

Justin FitzPatrick

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Browse the shoe sections of London's most exclusive menswear stores, and you won't notice many up-and-coming labels fighting for space among the likes of Loake, Church's and Crockett & Jones. It was a thought that more than occurred to Justin FitzPatrick when he graduated from the University of Washington in 2006 and set his heart on launching his own range. "My competitors had 100-year-old factories and client bases that never changed," he explains today. "I needed experience. I couldn't just be a kid from Seattle with a business degree going, 'Here's my line' and expect anyone to take me seriously."

So he set himself a task: a five-year plan to learn every aspect of the industry from the ground up, despite being a complete outsider. He started selling shoes in a department store so he could understand the minds of buyers. He emptied his savings to undertake an apprenticeship in Florence with legendary shoemaker Stefano Bemer. And when his money ran out, he continued his education by moving to the UK to shine and polish for Gieves & Hawkes by day while learning about patterns and lasts from Tony Gaziano, co-founder of Gaziano and Girling, in his spare time.

But here's the clever part. While doing all of this, he created his own blog, The Shoe Snob, for footwear fanatics, like him, who wanted to know the secrets of the industry. "I knew that if I got enough readers, I would have a ready-made customer base when I finally launched."

That was four years ago. Today Justin FitzPatrick is on track to sell 3000 pairs in 2017, and his brand is renowned for combining traditional craftsmanship with creative thinking. His Jodhpur boot, for instance, feature straps that come back around themselves rather than wrap around the ankle for increased comfort. His made-to-measure shoes are created from a bespoke last, while he only uses the same high-grade leather found in handmade pairs that cost three times the price.

Why, you wonder, did he put himself through all those years of struggle when he could have launched a business closer to home?

"I want to provide the world with great shoes. After graduating it was my never-looking-back goal to make that happen."

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