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Clarks pays homage to Tokyo's streetwear origins

Exploring the backstreets of Harajuku, Clarks takes a deep dive into street style history.

September 2024: For FW24, Clarks heads to streetwear's ground zero, Ura-Harajuku, charting the cultural cross-pollination that makes it one of the most significant fashion districts in Shibuya, not least the birthplace of the eponymous style tribe, Urahara kei.

The Clarks and Tokyo documentary, directed by Taichi Kimura, delves deep into the archives, calling on the voices and faces that live and breathe the culture. Throughout, writers, independent store directors and Urahara diehards lay out the seminal role Clarks and its core silhouettes played in the birth of the scene. The designs in question? The Wallabee, primed with its glove-like fit; the Desert Boot, a 1950s-born, smooth-toe essential; and the Desert Trek, renowned for its distinctive central seam.

Cultural exchange

The interviewees guide us through five decades. From the early 60s, when American Ivy League and British prep first began infiltrating Japanese youth style, all the way through to the 70s surf boom, and later, the 90s and 2000s, pinpointing the cultural milestones that made each Clarks design a hit.

Together, the story builds a picture of proto-streetwear Tokyo, where style tribes fashioned themselves in vintage imports and classic Clarks footwear. "In the 1960s, the first thing you have to understand was Japanese kids had to be in uniform all the time," says David Marx, author of 'Ametora: How Japan Saved American Style'. "Desert Boots were one of the core shoes that people started to wear when they started to dress outside their uniforms."



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Original street-style

The Urahara's heyday came in the late 90s and early 2000s, posterboyed by Japanese design heroes, Hiroshi Fujiwara, Nigo and Jun Takahashi. Through them, Japanese dandies searching for something a little more understated than Harajuku's kawaii kids discovered the wares of US hip-hop and skate culture. This further cemented the status of the Wallabee – already a favourite across New York hip hop and with artists like the Beastie Boys and Wu Tang – making it a natural addition to their vintage denim and rare graphic tees.

Throughout, the documentary teases pages from cult publications. From the first Japanese menswear magazine, 'Men's Club', to 'Takarajima', the pop-culture magazine responsible for Hiroshi

Fujiwara's infamous 'Last Orgy' column – a recommendation segment focused on record releases, punk and b-boy culture – pivotal in bridging the East-West gap.

During the short, Uraharajuku regular, DJ Daruma, takes a trip down memory lane, spotlighting his legendary hangouts, be it Neighbourhood's original store or BAPE's former stomping ground. "I remember my parents making me wear the Wallabees when I was younger, so I remember them quite vividly," he says. "When you wanted to be a little bit different from the rest, people wore the Clarks Wallabee instead of sneakers."

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Across generations

Each and every figure seen in the film - from SHIPS Ginza's Norio Amemiya, the MIMIC team and atmos' Hirofumi Kojima to stylist Kei Hashimoto and Kowga's designer Kasumi Kouga - has a personal and unique connection to Clarks and Urahara. It is these authentic connections that differentiate all over the globe that make Clarks a brand like no other.



Alongside the documentary, a trio of lookbooks highlight a generation of elders and a new wave of subcultural cognoscenti rocking Clarks effortless staples, as well as the one-off Harajuku pack Wallabees. The latter come primed with subtle nods to the youth district's signatures: beaded laces, leopard print pony hair and fob adornments, all adding further innovation to an old-school canvas. Elsewhere, the pack features scaled-up platform soles, camo-canvas panelling offset with classic mocc-stitch piping - plus, snake- or croc-effect leathers. Naturally, the microsuede remains constant.



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"I think it's amazing how Clarks has maintained its mood and style for the youth today," says Fuko Asayama, director of BEAMS' womenswear label, BEAMS BOY. "Even though some elements have been updated, the shape has yet to. I don't think there are a lot of shoes that have that to say about them."

The documentary will be available to watch on the [@ClarksOriginals](#) Instagram from **19th September 2024.**



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About Clarks

Clarks, based in Somerset, England, has been at the forefront of innovative shoemaking since its foundation in 1825, when brothers Cyrus and James Clark made a slipper from sheepskin cut-offs. At the time it was ground breaking: a combination of invention and craftsmanship that's remained at the heart of what the brand does now. In the Clarks archive of more than 22,000 pairs are shoes that have sparked revolutions and defined generations. From the original Clarks Desert Boot, first designed by Nathan Clark and launched in 1950, to the iconic Wallabee, each design has an instantly recognisable signature that makes it unmistakably Clarks. Clarks is a global business operating retail, wholesale, franchise, and online channels in over 100 markets.

