

# NEXT FOOT FORWARD

Nike's spring collection of sneakers tells us something about the state of industrial design—and the cultural forces shaping it.

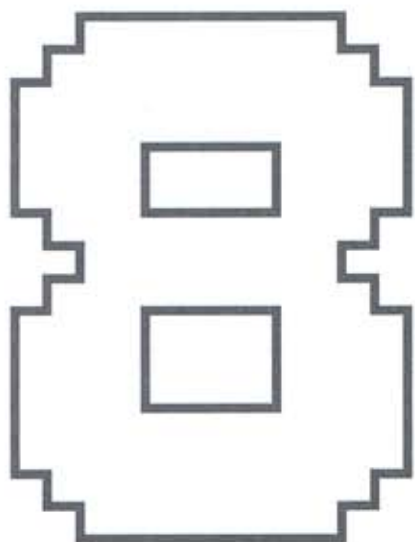


## CONSIDERED

**Considered is Nike's first collection of footwear built around the cradle-to-cradle concept.** The line's five pieces are designed to save energy and minimize waste, a process that begins with form. A single long lace is hand-woven through the boot's three leather components. Along with some strategically placed seams, this assembly removes the need for adhesives to hold the leather together. The sole is made of injected recycled rubber, and its cage is Phylon, a material created from compressed foam pellets. The shoe comes without a lining, making it easier to recycle and reducing the amount of backers, reinforcers, and counterweights needed. Most of the shoe's materials are sourced from within 200 miles of each factory. The line is an extension of Nike's environmental work, including the company's Reuse-A-Shoe take-back program.

Elements from the Considered series have appeared in other Nike shoes: the lacy basket debuted in the Air Woven; the sole's snap-on cage, in the Newson Zvezdochka; and the linerless look, in the Superfly. But to make Considered shoes truly sustainable—and on par with other eco-friendly products like Birkenstock's Footprints line and IPATH's hemp footwear—the designers had to think holistically. As Richard Clarke, Nike's global creative director for footwear, notes, "We were forced to solve the problem in a different way."





## DESIGN INNOVATIONS



CUSTOMIZATION



STREAMLINED SILHOUETTE



'80s REISSUE



NICHE PRODUCT



MINIMAL MATERIALS



SURFACE TREATMENTS



ECO-FRIENDLY



TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION

By Julie Taraska

From Bangalore to the Bronx, sneakers have evolved from purely functional objects to lifestyle items, prized as much for signifying a wearer's identity as for enhancing athletic performance. This shift has introduced new challenges for shoe designers. Aside from choosing from the ever evolving palette of materials and technological developments, they must also address such abstract concepts as hipness and cultural politics, as well as factor in consumer beliefs about topics ranging from ethics to sustainability.

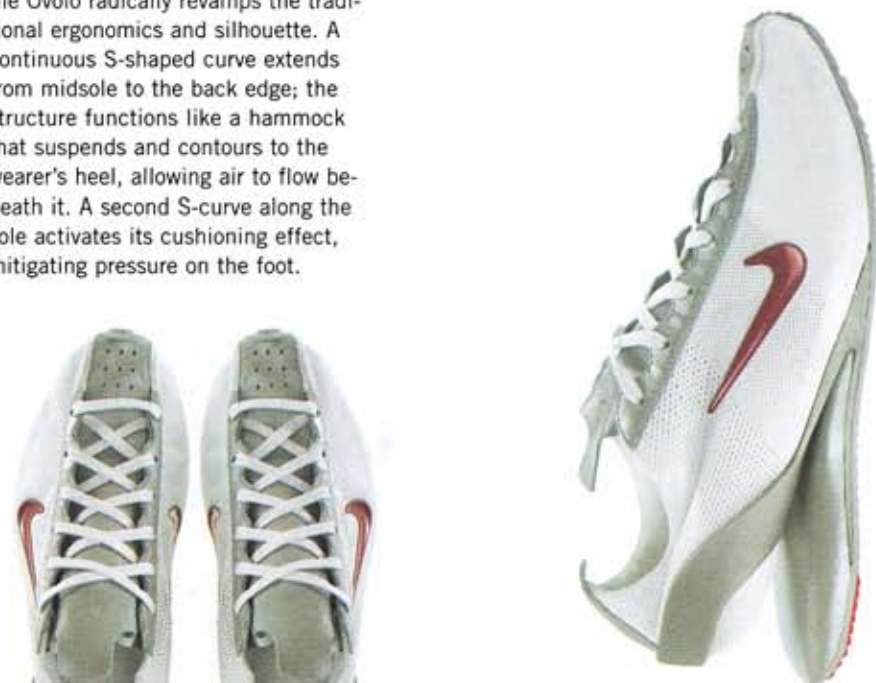
So how are these changes affecting sneaker design? By looking at the 2005 spring-summer collection of Nike—which controls roughly 40 percent of the global market for performance shoes—we can glean some clues. Based on this sample, trends ahead include environmental accountability, technological innovation, surface treatments, customization, 1980s reissues, niche products, simplified silhouettes, and minimal material use. And hovering in the distance—but still out of reach—is modularity: the ability to sell sections of shoes so users can replace worn-out parts or assemble their own models.

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### OVALO

This women's shoe has three aims: increase airflow to the heel, offer a personalized fit, and challenge perceptions of how a running shoe should look. The designers say women are more willing to try unorthodox sneaker styles, and the Ovolo radically revamps the traditional ergonomics and silhouette. A continuous S-shaped curve extends from midsole to the back edge; the structure functions like a hammock that suspends and contours to the wearer's heel, allowing air to flow beneath it. A second S-curve along the sole activates its cushioning effect, mitigating pressure on the foot.



## CITYKNIFE III

This foldable footwear designed for travelers incorporates lessons learned from Nike's Cityknife I (2002) and II (2003), and echoes other specialty lines, such as Reebok's Travel Trainer and Adidas's Jisho and Mei Mesh. **But the shoe packs flatter and can be worn longer than its predecessors because it is made with Phylite, a mixture of foam and rubber placed on the heel and toe of the outer soles, increasing durability and cushioning and removing the need for bulky midsoles.** Cityknife III's surface is laser etched—a process the company introduced in leather footwear about 18 months ago that allows for precise design and detail.



## FREE

Designed as a training aid to strengthen runners' feet, Free intends to liberate the foot from the confines of a shoe. But how to make a sneaker that mimics barefoot training? Give it the suppleness of a human foot. "The trick with Free was to come up with a new manufacturing process for creating deep cuts into the outsole," senior engineer Tobie Hatfield says. "Previously, short slits were always cut into the finished material, but we found a way to mold the cuts as we made the sole"—adding flexibility and saving time. Strategically placed slices also adorn Free's upper, making the surface material less static and confining. All these efforts helped shift the balance of control from the shoe to the foot.





## TRACK DART

This sneaker comes with a celebrity pedigree: it was designed as recovery footwear for sprinter Marion Jones. A streetwear take on Jones's track spikes, the shoe melds form and function with a heavy dose of fashion. **High-frequency welded rather than stitched, with minimal arch support (sprinters place their weight on the forefoot), the lightweight mesh shoe breathes and can be worn barefoot without irritating the skin.** The sole's traction pattern—dimples around the perimeter and rectangles in the center—also nods to Nike's classic waffle sole pattern.



📱 '80s 📱

## VANDAL

Originally debuted in 1985, Vandal offers a different take on customization and, like most of Nike's reissued shoes, was designed as a basketball sneaker. **Nike collaborated with graphic designer Geoff McFetridge to create a shoe that must be "vandalized"—the upper layer of canvas torn or cut away—for the camouflage print underneath to be revealed.** A limited number of the McFetridge shoes appeared in specialty shops about a year and a half ago. A newer version has updated materials and a two-layer upper—a gray top and an underlying camouflage pattern. Wide-spread distribution of the shoe is expected soon.

