

The only way is uppers

Reality star and designer Jessica Wright talks about her lifelong passion for shoes and her collaborative range with industry stalwart Lacey's Footwear



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PROFIL



Tell me a bit about how your footwear label was started.

My dream has always been to have my own range of shoes – I've been obsessed by footwear since I was a little girl and they really are my passion. I love how they can change an entire outfit, and even the way you feel. When I initially met with the team at Lacey's Footwear I knew I had to work with them. It's one of the very best shoe manufacturers in the UK, so it's an honour that they wanted to work with me. What they don't know about shoes isn't worth knowing – from the design stage to materials and production to retail – they're the experts and it's been a dream collaboration from day one. They seemed to my vision, which was so important to me and I have learnt so much from them in the first year of launch. We're now on our second collection for spring/summer 2016, and some styles sold out on the day of launch, which was the most incredible feeling after all of the hard work everyone has put in.

What was the aim of the label when it was first established?

The aim was to produce an affordable, comfortable, on-trend range of shoes that appeal to women of all ages. I also wanted to create pieces which were my vision – to see my dreams come to life and design the shoes that I wish existed. The styles are very much me, and are very recognisable which was hugely important, hence the gold glitter sole on every design. I really believe we've achieved our original aims – there's a style of shoe in my collection for every woman: the woman who wants to party, the woman who wants to go out for dinner, the woman who's working in an office, the woman who's getting married. There's something for everyone, yet it's all very Jessica Wright. Each pair has its own USP, with different colours, styles, heel heights, materials and overall looks across the line.

How was the initial product developed, and what was the response?

We sat down and started designing straight away – I came with a lot of initial ideas and with the help and guidance of Lacey's, we were able to create what was in my head. We began drawing and designing shapes and mixing colours, materials and heel heights together. I was thrilled when I saw the samples for the first time – with a few tweaks the debut collection was perfect, and to see its initial success was brilliant. I felt very proud launching my very first footwear collection to the trade and press at Moda; my dream was now very much a reality. People are always surprised by how comfortable they are, it's so hard to buy comfortable heels which look on-trend and sexy and we've definitely achieved it. There's no better feeling than seeing women out and about in my shoes and seeing that gold glitter sole glow.

What challenges were encountered when the company was starting out?

Although it sounds too good to be true, we've had very few challenges – it's been a very smooth process which I believe is a sign of a perfect, successful collaboration. That said, it has been a big learning curve for me – I've learnt so much about the timings, logistics and technicalities behind a collection, and only how much work goes on behind the scenes. One challenge we did have, however, was finding the appropriate heel height for the right customer – that was hard to get right and agree on initially but we eventually cracked it. I had ideas of what I wanted but sometimes it just wasn't realistic, this is where the team at Lacey's was amazing, with their knowledge on the realities of creating a shoe that works and sells. Overall though, I must say that it has been an amazing journey.

What sets you apart from your competitors in the footwear industry?

Well I have to say it's the trademark gold glitter sole, I love it and that is what everyone is talking about. However, I really don't believe that any other label offers a collection that offers the affordable quality, on-trend look and comfort that mine does. Affordable pricing on designer-look shoes is hard to come by.

How important is the location and history of the company to its success?

I think it's very important – I love that my collection is designed and based in London, it's my capital city and a huge hub for fashion and design. The fact that Lacey's has such a strong history and a great reputation in the industry is invaluable too. It's also about how focused and determined you are as a company on creating the final product you plan to achieve. A lot of thought and effort goes into the process from start to finish. The Lacey's team and I work really well together to produce something we're all totally happy with.

How would you describe the current Jessica Wright footwear collection?

As we all know, fashion changes all the time and certainly goes around in circles. I love how fashion can be almost anything within reason, as long as you style it well. For me, with my shoe collection it's all about creating a pair that makes a woman feel powerful when she walks in them. In my opinion, shoes can totally change the way you feel about yourself. You can go from feeling dowdy to fabulous just by slipping on a fabulous heel! My collections are definitely trend-led but they have their own original quirks which work well to give the range a twist. It was so fun to play around with ideas.

How often do you launch new lines?

We launch autumn/winter and spring/summer collections each year, but I've ensured that we continue popular styles, as



many of the designs are timeless classics which are trans-seasonal.

What are the current best-selling designs?

The current best-sellers are the Amara – I love them, I wore them to the BRITs this year and they sold out pretty much straight away. Other popular styles in my spring/summer 2016 collection are Alaska and Adrianna. Ann and Angelina were both so popular for autumn/winter 2015 as they're ideal for the Christmas party season. Also, let's not forget the Amore style, which is really popular with bridal parties – the bridesmaids wore them at my brother's (TV presenter, Mark Wright) wedding.

When was the website launched and how does it support the business?

The website launched with the collection in August 2015. It's a huge part of the business, as we see a lot of traffic and sales through the site, especially as our brand social media is so active. The website's very important, as it acts like a worldwide shop window whilst we grow the brand beyond its second collection – it's still early days.

Which trade shows do you attend and which one works best for you?

Our main trade show each season is Moda. I was so pleased to be at the NEC in



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August 2015 launching my debut line, and I'm looking forward to attending again. I loved chatting to buyers, press and the public about my collection. We've also shown the collection at trade shows abroad, such as Miam in Milan and Expo Riva at Cerdà. These are really important fairs where we've introduced my Jessica Wright Footwear brand to a more global market – it shows where we're going with the brand and our aim is to go global quickly.

What have been the key milestones for your business so far?

Apart from the successful launch last summer and the nearly sold-out spring/summer 2016 collection, I must say seeing the brand stocked by Lippy and House of Fraser were fantastic milestones for us.

How do you view the current market and what trends, both in product and in business, do you see emerging over the coming months?

Trends-wise, I really don't want to give away the secrets of my spring and summer collection, but expect more heels, glitz and on-trend glamour for autumn/winter. Business-wise, it's very clear that the power of social media is only on the increase – it still amazes me how much impact Twitter, Instagram and now Snapchat can have on a brand's reputation, sales and success – it's an amazing business tool that can't be underestimated.

What are your future plans for the Jessica Wright Footwear label?

When something is successful, I believe you need to continue with the same formula. We're going to continue launching bigger collections each season, pushing the boundaries more and more on each one. We want to extend the retail reach of the line with each season and ensure that my gold glitter sole becomes synonymous with one of the best and leading shoe collections on the market. **EW**

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