaboration, tastefully embroidering the pattern on the leather upper of the shoe.

Although NIGO left the label after it was acquired by I.T. Group in 2011, there remains a group of stalwarts who still can't get enough BAPE. NIGO remains active in the fashion and streetwear space; he started up a new label called Human Made that builds on his love of old vintage clothing, making youthful clothes inspired by the hard-wearing goods of yore. And in 2021, he was named the creative director at KENZO, the French fashion house originally founded by Japanese designer Kenzo Takada.

OPPOSITE: A Bathing Ape's Dr. Martens collaboration from the Spring/Summer 2020 collection, featuring the brand's signature camouflage.

BELOW: A Bathing Ape flagship store in Shibuya, Tokyo.

Denim Tears

Longtime creative consultant and art world consigliere Tremaine Emory established his Denim Tears label in 2019. Occupying a liminal space between clothing line, art project and history lesson, Denim Tears is a label that tells the complicated story of the African Diaspora. In juxtaposing the fraught history of racism with the practice of making conversational clothing, each release doubles as a lesson in the collective Black experience with a healthy dose of art history.

An avid fan of artists like Arthur Jafa and David Hammons, Emory's Denim Tears collection items often reference Hammons' 1990 work 'African American Flag', depicting the United States flag rendered in black, green and red – using the colours of the Pan-African flag to illustrate the African Diaspora. The most used motif in Emory's line is a cotton wreath, appearing on everything from jeans to sweatshirts to T-shirts, referencing the American slave trade that had Black workers picking cotton in many Southern plantations.

The controversial and necessary nature of Emory's work was amplified in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, making him an important figure in creating more inclusive spaces for Black creatives in industries like fashion. One of his first jobs in fashion was working for designer Marc Jacobs, who remains one of his biggest mentors. As a creative adviser to figures like Kanye West and the late designer Virgil Abloh, Emory had a seat at some of the world's most exclusive creative tables. It's a position that earned him a spot as Supreme's creative director in February 2022, a post he resigned from less than a year later, alleging systemic racism at the company.

Emory's willingness to use his platform to speak about these issues continues to make him an important part of the creative conversation. In 2022, he also partnered with Dr. Martens to make several versions of the 1460 Boot and Penton Loafer, repurposing Hammons' African American Flag in the shape of the Union Jack, nodding to the Afro-Caribbean Diaspora and the important influence of those cultures to the UK's creative developments in music and style.

OPPOSITE: Denim Tears designer Tremaine Emory reinterprets the British Union Jack with the colours of the Pan-African flag for his 2023 Dr. Martens collaboration.

BELOW: Denim Tears designer and founder Tremaine Emory.

Fashion

Dr. Martens exists explicitly as an anti-fashion brand. Its humble beginnings creating and marketing an orthopaedic shoe that became a workwear staple firmly place it in the canon of similar blue-collar brands who are anything but exclusive. Its popularity with the punk subculture was a clear message that the brand had little in common with expensive, luxurious clothes often seen on the runway, as well as the types of customers associated with them.

But fashion is a fickle industry, and often it elevates humble inspiration to a different level for a new audience. The advent of collaborative projects between storied fashion brands and sneaker companies like Nike and Vans and high street retailers like H&M and Uniqlo opened up a new avenue for accessibility. It was a way of getting elevated design in the hands of the average consumer, a different approach from diffusion lines that fashion labels often make to court a more price-conscious audience.

Stemming from a spirit of mutual appreciation, Dr. Martens' presence on the runway and beyond reflects the brand's ability to exist in multiple contexts. It also speaks to the evolution of fashion designers and a generation of progressive creatives who are keen to what people are wearing on the street and use it as a source of inspiration for what ends up on the catwalks in cities like London, New York, Milan and Paris.

Similar to the world of streetwear, Dr. Martens' collaborations

in the fashion space not only raise even more awareness to the company's core offerings, but attract a new audience of customers who appreciate both equally. The democratisation of fashion is all about mixing the accessible with the aspirational, and these types of partnerships level the playing field in new ways.

LEFT: Model Metta Irebe wearing collaborative Rick Owens x Dr. Martens shoes at New York Fashion Week. Avant-garde designer Owens is known for his norm-defying designs, like these shoes with an intricate lace pattern evocative of a pentagram. Owens' dark designs have garnered him both praise and controversy.

Raf Simons

Belgian fashion designer Raf Simons launched his eponymous menswear label in 1995. Influenced heavily by youth culture and music groups like the Manic Street Preachers, Simons' designs reimagined menswear uniforms like schoolboy suits and standard-issue military gear. His early collections elongated the shape of silhouettes like the MA-1 bomber, and emblazoned M-51 fishtail parkas with the work of Peter Saville, the Manchester-born graphic designer who famously created album art for Joy Division and New Order.

Much of Simons' most sought-after pieces come from Saville and Simons' longtime collaboration. For his Autumn/Winter 2003 collection, Simons presented a series of fishtail parkas adorned with art from New Order's *Power, Corruption and Lies* album, featuring a painterly floral arrangement that has become a cult piece. Many of the pieces reference Saville's time working for seminal British music label Factory Records, a now-defunct label that was based in Manchester and responsible for launching the careers of Joy Division, New Order and Happy Mondays.

Raf Simons' designs often explored dark, dystopian themes, and the clothing spoke to a new generation of fashion consumers who understood culture just as much as quality clothes. The approach of remixing subcultures and their uniforms was a novel one that also helped redefine what fashion could be.

Simons' austere tailoring and appreciation for clean lines also got the attention of several fashion houses. For seven years he was the creative director of Jil Sander, and famously took over the house of Dior from 2012 until 2015, where he exhibited his chops doing womenswear while designer Kris Van Assche still helmed Dior Homme. For a time, he was tasked with revitalising the American fashion brand Calvin Klein, which he did by reimagining and reinterpreting quintessentially American archetypes like the cowboy and doing a licensed Jaws collaboration for his Spring/Summer 2019 collection. After shuttering his menswear label in 2022, he currently co-designs Prada's collections alongside Miuccia Prada.

His ability to balance culture and understanding of subversion is precisely what makes his collaborations with Dr. Martens so interesting. The understated appeal of an elegant double monk is livened up with metallic leathers. For his Fall/Winter 2019 collection, he made a collaborative pair of 1461s with an exposed steel toe, nodding to the brand's workwear roots while showing his appreciation for built-to-last footwear.

LEFT: A Raf Simons and Dr. Martens collaborative 1460 Boot for the designer's Spring/Summer 2020 collection featuring decorative metal rings all over the shoe.

Rick Owens

LEFT: Designer Rick Owens beaming outside his Paris Fashion Week show in 2018.

Born Richard Saturnino Owens in the rural town of Porterville, California, the designer referred to by his hardcore fanbase simply as 'Rick' is known as the lord of dark design. His eponymous clothing label and furniture line is truly a world of his own making.

Known for his exaggerated silhouettes and predilection for extremes, Owens' clothes include elongated, form-fitting tops, blistered lambskin leather jackets that look as if they were slowly decaying, and mind-boggling plays with proportion meant to distort common standards of beauty. Yet, in doing so he's created his own unique version of luxury and elegance. By no means is anything with a Rick Owens label on it readily accessible to the average consumer - whether by price or aesthetic - but the fact that his designs are truly an acquired taste is precisely the reason he is one of today's most acclaimed designers.

Owens is also known for his signature footwear. Taking silhouettes like sneakers and boots, he plays up the proportions to make them look like what he describes as 'monster trucks for your feet'. Whether it's enormous sneakers with elongated tongues like Ramones or Geobaskets, or the high-heeled Kiss boots that resemble the type of shoes Gene Simmons or Ace Frehley (of the band KISS) would wear on stage, his footwear is a new kind of status symbol.

Ever the envelope pusher, Rick Owens' collaborations with Dr. Martens are known for the sheer amount of laces placed on the upper. By moving around the eyelets and speed hooks on the top of the shoe, his rendition of icons like the 1460 boot result in a Satanic pentagram being formed through the lacing. No stranger to courting controversy, Owens regularly uses the pentagram and other extreme images and phrases in his designs. He's not for everybody, and that's exactly the point.

LEFT: Rick Owens exaggerated the laces on his first Dr. Martens collaboration from his Spring/Summer 2021 collection.

Comme des Garçons

ABOVE: An attendee at Art Basel Hong Kong wearing Comme des Garçons x Dr. Martens shoes.

Rei Kawakubo founded her Japanese fashion label in 1969 without any formal fashion training, although she did study fine arts and literature at Keio University. Considering how intellectual her cult designs are, those disciplines help inform what makes the brand - colloquially known as CDG - a favourite among in-the-know fashion editors and obsessive consumers alike.

Known for using atypical fabrics (usually in black) and unfinished seams, Kawakubo's designs exemplify a certain wabi-sabi philosophy of Japanese beauty. It's about finding the quiet elegance present in the intentionally imperfect, and while pretentious French fashion critics initially scoffed at the gritty details that characterise many of CDG garments, it's safe to say almost all of them have come around by now.

Kawakubo is also known as the founder of Dover Street Market (DSM), a concept store originally opened on Dover Street in Mayfair, London. Now with seven locations across London, New York, Los Angeles, Ginza, Singapore, Beijing and most recently Paris, DSM is highly regarded as one of the best places to shop in the world.

Beyond carrying the entirety of Comme des Garçons offerings (which includes multiple sub-labels as well as a line of incubated brands like Sky High Farm Workwear and Airei), the discerning store not only champions younger, avant-garde designers, but also carries many independent and luxury designers, resulting in an interesting juxtaposition of brands.

The partnership between Dr. Martens and Comme des Garçons goes back over a decade. Like many CDG collaborations, these are very exclusive and only available in select stores. In fact, CDG distributes them itself so they can have a better say over which stockists are the best fit. Of course, most designs have been in black, but there are interesting twists and details that elevate classic Dr. Martens silhouettes, like 1460 and 1461 shoes made from durably luxurious shell cordovan, a difficult-to-produce equine leather derived from the rump of a horse that gives it an exceptionally high quality.

LEFT: A stark white shoe from the Spring/Summer 2023 Comme des Garçons Homme x Dr. Martens collaboration made from shell cordovan.

Yohji Yamamoto

ABOVE: A model wearing Yohji Yamamoto x Dr. Martens shoes on the runway for his Fall/Winter 2017 collection.

Although Yohji Yamamoto had designs on becoming a lawyer, going as far as graduating with a proper law degree, he gave up that career to help at his mother's dressmaking business, learning the craft of tailoring along the way. In 1969 he graduated from the prestigious Bunka Fashion College with a degree in fashion design.

Upon launching his eponymous fashion label in 1977, his womenswear collections caught the attention of the fashion world for how similar the clothes were to his menswear. Both had a strong emphasis on tailoring, oversized silhouettes, and interesting drapes that provided a bold, new vision of elegance and what seduction could mean. Instead of revealing cuts and form-fitting silhouettes, Yamamoto's designs gave womenswear a sense of proportion as protection.

A longtime collaborator with Dr. Martens, Yamamoto's collaborations with the brand play on his codes of repurposed militaria as well as remixed tailoring. Paratrooper-inspired details on a high boot are made even more extreme with a zipper detail. Monk strap shoes are made funkier with asymmetrical placements on the upper, creating a cognitive dissonance that is still compellingly wearable.

LEFT: Yohji Yamamoto's collaboration with Dr. Martens from his Fall/Winter 2023 collection, featuring a side-zip and elasticated gore panel on the side of an elongated boot.

Marc Jacobs

American fashion designer Marc Jacobs got his start in the industry at the age of 15, working at the stockroom of Charivari, an influential New York City boutique known for its forward-thinking merchandising and predilection for avant-garde designers. He debuted his eponymous label in 1986, earning the Council of Fashion Designers of America's prestigious Perry Ellis Award for 'New Fashion Talent' just a year later – the youngest designer to ever do so.

ABOVE: Dr. Martens on the runway for Marc Jacobs' 1993 show for Perry Ellis.

Along with this business partner and longtime creative collaborator Robert Duffy, he began to oversee womenswear for Perry Ellis in the early 1990s. One of his most famous collections there was inspired by the nascent grunge movement, which contained silk interpretations of flannel shirts and looks styled with Dr. Martens boots. Although the collection was lauded by critics, it flopped commercially and was also viewed as the exact kind of luxury fashion that grunge was adamantly against, leading to Jacobs' dismissal from the post.

But that didn't stop Jacobs' trajectory. By 1997, he was appointed creative director at Louis Vuitton. His 17-year tenure at the house is characterised by bringing culture to the storied French label, including iconic collaborations with artists like Stephen Sprouse, Takashi Murakami and Yayoi Kusama, who breathed new life into the house's high-end accessories and signature motifs.

Concurrently, he was still running his Marc Jacobs label as well as his diffusion line, Marc By Marc Jacobs, which folded in 2015. In its place is the newer line Heaven By Marc Jacobs, a younger label under the helm of Ava Nirui which brought back the youthful edge of Marc By Marc Jacobs, filtered through a distinctively Gen-Z lens. The DIY attitude and use of archival prints and trinkets seeped into Jacobs' other partnerships. For the 60th anniversary of the 1460 Boot in 2020, Jacobs took that aesthetic and applied it to Dr. Martens' first ever vegan boot, once again proving his ability to stay relevant to younger generations.

LEFT: Marc Jacobs celebrated Dr. Martens' 60th anniversary with a pair of vegan leather 1460 boots adorned with plenty of hardware.

Music & Culture

As a brand built on the feet of artists, musicians and cultural creators, Dr. Martens has always championed the art of expression. It went from being a symbol of rebel style to a canvas for creativity. It was only a matter of time before the brand looked to its past to work with some of the multidisciplinary artists who really exemplify the modern legacy of the brand.

It helped to start with musicians. From The Who's Pete Townshend to Johnny Rotten of Sex Pistols, there's certainly no shortage of true rockstars who have made the British footwear brand a quintessential part of subcultural style. It then extended itself to the fine artists and street artists who would customise their own pairs of the shoes, creating wearable works of art that new fans could access.

In a full-circle moment for a truly cultural brand, these collaborations with a plethora of entertainers, artists and music groups represent how Dr. Martens helped amplify the legacy of sound, style and creativity it was built on.

LEFT: Gwen Stefani of No Doubt performing in a bold tartan pair of Dr. Martens.

Joy Division

ABOVE: Joy Division in Manchester in 1979.

Formed in Salford, England in 1976, Joy Division was a seminal band that led the gothic, post-punk sound that would go on to inform genres like shoegaze. The group eventually consisted of vocalist and guitarist Ian Curtis, guitarist and keyboardist Bernard Sumner, bassist Peter Hook and drummer Stephen Morris.

The band was instrumental in the rise of independent record label Factory Records, as well as the graphic design career of Peter Saville. In later years, Saville's designs became a fashion statement in their own right, thanks to his collaborations with acclaimed fashion designers like Raf Simons, and eventually with streetwear labels like Supreme.

In 2018, Dr. Martens celebrated the band's sonic legacy by releasing a 1460 Boot embossed with the famous artwork from Joy Division's 1979 album *Unknown Pleasures*. The Peter Saville artwork used a data plot of signals from a radio pulsar to create the memorable, simplistic wavelength that would go on to be parodied numerous times, but remains synonymous with the band.

RIGHT: The 1460 Boot reimagined with the famous artwork from Joy Division's *Unknown Pleasures* album.

The Clash

ABOVE: The Clash photographed in New York in 1978.

A British punk progenitor formed in 1976, The Clash came together from members who were already active in the London underground music scene. Comprised of frontman Joe Strummer (born John Graham Mellor), guitarist Mick Jones, bassist Paul Simonon and drummer Nicky Headon, the band was known for its politically charged lyrics and strong social commentary.

The Clash led the charge in punk as a form of radical protest. Songs like 'White Riot' encouraged racial unity while railing against a common enemy – the overarching institution that kept both poor Whites and Blacks oppressed. Meanwhile, 'Career Opportunities' addressed low-paying jobs and a lack of upward mobility, and 'Lost In the Supermarket' is a criticism of consumer culture and capitalism.

BELOW: Military influences and shiny green leather ensures this Dr. Martens collaboration with The Clash from the Fall/Winter 2022 season only gets better with age.

The Who

The Who guitarist Pete Townshend famously put Dr. Martens on the musical map when he first started wearing a pair of the 1460 Boots in 1967, and it's a look that remains as timeless as ever. Widely considered one of the most influential rock bands of all time, The Who was first formed in 1962 by vocalist Roger Daltrey, guitarist Pete Townshend, bassist John Entwistle and drummer Keith Moon.

RIGHT: Pete Townshend wearing Dr. Martens in the United Kingdom in 1971.

Even in its early days, The Who led a style revolution. The Mod movement of scooter-driving, fashion-forward teens and young adults made fishtail parkas and mohair suits an alternative uniform. Aside from paying homage to the style in the film and album of the same name, *Quadrophenia*, they had already proven themselves capable of creating full-on rock operas. The *Tommy* album from 1969, an instant sensation about a differently-abled pinball wunderkind, spawned a feature film and many stage shows. The Who's surviving members – Daltrey and Townshed – continue to tour today.

BELOW: The 2019 collaboration between The Who and Dr. Martens also included the classic 1460 Boot.

Keith Haring

Born in Reading, Pennsylvania, artist Keith Haring moved to New York City's Lower East Side in 1978 to study painting at the School of Visual Arts. As a child, he was influenced by Walt Disney, Dr. Seuss, Charles Schulz's *Peanuts* comic strip and Looney Tunes, cartoons that would inform the playful style of his work. Later on, in his formative years, the work of artist Pierre Alechinsky would inform the large-scale images featuring writing and characters that Haring became known for.

His unique style of pop art emerged during a vibrant graffiti movement in New York City, counting figures like Rammellzee and Jean-Michel Basquiat as his contemporaries. Using his work as a social platform, he advocated for issues in the LGBTQ+ community like the AIDS epidemic and practising safe sex, as well as speaking out against the crack epidemic and apartheid.

In 1986, Haring opened the Pop Shop on 292 Lafayette Street in New York's SoHo neighbourhood. It was an unprecedented move for a fine artist to do at the time - selling T-shirts, hoodies, and more accessible versions of his work that toed the line between editioned pieces and commercialised merch. But to Haring's mind, it was about putting the work on a more even playing field where monied collectors and the average consumer could appreciate his art and become patrons at a more affordable level.

Although Haring unfortunately passed away of AIDS-related complications on 16 February 1990, his legacy lives on through the work of the Keith Haring Foundation. In 2021, they teamed up with Dr. Martens on a collaboration of four shoes featuring Haring's bold line artwork. It certainly kept the spirit of the Pop Shop's mission to make art more democratic alive.

ABOVE: The pop art of Keith Haring stands out even more as an all-over print on the Dr. Martens 1461 shoe.

Jean-Michel Basquiat

ABOVE: Jean-Michel Basquiat poses in front of one of his paintings at the Vrej Baghomian Gallery in 1988.

A bit of a child prodigy, Jean-Michael Basquiat was born in Park Slope, Brooklyn and could read and write by the age of four. His love of art was encouraged by his mother, who took him to art museums and even went as far as making him a junior member of the Brooklyn Museum of Art. By age seven, he had collaborated with his classmate Marc Prozzo on a children's book that he wrote and Prozzo illustrated.

During the late 1970s, Basquiat and his creative partner Al Diaz became the graffiti duo SAMO, putting up epigrams all over Manhattan at a time when graffiti was undergoing a cultural shift from petty crime to legitimate art form. That led to Basquiat's evolution into a painter, where his exhibits quickly garnered the attention of eager collectors and approving critics alike. Before he turned 25, he was already the youngest artist to participate in Kassel, Germany's Documenta as well as the youngest artist to exhibit at New York's Whitney Biennial.

Basquiat's practice mixed chaotic visuals to comment on wealth disparity, his own experiences in the Black community and institutionalised racism. He became a downtown art world darling, befriending influential boulevardiers like the late Glenn O'Brien, who featured him on his public access program *TV Party* as well as making him the lead in the underground film *Downtown '81*.

BELOW: A closer look at the lace locks from the 2021 collaboration between Dr. Martens and artist Jean-Michel Basquiat, depicting the recurring crown motif from his work.

His work was revisited in a few collaborations with Dr. Martens in 2020 and 2021. The first collection featured the 1460 adorned with the black-and-white cover art Basqiuat did for 'Beat Bop', a 1983 single by Rammellzee and K-Rob. The other shoe was a 1461 incorporating Basquiat's 'Dustheads', a 1982 work that broke records when it sold at Christie's for $48.8 million in 2013.

Caring For Your Boots

A fresh pair of Dr. Martens boots is always a worthy investment. And every investment requires protection. As a truly timeless style staple, if you take proper care of them, they will last for a lifetime - and judging by the sheer number of vintage pairs available, maybe more than a few lifetimes.

Dr. Martens offers several products that help you prolong the life of your shoes. The first is their signature Wonder Balsam. It's a unique blend of natural and synthetic waxes meant to keep your boots looking great. But since it contains beeswax, those who prefer their Dr. Martens vegan may have to look for other care options. It's advised that you rub some on the leather upper of the shoe right before the first wear to help soften and condition the leather.

Once your pair is comfortably broken-in, they may require some re-application to have them looking good as new. To do that, you first need to take out the laces, then go over the boots with a brush to get rid of any excess dirt or mud. For shoes that have been through even more, it's advised you clean any caked-in mud and dirt off prior to re-applying the Wonder Balsam. Then you dry them and rub the wax back into the upper, paying extra attention to spots that are scuffed and creased to really work it into the material. After you let it dry for ten minutes, you might want to consider spraying your shoes with Ultra Shoe Protector spray to give it even more protection against the elements.

RIGHT: Dr. Martens Wonder Balsam and Ultra Shoe Protector Spray. The specially formulated Wonder Balsam helps restore the uppers of Dr. Martens shoes while greatly aiding in the break-in process for sturdier materials like leather. When used in tandem with the Ultra Shoe Protector Spray, the combination will ensure your pair of shoes will last for many years to come.

If your pair of Dr. Martens is made from oiled or waxed leather, then you'll want to opt for the Dubbin Shoe Protector. Made to condition these specially-treated leathers, the process is similar to how one would apply the Wonder Balsam.

Although the finish will look a bit shinier than the pair you started with, the Dubbin will achieve a matte finish once it dries. As an added plus, it also provides a water-resistant protective layer.

For suede Dr. Marten shoes, you'll need to go with a specialised suede cleaner. After taking out the laces brushing off excess dirt from the upper, cleaning suede Dr. Martens is a bit more involved but still a relatively painless process. You'll want to spray the shoe sparingly, making sure no one part gets too wet. And once the shoes are dry, you'll use a two-sided suede brush to finish up the details – using the rubber side to buff out any scuffs or marks while using the bristles to lift the nep of the suede back up, restoring the initial appeal of the shoes.

LEFT: Dr. Martens oiled leather shoes with Dubbin Shoe Protector.

OVERLEAF: An array of Dr. Martens for sale in one of the brand's global flagship stores.

The Future of Dr. Martens

With one foot planted firmly in its heritage and the other stepping towards the future, Dr. Martens is boldly taking timeless British style forward. The brand continues to innovate in its space, recently making moves like introducing its '14XX' capsule collection of footwear that reimagines its most iconic shoes in a futuristic context. It reinterprets silhouettes like the 1460 and 1461 with newer materials and innovations like modular uppers that can be converted from lifestyle shoes into truly weatherproof boots, thanks to the addition of removable gaiters.

Meanwhile, it continues to partner with some of today's most influential designers, creators, and pop cultural powerhouses to remind the world of how the brand grew from humble workwear manufacturer to a modern stalwart of avant-garde style. It continues to work with labels across multiple genres - whether it's streetwear brands like Supreme, up-and-coming in-the-know labels like Girls Don't Cry, and edgy independent fashion brands like GANNI.

It's almost hard to believe that the company started as producers of a comfort shoe, and one may wonder what the original Dr Klaus Maertens might think of how much his novel idea for an orthopaedic shoe has evolved into something so much bigger. But if you think about it, Maertens created a product whose end goal was for wearers to be more comfortable, and now Dr. Martens is a brand for those who are proudly comfortable in their own skin. That's certainly a legacy worth leaving and, judging by the gigantic footprint the brand has in business and in culture, Dr. Martens is making sure that it has big shoes to fill.

ABOVE: The signature heel loop on a pair of Dr. Martens and its iconic AirWair sole.

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RIGHT: Every journey begins with a single step. Which pair of Dr. Martens will you choose to begin yours in?