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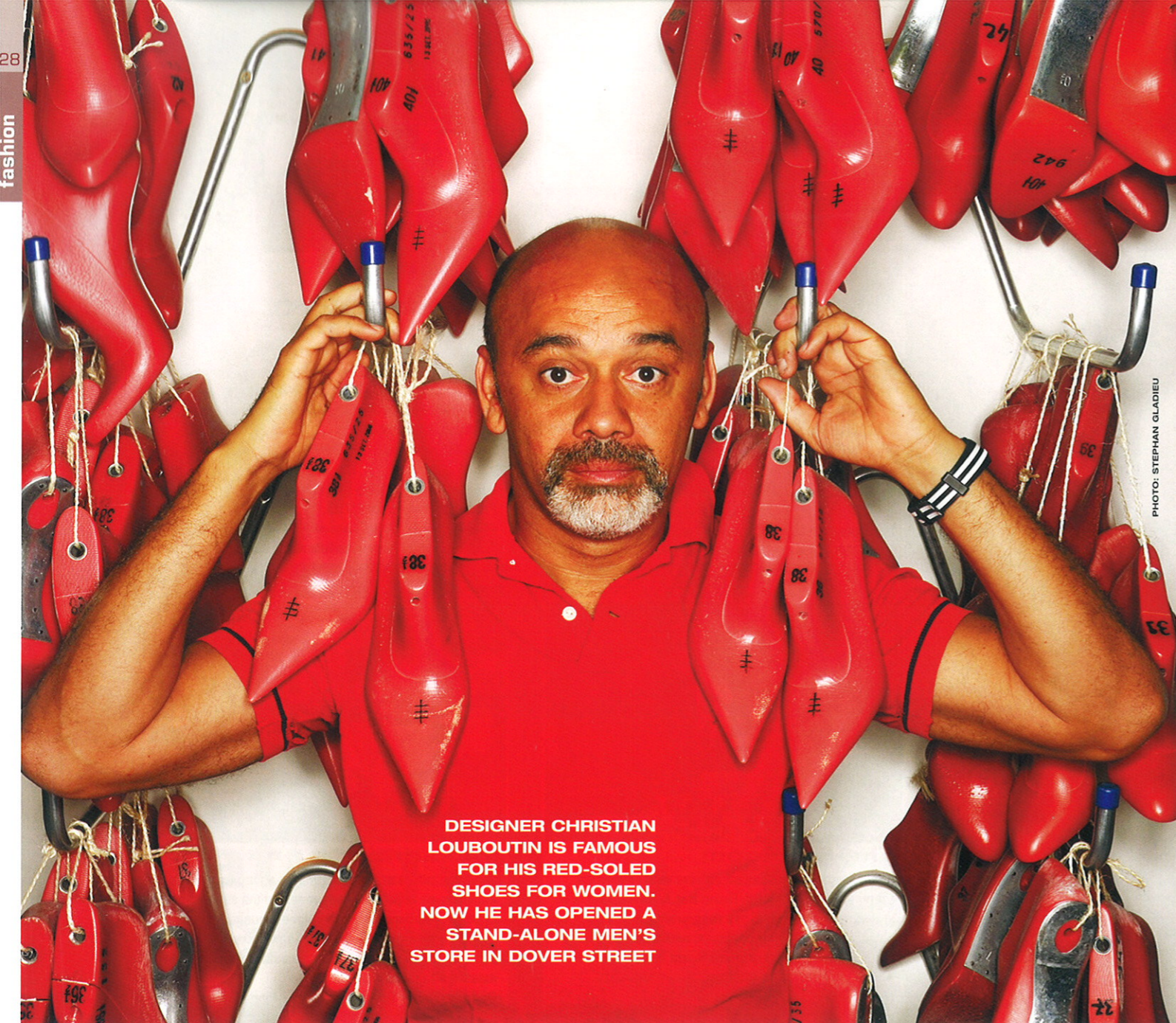


PHOTO: STEPHAN GLADIEU

DESIGNER CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN IS FAMOUS FOR HIS RED-SOLED SHOES FOR WOMEN. NOW HE HAS OPENED A STAND-ALONE MEN'S STORE IN DOVER STREET

Taking the next step

Since opening his first store on Rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau in Paris back in 1991, Christian Louboutin's red-soled shoes have been worn by some of the world's most glamorous women, from Princess Caroline of Monaco and Queen Rania of Jordan to Hollywood stars such as Nicole Kidman and Gwyneth Paltrow.

In 2008 he brought his sexy designs to Mount Street – a decade after opening his first UK store in Belgravia's Motcomb Street – and last year's 20th anniversary celebrations saw the publication of a book and a retrospective at the Design Museum. Following the launch of a dedicated men's space in Paris in September 2011, the French footwear designer has now opened a men's boutique at 35 Dover Street, offering a wide range of men's shoes and bags.

Christian's interest in shoe design goes back to one particular experience during his childhood. He visited a museum near his parents' apartment in Paris and saw his first drawing of a shoe – a high heel with a red cross running through it, as it was forbidden to wear heels in the museum. It was the foundation of his design and influenced what he

Christian Louboutin on Dover Street

Why did you decide to open a stand-alone men's store?

I opened my very first stand-alone men's store in Paris last year. It opened during the August holidays when traditionally it is very quiet in my home city. Without any fanfare, but through word of mouth, it had a very successful launch period and I understood then the growing call for dedicated spaces for men. I opened the first one for aesthetic reasons – when you take women's and men's designs in the same store, the size of the men's shoes are so different that it seems like the French saying "an elephant in a china shop".

Why did you decide to open in Dover Street?

When in London I stay in Mayfair, near my flagship on Mount Street, so Dover Street has always been familiar to me. The new store is housed in a beautiful Georgian building, which still has many original features, so it was the space as well as the location which made the decision.

Were you involved in the design of the store?

I have always been involved in the

designs of my stores, from the very first women's one in Paris over 20 years ago. I worked closely with Eric Clough, an architect from New York-based firm 212box, on the designs. The men's space had to be carefully considered – the women's boutiques are very feminine, boudoir-like environments and the men's space needed to be a very different aesthetic while still bringing the customer into the "world of Louboutin". We kept some elements such as the red carpet I have in all my stores, but gave it a strong geometric border and a deeper, richer shade than my signature red. It is a much more masculine space with a more futuristic feel.

What do you like about the area?

Mayfair has almost everything I need when staying in London – the best concierge, Martin, from Claridge's, onion soup and veal fillet at the Wolseley, my tailor at Norton & Sons on Savile Row and Fortnum & Mason, where I go for HP Sauce, chutney and Colman's Mustard.

Who are your customers in Dover Street?

There is a widely held notion that there is only a certain type of man who is interested in fashion, but I don't have any particular customer type, just those who enjoy being playful with their wardrobe. It isn't that men didn't feel interested in men's luxury goods until recently and, in fact, accessories have always been important in men's fashion, but I think

brands have only recently begun to focus on men only. It is an organic progression, the need was there, and now it is being focused on and is naturally more available.

Is designing men's shoes very different to designing for women, or is the process the same?

With women's designs you have to consider the fact that they are going to transform the body and her way of standing when she wears them – the same thing is not there for men putting on a shoe. What remains the same is the process is that the design for both men and women should give the same excitement when they put them on.



wanted to do creatively. He began sketching shoes and later became transfixed on the glamour of Paris's nightlife, its music halls and burlesque dancers. He was just 16 when he tried to sell his first designs at the Folies Bergère.

He went on to train with Charles Jourdan before working with the likes of Chanel, Yves Saint Laurent and Roger Vivier prior to setting up his own brand.

Christian Louboutin shoes are instantly recognisable by their red soles – which came about by accident.

"I was in a factory in Italy. When the first prototype arrived, there was something missing from the original drawings, which were all in colour – and the more I thought about it, the less I could understand it.

"Then, at one point, I was looking at the prototype in profile and there was this big, black sole and there had been no black in my drawings.

"But luckily enough, I had this assistant who was painting her nails so I grabbed her nail polish and I painted the sole. The shoe then looked exactly as it had in the drawing – it was just a matter of colour. I loved it and it became my trademark."

Christian's first collection of trainers and studded loafers for men was initially introduced in spring 2010 – it was a natural progression for the designer who had been making men's shoes for friends, performers and as part of special collaborations for most of his 20-year career. In recent years, the collections have expanded significantly and now encompass a variety of styles.

