

STEP OUT WITH FAB FOOTWEAR

Talented men's shoes designer Danielle Wathes talks about her inspiration and plans for the future



Women's sexiness tends to be associated with a heel and the shape of a shoe more than a particular colour or design. The elevation of a shoe makes a woman look taller and her legs and bum look more shapely. This isn't a trend that has recurred in men's footwear for a few hundred years (and I don't see it anytime soon either!). I think when it comes to men's footwear the sexiness comes from elevation of confidence in the wearer and the overall look that the shoes inspire. If a man is comfortable in his shoes, he is comfortable in himself and that shines through.

Where do you find the inspiration for your creations?

I am a bit of a self-proclaimed nerd and from day one I began taking inspiration from screen and literature. I use my passions and interests to inspire me and if they are too far out of the box I spend time re-working them until they fit my vision. It's really important to me that any designs I create keep my interest and allow me to explore my interests while implementing them into my work life.

As well as film and stories I use history as an inspiration for a lot of what I create, I am fascinated by history and the concept of time, hence why my first collection revolves around that topic. I visit lots of museums and love hearing stories from the past.

I rely quite heavily on the opinions of my clients, as the shoes I'm creating are not for me, they are for them and it's essential I take their wants and needs into consideration →

Danielle Wathes is the talented designer behind Percy Stride shoes, which she launched in 2017. Gill Harris caught up with the 28-year-old from Swindon for a chat.

How did you get into making footwear?

I was always an artist child, which I still pursue now by completing commission portraiture in my very limited spare time. I decided to study footwear design at De Montfort University and was very fortunate to be one of about 30 who were selected to do the course. I had a tough decision of what type of design I wanted to take – fashion, interior or footwear – but ultimately, everyone needs shoes!

I studied for three years the design, construction and manufacture of all kinds of footwear as well as accessories, causing myself a few injuries in the process of shoe

making over my time there, but it was all worth it in the end.

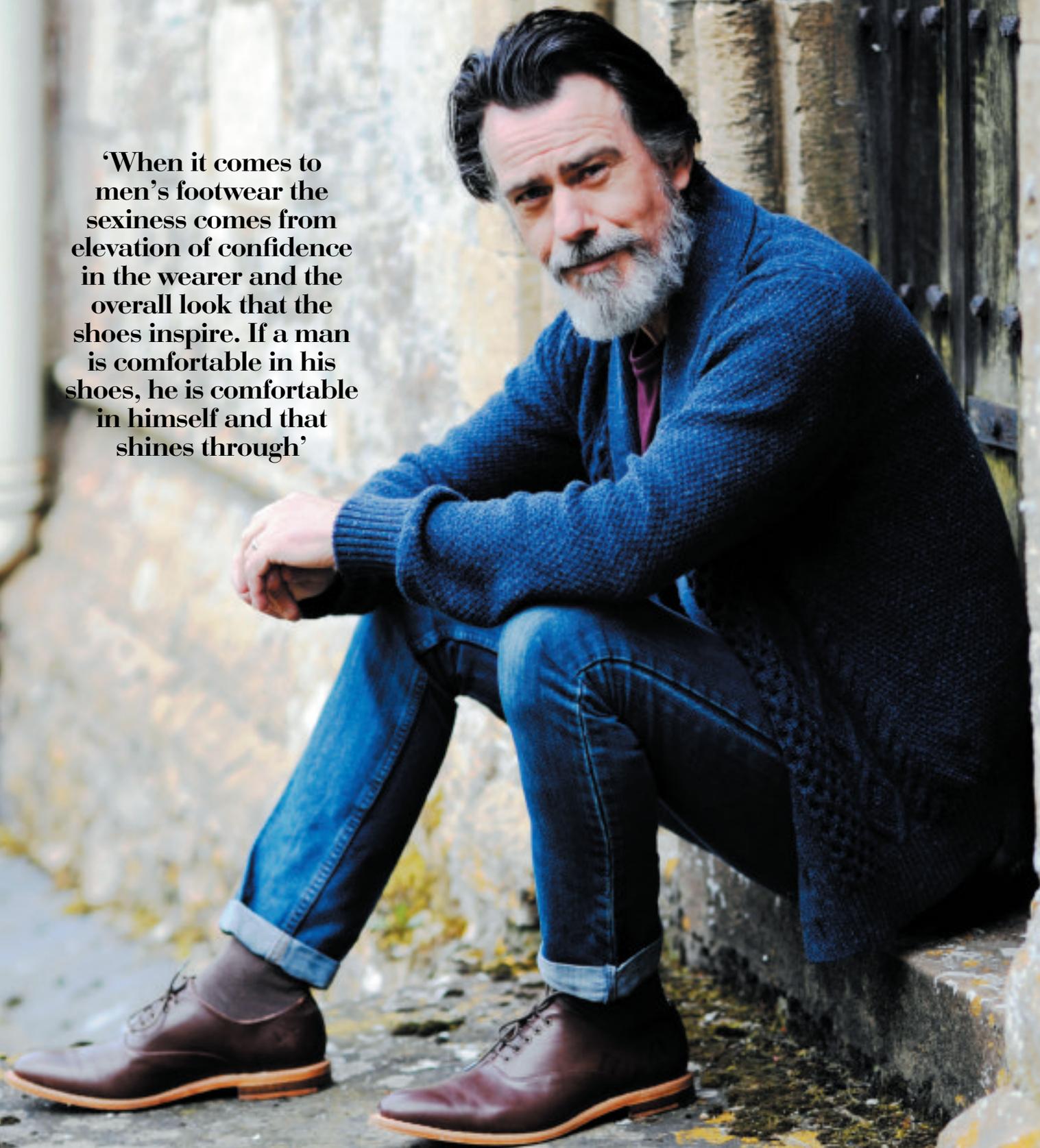
Why did you choose men's shoes over women's?

I wanted to explore design from a fresh perspective and felt there was much more 'wiggle room' for interpretation with menswear than womenswear. I didn't feel I could add anything more to women's footwear that wasn't already being explored by other amazing designers in the industry. I tend to think that men and women shop very differently and shop with different criteria in mind and what I wanted for my products and for my brand fitted more so with how men shopped than how women did.

We all know women's shoes can be amazingly glamorous – what's sexy and interesting about men's footwear?



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when I design a new range. Initially I begin by old fashioned sketching. I don't like to use my computer for designing (I'm just not that modern!) I'd much rather have a pencil and paper.

I draw each design individually, changing small aspects such as buckles, eyelets and patterns until I get one I like (which, believe me, can take weeks!). Once I've chosen my designs, I go on to choose the leathers and colours I want for each shoe then I hand over to my Northampton factory where they bring my creations to life. I visit the factory on a regular basis and keep in touch with images and communication back and forth on every aspect of the shoe as its being made.

What materials are your favourites?

Well it's got to be leather. When you think of shoes you automatically think leather – it's durable, water resistant and comes in so many varieties of texture and colour. I am like a child in a sweet shop when I go to a leather merchant. I could spend a whole day walking through the rooms of stunning colours.

There is so much more to explore with leather. So far I've used debossing techniques and screenprinting elements in my designs,

but I'd really like to go further with engraving, tattooing and distressing leather for some future collections.

Out of all the shoes you've designed, which is your favourite?

It's so difficult to say. I've just brought out the second generation of my initial collection which has an added back counter and that looks stunning and adds another element to design so that's really exciting. But ultimately my black and white 'spats' with a handmade screenprint are probably my favourite, they spark conversation whenever I take them out the box and as a designer that shock and awe reaction is always a good one, even though they tend to be a bit like Marmite!

It's not just about making attractive shoes, is it?

I have worked very hard alongside a brilliant and talented content creator since my launch in 2017 to create a blog which runs weekly on the website. Having studied bio-mechanics and worked within a wellness and chiropractic capacity, I wanted to highlight issues such as spinal alignment, weight distribution and more thorough guidance to those who





have ailments and conditions which makes footwear selection difficult. I've spent a lot of time making sure that information is available for them. Recently we launched a blog about mental health and how fashion can elevate your confidence. These are issues that are important to me and therefore I'm very proud of the amount of information we've been able to provide over the years through the blog.

Which is your own favourite pair of shoes?

I'm not sure I can possibly choose a single pair out of 60 odd pairs. It definitely changes by season and even though I am a classic boot wearer all year round, I have a fab little pair of Timberland deck shoes (well, two pairs now) which I tend to wear most often these days. They are my current favourites because they are ultimately comfortable. I have quite fat wide feet and I'm constantly trying to make them look daintier and my deck shoes are my only flats which actually achieve that because they are so robust and properly constructed.

How have things been in 2020?

Well Covid is not ideal, to say the least, but I'm trying to see the positives rather than

the negatives. As pretty much a one-man band I'm in a fortunate position to be able to comfortably plan for next year and years to come.

I have spent most of lockdown in my pyjamas working away on new ranges which is time I may not have had otherwise and I'm happy to say I have achieved this and I am expecting new products in 2021.

My factory has been working tirelessly making shoes for the NHS during Covid, which I am incredibly proud of and even though the circumstances are less than ideal in the retail sector right now, I'm incredibly humbled by the support I've received during this time by my clients and the British public who are choosing to shop closer to home and give us little guys the hope we desperately need right now.

What are your plans 2021?

To get back out there! I can't wait to be at events introducing the shoes to new people, having chin wags and enjoying a few laughs in 2021. I have my new collection coming out and I'm working on some collaborations and accessories, so I'm incredibly excited for the road ahead.