

# Cool Country

An affinity for the outdoors adds adventure to Martin Dingman's entire collection. BY JOCELYN ANDERSON

**M**artin Dingman clearly enjoys talking about his love of rural America.

"Think of the country — of a rolling brook or a freshly mown hayfield or the Rocky and Appalachian mountains. It conjures some of the most beautiful paintings you'll ever see — in fact, generally the most beautiful ones are those of nature," he enthused. "Now think of the visual colors and textures of the city. What do you have? Concrete, chrome, glass, asphalt and a royal-blue garbage truck."

That the designer added the moniker Countrywear to his entire eponymous men's collection is no surprise. Dingman, who has based his business in the slower-paced Ozark region of northwest Arkansas for more than 20 years, grew up living the country lifestyle.

His father had a 1,100-acre ranch and raised cattle. "I was the guy in charge of the horse and rounding up," said Dingman.

And the family regularly visited his grandfather in northern Kentucky, where the young man learned about horse training and developed a fondness for Walker hunting dogs.

"American fox hunting, back in the day, didn't require horses, horns or riding jackets. The good ol' boys would take their Walker foxhounds and turn them loose at night and sit around the campfire, drink whiskey and listen to the dogs. They all knew by the sound of the dog's bark which one was really on the fox," said Dingman. "I would go with [my grandfather] and care for them when I would visit him in the summers."

The tradition held with Dingman's three children, who each had their own dogs and would enter them in competitions.

The designer's new brand name coincided with the launch of his apparel for fall '13. The line includes pants, jackets, shirts, ties and socks, and texture plays a key role, with tweeds, moleskin and alpaca fibers looming large. Motifs such as pheasants and English pointer dogs also figure into the tie range. The looks are ideally suited for a weekend spent in the countryside, said Dingman. And in fact, his marketing, lookbooks and other materials, created by his son Grayson, all call to mind this aesthetic.

Most recently, Dingman expanded his bag range to suit the country theme. In addition to a classic briefcase, duffle bag and portfolio, he now

offers a wallet for fishing flies, a shotgun case and a reel holder.

"We are going to be doing more outdoor pieces," he said. "I am going to do a tennis racket cover and a rod case."

In footwear, too, the inspiration is readily apparent. Dingman has updated the classic horse-bit loafer (replicating the bit that's put into horses' mouths to guide them) with antique brass and silver. For his ultra-traditional customers, Dingman has them covered, too: "There are some men who will not wear a bit because they think it's too blingy. So this is a hand-wrapped piece. It's a nice detail."

Other men's footwear looks include the classic moccasin, which Dingman hand-stitched onto the last, and old-school penny loafers.

His shoe-color names even evoke rural roots. "This is burnt cedar. This isn't brown, excuse me," he quipped.

The longtime footwear maker continues to

expand his range of apparel, too, highlighting such utilitarian elements as bi-swing constructed jackets, which incorporate pleats into the back shoulder for increased mobility. "You can throw your shotgun up to shoot and have the extra [room to move]," said Dingman.

The result, he added, is a collection that feels more personal.

"Throughout the years, I have chased the market and tried to do what's current," Dingman said. "It's not that that was wrong, but it really wasn't who I was at all times. We sold product during those days that I would never wear."

Now the line is filled with pieces he would readily wear.

So within this country-inspired realm, what's next for Dingman?

"Apparel is still going to expand. There'll be knit at some point," he said. "I want to do watches. And I want to do a fragrance. How about a fragrance called Spring Rain?"



Martin  
Dingman

PHOTO: COURTESY OF MARTIN DINGMAN