

Miles Program

For this footwear newcomer, a little mystery goes a long way. BY JOCELYN ANDERSON

British men's shoe brand Anthony Miles has been gaining followers for three seasons now, but the identity of its designer is still a secret.

A few hints have been dropped along the way: He's an established name in the U.K. fashion industry, works on many high-profile projects simultaneously and somehow helped conceive the brand name.

"He's got quite a lot of commitments right now that he can't give up on," said Robert Wood, brand director for Anthony Miles. "But [this label] is definitely his main passion, so to speak."

Whoever he is, the designer helped develop the line with a solid vision — classic shapes with modern touches and subtle pops of color. And it's decidedly not based on any heritage look. Styles feature straight lines and new materials, including translucent soles.

For fall '13, the offering encompasses oxfords, wingtips, boots and a sneaker. Retail prices range from 120 pounds to 140 pounds, or from \$186 to \$217 at current exchange.

The brand is owned and operated by Kirby Footwear Ltd., which does private label for the likes of Aldo and Kurt Geiger. For Anthony Miles' first season, in fall '12, it won exclusive distribution in Selfridges in London and greater Manchester, as well as on the retailer's e-commerce site. Since then, additional wholesale accounts have come on board, including Topman, Spanish department store El Corté Ingles and Asos.com.

Neil Steptoe, men's buying manager at Zalando U.K., landed the exclusivity deal for Selfridges in his final season buying for the store under the Kurt Geiger concession. Zalando then picked up the label for spring '13, and Steptoe said sales have been positive.

"I have liked what I've seen since the launch," said Steptoe. "They are offering strong fashion looks at a good price, and as buyers we get a good margin, certainly for a footwear brand, so all in all, it's worth trying."

Echoed Daniel Storey, buyer of men's branded footwear for Asos.com, "The fact that they are not a heritage brand appealed to us. Modern, fashion-forward formal brands at an accessible price point are rare. They will be unique among the Asos portfolio."

Now Anthony Miles is taking aim at the Japanese and Canadian markets, through distributors based in each country. After that, entry into the U.S. would be ideal, said Wood.

"America is the area that is most difficult for us and that's where we do probably need an agent, someone with a bit more experience who knows the buyers," he said. "America is definitely a key area for us, [in addition to] extending our distribution across Europe."

To address the European market, the brand launched an e-commerce website this spring and will exhibit at Jacket Required in London and Micam in Milan this year. Sales are quickly building, the company reported, with 120 percent growth from the second season to the third.

Despite the tremendous flurry of activity over the better part of a year, the team remains small, with five players. Design manager Ben Smart interfaces with the man who shall not be named, and additional staff members work in PR and marketing. The group also receives help from Kirby's managing director.

And though the fledgling brand benefits from its affiliation with Kirby, which boasts more than a decade in the business, the team did encounter challenges along the way, said Wood. Managing time and priorities has been particularly difficult with limited manpower.

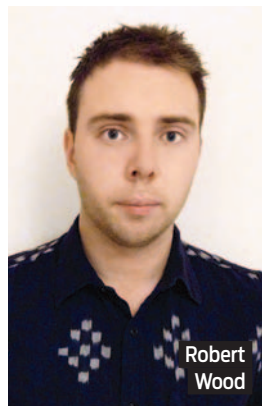
"We had such a successful first season at Selfridges and so many people took note that we got inundated with things we needed to do really quickly," said Wood. "We got to a stage where all the samples were coming out and we had to decide whose samples needed to go first."

Their hard work has already paid off with an early accolade: Anthony Miles was nominated for Growing Brand of the Year at the 2013 *Drapers* Footwear & Accessories Awards. (Northern Cobbler won.)

Going forward, the line will further expand for



Looks from
Anthony Miles
for fall '13



Robert
Wood

spring '14 by adding a sandal to the mix. Accessories are also in the pipeline, along with iPad and iPhone cases that would use the same rubber and colors that the brand features on its shoe soles. Belts will be introduced in the next year or so.

Still, Wood said, the brand likely will remain dedicated to the male consumer rather than broadening its range to include looks for women.

"We've never mentioned anything about ladies," he explained. "The straight line details and colors, I don't really see them fitting [that market], and it's never been part of our thinking."

But someday soon the mystery designer will reveal himself.

"We are starting to get a few questions, 'Is it this?' 'Is it that?'" said Wood. "In a couple of seasons or maybe a couple of years, we'll be in a position where we'll be able to take him on full time and he can concentrate just on Anthony Miles."