

# Fashion Outlook

## Shoe designer leads a worthy march

While most people tip-toe around the subject of AIDS, shoe designer Kenneth Cole has dug in his heels and become a prominent supporter of AIDS research. A patron of The American Foundation for AIDS Research, he also encourages those who like his fashion direction to follow in his philanthropic footsteps.

Perhaps you've seen Cole's most recent magazine ad with a blank check made out to AmFAR, and this statement: "Buy a pair of our shoes on World AIDS Day and you'll contribute to more than your wardrobe." The fine print revealed that on Dec. 1, the U.N.-sponsored World AIDS Day, Cole planned to donate 40 percent of every shoe sale to AmFAR.

AmFAR, based in New York City, supports international AIDS education and treatment programs, and community-based clinical trials of promising drugs. According to a very conservative estimate, AIDS has claimed at least 65,000 lives in the last nine years. Experts fear that thousands more men, women and children will become victims of AIDS before it can be controlled, let alone cured.

Although many in the fashion community contribute to AIDS programs, Cole has made a very visible commitment. In 1985, he launched a public awareness campaign with a series of striking ads. Cole devoted the firm's \$250,000 ad budget to put his first eye-catcher in 27 publications in one month. Annie Leibowitz (of Rolling Stone and Vanity Fair fame) photographed top models Ariane, Christie Brinkley, Kelly Emberg, Cindy Harel, Beverly Johnson, Andie MacDowell, Paulina, Julianne Phillips and Joan Severance with a group of chil-

dren. The ad proclaimed: "For the Future of Our Children ... Support The American Foundation for AIDS Research. We Do."

Cole sometimes uses stark images. When the phrase "safe sex" was said in hushed tones, one of his ads made its point in a one-two punch: a picture of a condom package and a line of copy: "Shoes are not the only thing we encourage you to wear."

Just after Cole and his wife, Maria, had their first baby, Emily Carrie, about 14 months ago, baby shoes appeared in another ad with a startling observation: "This year because of AIDS, hundreds of Americans won't live long enough to fill these shoes."

"That one is special to us," admits Maria Cole. Her husband, still in Italy working on his next collection, enlisted her help to explain his theories on fashion and philanthropy. Maria Cole is more than a supportive spouse; she works in public relations and helped create her husband's press kit. "After the first ad's success, Kenneth decided that every couple of months he would dedicate an ad to AIDS aware-

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ness," she explains, adding that her husband comes up with the ideas for all of his other ads.

In these memorable ads, Cole manages to make witty references to newsmakers without ever sticking his foot in his mouth. Nancy Reagan, Imelda Marcos, and even the 1988 presidential candidates have made their way into Kenneth Coles' ads. Even his father-in-law, Governor Mario Cuomo of New York, is amused. "He thinks that the ads are clever," says Maria Cole.

Her husband's wit and attention to detail is also evident in his successful shoeline, distributed to more than 2,000 U.S. stores and 11 countries. There is a Kenneth Cole store in San



"This year because of AIDS, hundreds of Americans won't live long enough to fill these shoes."

—Kenneth Cole

BABY SHOES were shown in this ad from Kenneth Cole's fund-raising campaign for The American Foundation for AIDS Research.

Francisco; and a third New York store just opened in the Flatiron district. Outfitted with weathered metal and bare wood, this new flagship provides a dramatic setting for a wide selection of shoe styles at moderate prices (\$50 to \$150).

Cole knows how to work whimsy into his collection. Take the classic penny loafer updated in lizard print leather, or the suede oxford with a nonsense crepe sole and mink trim

and mink pompoms on the shoelaces. Some pumps have a romantic touch of embroidery.

But Cole is in control. He knows when simplicity becomes shorthand for elegance. He's created simple but well-sculpted suede pumps that are perfect for the most conservative office. The extra touch comes in the color range, a warm nutmeg, vibrant cobalt and vintage burgandy. He offers men some tailored but unstodgy oxfords and boots with maximum swagger.

Cole, who started his business in 1981, five years after he and his father Charles began Candies, maintains what he calls a "fashion forward" approach to his line. In 1988, he created Unlisted, affordable shoes that keep in step with current trends — heavy rubber soles, lizard prints, quilted suede and front-zipped, go-go boots or flats with poetically floppy bows.

This year Unlisted and Kenneth Cole handbags made a big hit by combining quality leather and suede with interesting details, like the handle made from a metal coil encased in plastic. Soon after the shoe designer heard the patter of little feet at home, he introduced Kid Cole, baby shoes. Next spring, look for Kenneth Cole wallets, makeup and key cases.

EMBROIDERED satin piping gives a romantic touch to Kenneth Cole's velvet pump ("Scroller Coaster") or slip-on ("Hi-Scroller"). Both are \$82.

Cole's creativity has won kudos from the fashion industry. The 35-year-old business man won the Cutty Sark Men's Fashion Award for Outstanding Accessory Design in 1985 and 1987. Last year, he was elected to the National Council of Fashion Designers. But it is his ability to fashion a company with a visible commitment to helping others that allows Kenneth Cole to continually put his best foot forward.



KENNETH COLE, a shoe designer, tries to make his fashion-conscious customers more aware of social issues, such as AIDS.

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