



Explore Matisse's Footwear Wonderland and Design Studio in El Segundo

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Matisse is known for its fest-ready boots and boho-cool vibes, so it's a no-brainer that the LA-based brand [teamed](#) with Coachella queen and style star Kate Bosworth last year. Founded in 2001, the brand is headquartered in El Segundo, where its 28,000-square-foot workspace and warehouse is home to thousands and thousands of shoes and a close-knit team of approximately 25 employees.

We first scored a peek inside the vintage-inspired footwear label's design studio during their massive [warehouse sale](#) earlier this year, and we've been dreaming about the shoe-filled space ever since—so we invited ourselves over for a tour of the digs. After exploring [Matisse's](#) modern HQ and scoring a peek at the upcoming 2016 spring collection, we sat down with creative director Sheena Parks to chat about the brand's production process and sustainability, the inspiration behind the spring line, what's next for Matisse, and more.

How long have you been at Matisse?

I've been with the company since its inception—2001. I was just an outside sales rep, and I had a background in clothing design. I was doing wholesale just to pay my way through college and I really loved it; I traveled, I had a lot of connections, and I loved selling the product. Footwear was a part of that and I always felt I had such opportunity [designing] footwear than I did with clothing.

I studied like a student and just worked every day immersed in [shoe design]. I feel very fortunate growing up with the brand and it's very near and dear to my heart. Now it's myself and an awesome team and we get to sit and do this everyday. We have a blast doing it.

What's the story behind the brand's name?

It's from the painter, Henri Matisse. The owner of Matisse started [another contemporary shoe brand], so he wanted a name that was identifiable but yet you don't really know where you know it from. But then Coconuts is a terrible; it was originally beach sandals.



Although the spring '16 collection is still under wraps, what can you tell us about the shoes and design inspiration?

We started with this core '70s bohemian girl, which makes up our girl in general because we're very rugged and Americana; we definitely have rock-n-roll influence. We're heavy in booties because we're known for that year-round. We deliver booties every month of the year. You can wear it in any weather, any season, bare legs, dresses, everything works now.

We drew from the '70s and everything that was happening in ready-to-wear and stuff we saw in Europe, then made a really cool collection of sandals ranging from little simmer flats to a super-high wood wedge, which for is me is [for] the ultimate boho girl. I was also really inspired by the Parisian girls on the street; they're so effortless and cool.

What sets Matisse apart from everyone else in the contemporary shoe market?

We always use the latest and greatest when it comes to vegan materials, faux textiles, even leather treatments, embossed textures, prints—we want to be ahead of the game, so that's where we focus a lot of time and energy. We develop a lot of materials, but we have a few tanneries and material houses that we work with exclusively that tend to push the bar and develop, and they bring us that information.

How long does it take to design each collection?

It's about 120 days to really getting a shoe completed to when you can go buy it at a store—30 days developing and conceptualizing the design, and then another 90 days producing it before it gets to [customers].

How closely do you work with the shoe factories?

We visit the factories typically six to seven times a year. We have factories in China, Brazil, Mexico, Italy, India, and Spain—we're a very well-oiled machine; we're not a one-trick pony. There's not a huge need to travel as frequently as years past because there's email and Skype. I tend to Skype with our factory in Italy all the time and they love it.

Many companies are moving towards greater transparency in their production process and supply chain. What's Matisse's approach to the issue?

We insist on all of our factories having social audits performed. We do that ourselves to make sure that labor practices are fair and wages are fair; [for example], they have to have breaks and start times and end times. That's our responsibility as human beings. With third parties, you're completely out of control. [They're] only as good as their integrity; a lot of them are greased and they let things slide. We've never relinquished control to a third party because we don't think that's in the best interest of our company. We keep full control and [also] do all QC ourselves.

Sustainability is also a big subject right now. What's your stance?

I have lengthy conversations with the tanneries, agents, and factory owners because I think that's one of the biggest problems with sustainability today is at the tanneries. There's always new and innovative ways to overcome these hurdles, and we always try to use the best materials we can in order to support those practices. It's hard because we're making fast fashion, in a sense—I made an entire line for spring and in six months, it's old news. I have a pair on from 2010, but there's a lot of timeless looks but that's not the consumer today. So we are toeing the line. My dream would be to have a sustainable capsule where we source old jackets and put together boots; it'd be very one-dimensional because there's only so much you can do with repurposed leather. It's hard to do so in this day and age and this type of product. We try to give back and we definitely try to be as green as possible here; I'm probably the most vocal about being green about water usage and recycling. We definitely try to lessen our impact, but at the end of the day, we're still making all of these shoes.

What's next for Matisse?

Right now we're aggressively pursuing international distribution, starting with the UK and Europe. Handbags is a possible new category we want to introduce using our iconic washed leathers and distressed leathers and really cool cowhides. That's something we're working on now and we're currently in the design process; it'll be interesting what we come up with.

We also have a couple of really cool collabs on the horizon, including one with [Understated Leather](#) for fall 2016, but it's delivering in time for festival season [in April].

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