

Kenta Matsunaga
Moonstar, Japan

In 2010, four employees at Japanese shoemaker Moonstar decided to make a canvas-and-rubber trainer as a sample to represent the 141-year-old company's factory in Kurume at a design exhibition in neighbouring Fukuoka.

To highlight Moonstar's craftsmanship they used a vulcanised rubber sole, a process dating to the company's first *jika-tabi* shoes in the 1920s, and persuaded executives to back the project.

"We called the exhibition *Shoes Like Pottery*," says Kenta Matsunaga, a product planner for children's shoes at the time. "The name came from a factory visitor who likened vulcanisation to ceramics made in a kiln."

Getting the green light for a commercial line was tricky; Matsunaga and designers

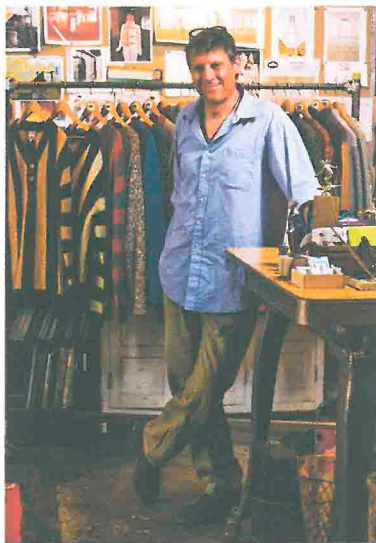
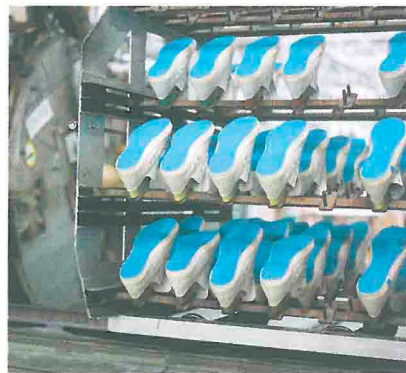
Yoh Mizoguchi, Yoshitake Takahashi and Yasuyo Urano had no marketing data to suggest that their trainers would sell. So they had to find shops to stock them and they wanted to avoid Moonstar's established channel: chain stores. Good Weaver, a shop in Fukuoka specialising in products made by local artisans, signed on.

The trainers are made by Moonstar's most skilled shoemakers and though they account for less than 1 per cent of the company's ¥33.2bn (€241m) in annual revenue, the shoes' growing success is inspiring change. Matsunaga is now on a team exploring new ideas. "We have sold mass-produced shoes for low prices but little by little we are rethinking what's special about what we do," he says. — KH

Why it works: Matsunaga's initiative shows that with the right culture, change can come from within a business.



"We are rethinking what's special about us?"



Steven Tatar
Ohio Knitting Mills, USA

Five blocks from its original home, venerable US knitwear maker Ohio Knitting Mills, founded in 1927, has been resurrected in a red-brick warehouse. Cleveland native Steven Tatar met Gary Rand, whose family had operated the mill for 76 years, just before the original factory was razed in the early 2000s.

After a period of collaboration, Rand agreed to sell Tatar the rights to use the mill's name – as well as thousands of the patterns and samples from the company's archives.

With no experience in the fashion industry, Tatar hired a production manager and began apprenticing under long-time knitter Peter Fleck at the latter's family mill in New Jersey. The Flecks' firm had worked with Ohio Knitting Mills since the 1970s and Tatar now spends months there with a small team making designs from Italian, French and American yarns. "The experience of camaraderie, is something we all share," he says.

In downtown Cleveland Tatar employs a small team who create clothes inspired by the original Ohio patterns. Orders are coming from respected Japanese and American shops and the brand produced its first wholesale collection in 2013. Though he admits demand won't surpass its heyday (it once employed 1,000 people), Tatar has high hopes. "I think of us as an American Missoni or Marimekko," he says. "I think we have the same opportunity." — MDB

Why it works: Tatar's commitment to heritage makes his brand truly authentic.

