

# Opposites Attract

Duckie Brown designers Daniel Silver and Steven Cox are putting some pep in Florsheim's step. << By Jocelyn Anderson



Not every designer without experience in footwear gets the chance to make shoes for an esteemed century-old brand.

But that's just what Daniel Silver (above, right) and Steven Cox, the duo behind the fashion-forward menswear label Duckie Brown, have done with Florsheim, launching the Florsheim by Duckie Brown line for fall '09.

"As a designer, you want to do everything," Cox said. "And I've always wanted to do shoes."

The offering is composed of nine styles — 41 SKUs altogether — retailing for \$190 to \$545. In addition to updating some of Florsheim's core styles, Cox and Silver delved into the company's vast archives to come up with other ideas. For example, the limited-edition Patriot Boot, for \$395, was inspired by a 1945 boot designed to celebrate the end of World War II.

The line will be shown at Compass in Las Vegas and so far has been picked up by Barneys, Revolve Clothing in Los Angeles and Odin in New York.

"Our goal from the very beginning was to turn up the music," Silver said. "We wanted to add to our client base. But also, the economy made us want to create a shoe that was within reach to many people."

Florsheim approached the pair after hearing that Duckie Brown had used the brand's shoes in a runway show. The unlikely partnership joins together the longtime footwear company known for classic designs with the 5-year-old, CFDA-nominated fashion label that has made its name showing unpredictable pieces season after season. Silver and Cox said they weren't given any guidelines on the new shoe line.

"A lot of people are amazed that the Florsheims have taken this chance," said Silver. "But I think they will be surprised to see what we have accomplished."

## 1. What made you want to collaborate with Florsheim?

**DS:** We loved that it wasn't someone coming to us to collaborate on a new \$1,500 shoe. That's typical. Everyone's doing very expensive shoes. For us, because Duckie Brown is so expensive and not a lot of people can afford it, it's nice that more people can have access to Duckie Brown.

## 2. What did you think of Florsheim before this?

**SC:** When I first got to New York in 1991, I used to go shopping on the Lower East Side for \$60 suits, and I found this store that sold Florsheim shoes. There is something about them — they are either very granddad-like or very cool.

**DS:** I grew up in the 1960s and '70s. My father wore Florsheim for years.

## 3. This has been described as a marriage of opposites? What do you think of that?

**DS:** It's because people think we're weird. We're two guys who live in New York, and we do this unusual line.

**SC:** People also don't realize how classic we actually are. And that's kind of our secret. Duckie Brown has the most beautiful classic trousers and shirts. It's just that we pair them with [more unusual pieces]. When I do a fashion show, I want to show something that's much more forward.

## 4. You hadn't done shoes before, so how did you approach the project?

**SC:** I started drawing shoes, which I've never done before. I didn't know how. I treated it the same way as I treated doing a man's jacket. The first thing I asked Florsheim to do for me was cut a shoe in half. I needed to see how the layers of the shoe are [put together]. I also looked at old drawings of shoes and researched heavily into Florsheim's archives.

## 5. What kinds of ideas did you present to Florsheim?

**SC:** We laid out skins, lasts, sketches. I did two seasons for them. I wanted to [change some colors]. Their black was not a good black. Their brown was not a good brown.

**DS:** They have so many collections over so many seasons that a lot of different voices get expressed.

## 6. What was their reaction to your presentation?

**DS:** As Steven would say, they were gob-smacked. They didn't know what to say, because we almost believed in the possibility more than they did.

**SC:** I don't think they've had anyone give them what I gave them. It was a lot of information. I went completely overboard with this presentation.

## 7. You are known for bright colors, and you have 10 colors of loafers in this collection. Was Florsheim excited by your desire to add some punch?

**SC:** I sprayed a shoe electric-blue to show them. They didn't really understand it. I wanted to do showpieces.

**DS:** Often people hire you because of who you are, and then tell you they want you to be who they are. But we went in wanting an electric-blue shoe, and we came out with one. They trusted us.

**SC:** I did a color palette for them. The core colors — black, chocolate, burgundy — those could be dollars, dollars, dollars. And then here's what you haven't got: the fashion color.

## 8. Do the two of you always agree on designs?

**DS:** We've never had a disagreement in our lives [laughing]. No, of course we're constantly disagreeing. Sometimes we both see it exactly the same way, and there are other times when we are absolutely diametrically opposed. Then it's about convincing each other.

## 9. Are there plans for Florsheim collections beyond fall '09?

**DS:** We do plan to go forward. Obviously, we will see how we sell the first time out, but it seems to me, given the interest we've generated, we should be around for quite a while. And hopefully, this is just the beginning.

## 10. Do you feel like the end result is exactly what you wanted?

**DS & SC:** Yes!

**SC:** It's a beautiful line. The proof is that I'm wearing them all the time, and I love them. That's why I did this.