

RETAIL DESIGN

Rubber soul

For someone who confesses to being "not the kind of designer who's into skateboarding, I'm a 46-year-old preppy", Mike Stiff of Stiff + Trevillion has created a gaggle of London's ultimate scene-making street-fashion stores.

Stiff's clients are a triumvirate of clothing designers/manufacturers, retailers and sneaker heads: Michael Koppleman, Simon Porter and Fraser Cooke. Between them they're responsible for the labels Gimme Five and Good Enough (among others), the stores Fly, The Hideout and their latest, Foot Patrol, a specialist emporium for the most dedicated sneaker addicts. A pair of limited-edition women's boxing boots, commissioned by Adidas from Stella McCartney, are a snip at £290.

Michael Koppleman spotted a back-to-basics conversion of a Sixties' loft that Stiff + Trevillion had created for a friend of his and asked Stiff to design London's flagship Covent Garden store for Stussy, one of the brands he represents. With the aim of throwing the visitor off-balance, as if on a wobbly old skateboard, Stiff added a hyperbolic floor of birch ply divided down the centre, with one ramp curving



into a display shelf. Up front there's a full-size plate-glass window bringing street-bustle right into the store; the end result references both the skate-park aesthetic and the chaos of street-riding.

Stiff is full of praise for his clients: "They're good clients; they give clear briefs, but push you to run beyond the brief." The downside is that budgets are small, but Stiff's convinced that makes him more thoughtful with the spend.

With Foot Patrol, the problem was how to turn a 46 sq m suntan parlour in a Soho alley into a destination store. It succeeded: some days the queues of sneaker aficionados seeking limited editions are so deep that staff impose a ticket system.



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There are a number of hyper-specialised sneaker stores in Tokyo and New York, and Foot Patrol is the UK representative in this select club.

Front man Fraser Cooke is a first-generation sneaker entrepreneur who built a word-of-mouth reputation by "sniffing out" rare stuff and matching it to discerning buyers. Back then, he'd search for dead stock in out-of-the-way sports stores in the USA; now he has connections at the heart of the beast, with savvy marketing guys from the big labels feeding him the crème de la crème models.

At Foot Patrol the product is intended to take centre stage, but the sense that this is a "high-security area" certainly adds to the perceived value of the booty. Creating a dividing line between shop floor and stock room by a wall of mesh school lockers, Mike's created an "almost unfriendly, very industrial atmosphere that

reminds me of school, or a DSS office or off-licence in a dodgy area".

Shoes are displayed, like puppies in a pet shop, in cages. A ceiling-height bulkhead swoops down and around to become wall, floor and counter, and is skinned in a flecked-rubber composite, distributed by the Natural Coating Company. It was originally intended for basketball courts and is made from recycled sneakers. Consequently, the store gives off a distinctly rubbery aroma and is pretty much maintenance-free. Various light sources, such as the illuminated glass benches, create more drama.

Stiff has assembled a collage of off-the-shelf parts into an off-the-wall, super-functioning and atmospherically charged stage set, on which some of the world's most avid consumers will, no doubt, fight for their right to purchase.

Liz Farrelly

