



DRY HEAT

GBMI STEPS INTO THE NEW LUXURY MARKET WITH THE RELAUNCH OF ITALIAN SHOE BRAND DRY-SHO D

WORDS: JOSELLE YOKOGAWA

When Killick Datta (picture above), chief executive of Santa Barbara, California-based GBMI (Global Brand Marketing Inc.) purchased Italian footwear and apparel brand Dry-ShoD, he saw two great things: a superb shoe and a great opportunity. "We've always been known for innovation and doing something different," explains Datta. "We might not always be successful, but we try." GBMI seems to have done something right. Since Datta landed the company's first client, Diesel footwear, in 1996, GBMI's sales have grown from \$6 million to \$300 million in 2003. Its stable of cool footwear brands helps. Aside from its ownership of Dry-ShoD, GBMI is the global licensee for leading footwear brands Diesel, Mecca, Nautica and XOXO, as well as owning the Pony brand of footwear and apparel. With Datta's sights set on entering the New Luxury sector, GBMI acquired Dry-ShoD from its Italian maker in November 2002 for \$8 million. "I purchased Dry-ShoD, because to me, Dry-ShoD is "luxury casual,"" Datta says. Of the brand's prior owners, he adds: "They were a great design and manufacturing resource but not a brand-building resource." The official relaunch of Dry-ShoD started with a men's fall/winter 2005-06 footwear collection, which includes around 80 styles, that bowed in Berlin at the Bread & Butter trade show in January. But aside from the new ownership, the product hasn't changed. The shoes are still uniquely designed, handcrafted in Italy and proudly employ uncommon and luxurious materials – from the natural vegetable tan leather, wrapped crepe soles, the rawest and most natural form of rubber, to the shoes' hand-hammered, stacked heels. The term Wabi-sabi comes to mind when viewing styles such as Bold, a shoe that features hand-stitched patches of leather (reminiscent of a Japanese bento box) with Asian symbols on it. The Sakall, another unique style, features hand-stained autumn-colored strips across a goat leather upper. And a group called Luke features a unique outsole inspired by Italian wheelbarrows. "I like it because, it's not a designer label," explains Datta. "It's a designer's label. There's a difference... If you think of all the

designers in this world, what would they have on their feet? They would want a product on their feet that's equally as innovative as how they think, how they work and how they live. And to me, this is what Dry-ShoD represents."

While Dry-ShoD's organic elements may not necessarily be its best selling feature, they will continue to be an integral part of the brand's concept, from the shoes' construction all the way down to their packaging. "I have to tell you, in all my life that I've been in the

"IT'S NOT A DESIGNER LABEL; IT'S A DESIGNER'S LABEL... IF YOU THINK OF ALL THE DESIGNERS IN THIS WORLD, WHAT WOULD THEY HAVE ON THEIR FEET? THEY WANT A PRODUCT ON THEIR FEET THAT'S EQUALLY AS INNOVATIVE AS HOW THEY THINK, HOW THEY WORK AND HOW THEY LIVE. AND TO ME, THAT'S WHAT DRY-SHO D REPRESENTS." – KILLICK DATTA, CEO, GBMI

shoe industry, I've never spent this much time and have had so many discussions about a shoe box," says Datta. "The shoe box is really incredible though. It's a great design. It's not a box you throw away." The new packaging features a lid-like brown raw corrugated cardboard top and bottom (with the brand name stamped into them) and a pale green center box with a metal silver grommet on the side.

A Dry-ShoD's women's footwear and accessories collection is set to launch for spring '06 and will eventually be followed by men's and women's high-end apparel collections. GBMI plans to distribute Dry-ShoD in all major countries including Hong Kong, where Datta recently returned from after launching the brand there. Dry-ShoD footwear retails between \$200 and \$500 per pair. www.gbmi.com

