





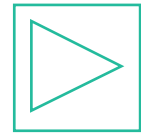


IN CONVERSATION WITH

Chris Lee

mad on adidas

imagery sourced from Chris's personal archive



START YARD

Exhibition opens 29th July - 31st August
at STARTYARD, 108 Church Street, Birkenhead.

PO: We are fascinated by the obsession for training shoes in Liverpool. What do you make of it then and how the legacy holds up now?

CL: Liverpool has always been at the forefront of fashion since I've known. In the early 80s people would try their best to be different and outdo each other travelling to London or abroad to get something your mates didn't have. Now you see a lot of lads looking identical,

CL: Social-media and the internet has really helped grow the market and accessibility to new drops, that used to be called a delivery. But it's also opened a way for smaller brands to exist and get traction. The only different unique adidas you're going to find now is if you stumble upon an old shop in a small town in Eastern Europe that's got some dead stock. I remember one day about five lads from Birmingham came into Slater Street, and all bought



partly to blame from an adidas point of view was that adidas had various factories across Europe, Germany, France, Austria, Yugoslavia, Poland etc., all making different shoes. For example, a lot of the Eva die cut (mid soles) and ZX shoes were made in France, if you had Wimbledon made in Germany you were cool, but if they were made in Austria with adidas



two pairs, some for their mates back home. They had obviously heard tales of this little shop in Liverpool, we got talking to them and they were made up to have found the store. As they were leaving Rob Wade Smith gave one of them £5 and said that's for your petrol home.

KO: How different was the stock in Liverpool to the rest of the country?

CL: We had a bigger and better range in Slater Street, than anywhere else in the country. I've got a UK adidas catalogue from 1980 and a German one from 1980, the UK range is easily five times bigger. In those days the different countries would visit adidas HQ and make their selection of what they thought would be right for them to sell, but obviously the trainers they didn't buy would be available in Germany or maybe other countries. Most decisions in those days were made for sportswear to be sold in sports shops, but the training shoe phenomenon ignored that and wanted them for fashion. In later years when I used to go buying adidas at the UK HQ in Ilkley,



on the middle stripe you were cooler. Adidas in the mid 80s closed all the factories in Europe and started to make one range for the world in the Far East, that killed one of the catalysts of why



they became popular, it took them decades to realise limited shoes in limited quantities was a way of creating dreams in the brand. Then obviously collaborations, limited colours, materials, etc. for different distribution retail sectors is what's been happening for a while now. I personally think they have taken it too far. I've seen some terrible collabs, re-issues that should not have been made in the first place and way too many colour drops of shoes. I could go on and on.

PO: The lads back then were true hunters for special, unique, or rare pairs, right? They travelled and used word of mouth - not like the ease of using social-media today.

when the sales guy went out of the room, I would be straight in the cupboards looking at the samples they didn't select that season, to be in the range. I'd always find something great, and we got a few specials just for us exclusively, or they would listen to me and get it in the range. It was the same when I used to go to ISPO the trade fair in Munich, adidas had one big hall to themselves no1 with a stage for a fashion show and the rest of the hall divided up into country territories. I'd sneak into all the other countries particularly France and Germany and write down the ref. codes to all the clothing and shoes I knew the UK hadn't done and try and get them. I did that one year with Barry Mellis my UK rep at the time



adidas LOS ANGELES

Coinciding with the 1984 Olympics was another consistent seller in the early days, and adidas kept them in the range as a best seller. Each coloured peg was a different cushioning density so you could adjust and customise yourself.



adidas GRAND SLAM

These along with Forest Hills were a level above Trimm Trab and Munchen in price and materials, made with kangaroo leather and the three-peg cushioning system that the LA trainer used, a very rare shoe.



adidas MUNCHEN

The cousin of Trimm Trab, but made with mesh and suede, there is a similar shoe with a different sole called Suisse, but I'm sure I've seen the exact shoe with that name, and that upper also was put onto the Tom Okker outsole as a squash shoe. Made in red and blue originally but slightly in the shadow of Trimm Trab.



adidas FOREST HILLS

I used to go into Top Man adidas concession nearly every Saturday in the early 80s just to look at these. I couldn't afford them and ended up getting adidas Nadi - no comparison at all. Whittys said they were getting them back in, but it was a totally different shoe with the same name. I was always envious of lads who had a pair.



adidas TOM OKKER PROFESSIONAL

I loved these when I had them, which was before I joined Wade Smith, they were like Wimbledon and Trimm Trab combined, but with the extra bump on the toe box like adidas Comfort. They did a reissue of a similar shoe about 12 years ago, but navy stripes called Tennis Super, I had two pairs, but for some reason I can't explain, I sold both!



adidas TRIMM TRAB

In 1982 I was still at school and one Saturday I went into Wade Smith Slater Street, and they had a pair of burgundy Trimm Trab. Robert said they'd only got three pairs and one was size 9 1/2, I didn't have the money on me, so I asked him to reserve them for me and I'll be back later. So, I went home to get the money off my mum, she wasn't in, so I had to walk to Old Swan to find her, which I did. I raced back to Slater Street expecting them to be sold but they hadn't. I was 50p short so Rob let me off which I promised to pay another day. So, I got them, not just a pair of Trimm Trab but a burgundy nubuck pair, I never knew existed.



adidas MARATHON TR

We sold loads of these for years at Wade Smith there was several different versions and updates made in Austria Germany and the inferior ones were from Yugoslavia. One day in the Birkenhead Wade Smith stock room I asked Neal Cowan (finance director), why were they stamped IRL, he told me it was for international, I found out later on a trip to Cork (Ireland adidas) with Rob that he had bought them from Michael O'Connell the head of adidas out there, I don't think we were supposed to be doing that.



adidas WIMBLEDON G.L

Grand Prix were good, Wimbledon were better with the red stripe, but Wimbledon with the extra adidas adidas adidas written down the middle stripe, well you were the chap if you had them.



adidas MICROPACER

Very expensive at the time they looked like they came from space, the first shoes with a computer to measure your pace and distance, a ground-breaking shoe and a great design.

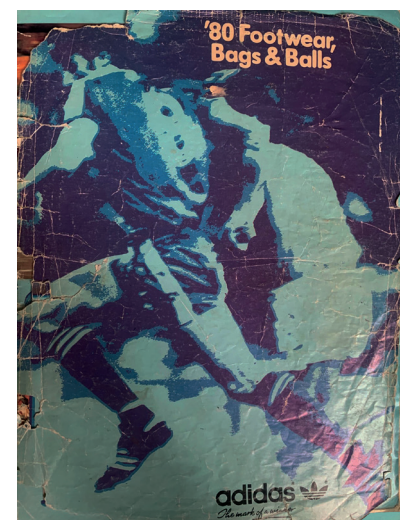


adidas SL80

Nicky Taylor a mate of mine who ended up working with me at Wade Smith had a pair of these, I think from Gansgear, for some reason when he thought they had had their day he tied them together and threw them over the telephone wires bottom of Brelade Road by where we lived, stayed there for months.

when I spotted this clothing range called ACC, sweatshirt based with large ACC on the chest. They had a massive run with that range for a few years after.

PO: We were looking at the figures for the global market in trainers. As of 2021 adidas has a net worth of approximately \$40 billion and the trainer/sneaker sector as a whole, is projected to be a \$95.14 billion industry by 2015. Can you remind our readers of the impact Wade Smith had - outselling Manchester and London?



CL: It wasn't just with adidas that we did so well, Liverpool has a history of retail chains where Liverpool was either the number one store in the country, or number two. I remember hearing that about Top Shop, Top Man, and others, which is the same reason Robert Wade Smith opened in Liverpool, as when he was the adidas concession manager at the Liverpool Topman it outsold every other



concession by miles. In Wade Smith, Mathew Street, we were number one in Europe for Ralph Lauren for a while and for adidas Reebok, Nike, Rockport, Lacoste, and a whole load of fashion brands like Versace jeans, Armani jeans, and Prada sport, when things take off in Liverpool they do in a big way.

PO: Trainers are a huge part of fashion's multi-million-pound industry, with high-end brands cashing in on the action. We know that Lanvin, Balenciaga, and Valentino Rockrunner are the appetite for some, but does the die-hard adidas fan still exist here?

CL: There are I am sure new die-hard fans for adidas, but I am so glad I lived through the 80s and 90s period, what you have to remember is that back then there were no re-issues, everything was new and exciting the whole industry was in its infancy with hundreds of independent sports and fashion retailers, all with passionate owners and staff. Now there's JD and Sports Direct.

MAD ON ADIDAS

An exhibition celebrating 1980s trainer culture and the story of Wade Smith. An exploration of history, culture, and the spirit of the 1980s.

Artwork by Nick Beedles commissioned by Chris Lee.

KO: What made you commission this exhibition?

CL: Several things combined really; It's 40 years since I joined Wade Smith, I recognised Nick Beedles the artist, would be great to commission to paint some iconic trainers, and it's an opportunity for me to show some of the 80s, 90s Wade Smith, adidas, Reebok and Nike artefacts and memorabilia I've collected over the years. Plus, it also coincides with the launch of the second stage of START-YARD in Birkenhead, so we have the space. And finally, it's a testbed for a much bigger exhibition I want to do around the book I'm writing called "Mad on Adidas". Where amongst other things I plan on rebuilding Wade Smith Slater Street and collaborate with some collectors, so it looks just like it did in 1982/83.

KO: Sounds like exciting times are ahead! Our readers will want to know if you have a favorite pair of trainers, and if they will feature in the exhibition?

CL: It could be Montreal 76, I had a pair in Slater Street and several others since, those for example I doubt any other store had them in the country, and maybe Tom Okker.

KO: So many shoes are being re-issued from the archives. What would you like to see resurrected?

CL: Adidas comfort, Tom Okker or Zelda. I'd also like to see Palermo...

KO: What we wear on our feet is an expression of who we are, what are you wearing today?

CL: Montreal 76 made in West Germany.

KO: Would you call yourself a collector?

CL: I am but I haven't got as many trainers as I should, I've also collected art, watches, and 20th century design chairs, most of it is now sold.

KO: What do you think is most significant about your collection of memorabilia?

CL: That's a hard one, either the first receipt I wrote, the letter from adidas, the 1980 adidas catalogue, or the two original posters off the wall from Slater Street.

Instagram: @madonadidas

Size: 11
First Pair: adidas Stan Smith
Latest Pair: Nike Air Max '97
Holy Grail: adidas Albatros

