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Carvil Gears for Revamp

By PAULINA SZMYDKE

PARIS — If you lived in Paris in the Fifties, Sixties or Seventies and had a knack for fine leather loafers, you have heard of Carvil.

The French footwear label, founded in 1952 by Henri Ledermann, was then popular among local dandies including Alain Delon and Jacques Dutronc (who immortalized the brand in one of his tunes); while abroad, Steve McQueen and Rolling Stones drummer Charlie Watts spread the word. The Dylan, an ankle boot with a round-shaped toe named after Bob Dylan, remains a bestseller to this day, though over time, the label — devoid of creative leadership — has slipped into near oblivion, selling through its only retail outpost at 67 Rue Pierre Charron in Paris.

“It was quite a mess,” said Frank Charriaut, who joined the company as artistic director in 2015, following a 10-year stint as footwear and accessories designer at Chanel. But he says he couldn’t resist the brand’s colorful history. “Here you have a company with a really interesting customer base. These are real men, very masculine — a mix of bad boys and Parisian elegant types, very seductive,” he noted, lamenting that with most fashion brands you either get one or the other.

“But it needed some cleaning up,” he allowed.

Charriaut started with the shop, “which was full of different samples and materials, [while] the original shoes, which have very interesting styles, got completely lost,” he said.

He reactivated Carvil’s original manufacturing partner in Italy and started handpicking the materials, including Italian velvet, French box calf and peccary, a grainy leather that is normally used by glovemakers, giving it soft yet durable qualities. “It’s still my favorite skin, and it’s also the original Carvil skin. When you think of the house’s loafer worn by Jean-Paul Belmondo — that was peccary.”

Charriaut says his goal is to “rebuild the brand between tradition and fashion,” continuing to use the Blake stitch, rather than the Goodyear stitch, which makes the construction lighter — “and more elegant,” he says.

Following a test run for summer, the designer presented his first full-fledged collection for fall 2016, which for the first time is up for wholesale, including the brand’s first sneaker. “Everybody was asking me for one, and I didn’t want to do it at first, but then I thought I could bring it into the mood of Carvil — in peccary,” he smiled.

Among the label’s other offers for fall are tassel loafers, velvet slippers and retro-low boots. The shoes, which have already been picked up by Colette in Paris, retail between 395 euros, or \$429 at current exchange, and 1,200 euros, or \$1,303, a pair.

According to Charriaut, with the relaunch work already done, sales jumped 25 percent versus the same year-ago period.



A style by Carvil
Courtesy Photo

Come spring, the brand is slated to open its second store in Paris' Saint Germain quarter, where the company has its roots.

Carvil is part of Carel, a women's footwear brand which has been undergoing a revamp of its own following its acquisition in 2011 by a group comprising former Annick Goutal Parfums general manager Frédérique Picard, investment fund 123 Venture and independent investors.

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