

INTERVIEW

JASON SCHOTT



Jason Schott is the fourth generation of Schott family members to work for the New York family business. His great grandfather, Irving, created the first ever 'Perfecto' jacket, for which the brand is most famous, in 1928. To mark its 90th anniversary, Schott NYC is putting on an exhibition of past jacket models at the forthcoming Jacket Required, as Tom Bottomley discovers.

—

Have you always worked for the family business?

I grew up sweeping floors and packing boxes in the factory. We have a rule in the family that everyone must leave and gain experience outside and bring back a unique skill. I worked as a certified public accountant after college, and joined the family business full-time about 20 years ago.

Do you know the business inside out, from the factory floor upwards?

Yes, my grandfather had a saying that we can't expect anybody to do a job that we aren't willing to do. So it's important to my family to know every aspect of everyone's jobs.

How would you best describe the enduring appeal of Schott NYC's outerwear?

We focus on building the best quality products that we can, by using techniques that have been passed down for over 100 years. We know that there will always be demand for timeless things that will become heirlooms and be passed down. The company was actually founded in 1913 by my great grandfather Irving and his brother, Jack Schott. It's a little known fact that Schott NYC was the first company to put a zipper on a jacket.

What big anniversary is the brand celebrating in 2018? Do you have any special plans?

My great grandfather invented the motorcycle jacket in 1928, so we are celebrating the 90th anniversary of the 'Perfecto' motorcycle jacket. We will be hosting an exhibition at the London trade show, Jacket Required. We will have the

same double stand that we normally have at the show, however, we will also have a large space behind our stand which will showcase the Perfecto exhibition. It will be a celebration of the Perfecto jacket, showcasing over 50-plus jackets, which will feature special collaboration pieces from brands like Supreme, Jeremy Scott, RRL and Vetements, to name but a few.

How much of the Schott product is still made in the original factory in New York?

In the US, over 80 per cent of our product is made in our factory. In Europe, we work with our Schott NYC licensee, so the product is split between US and European styles.

How important is it to still make your products in the USA, and to have that on your labelling?

It is less about the label and more about being able to control every aspect of the production. My family is managing the production every day and we wouldn't have the same product if we couldn't be as involved in the manufacturing.

What would you consider are the three most iconic Schott outerwear pieces that you still make today?

The three most iconic pieces in our collection are the motorcycle jacket, the bomber jacket and the peacoat. We have made many versions of these three styles, all of which are based on function and utility.

What are the company's link to the US military, police, fire services and so on, and how did they come about originally?

During WWII, all US manufacturers ended their civilian production to manufacture for the military. We still make many of our jackets to those military specifications. We haven't made uniforms for the fire services but we did make them for local police forces.

Do you have a favourite Schott jacket of your own? If so, what is it?

I have too many to have one favourite. I've been wearing an unlined café racer from our Perfecto brand collection lately.

Who are some of the most famous wearers of Schott jackets over the years?

Schott NYC hit the big screen in 1953, when the Perfecto One Star jacket was featured in the cult movie *The Wild Ones*, starring Marlon Brando.

Johnny, the leader of the Black Rebels

Motorcycle Club, is forever immortalised in his Perfecto One Star as the icon of the counter culture. The Perfecto was catapulted to the height of its popularity in 1955, when a love for speed ended the life of the quintessential 'American Bad Boy', James Dean. It is said that Dean could hardly be seen without his Perfecto. The black leather jacket became synonymous with 'The Rebel', and was banned from high schools across the country in the US.

We are lucky that over the years some very talented people have worn our jackets. As well as style icons like Brando and Dean, the likes of The Ramones, Blondie, Bruce Springsteen, Lady Gaga, Jay-Z, Kanye West and Rihanna have all been keen wearers of Schott NYC's Perfecto jackets.

What percentage of your business these days is with the women's offer and have you seen that side grow?

We do offer a women's collection, but in the UK we have found more of a demand for unisex styles. The UK customer likes to wear things with a boyfriend fit. For a/w 18, we have focused on introducing some new unisex styles into the collection.

Is there a new UK wholesale focus going forward?

We are always looking to grow the business globally. In the UK, we have launched with Selfridges and Matches for a/w 17, and look forward to opening similar accounts for a/w 18. Harvey Nichols and Mr Porter are other key accounts for us right now.

Who is the real target market for the Schott brand right now?

We have been making outerwear for over 100 years and we don't focus specifically on one target market. We stay true to our history and heritage, and focus on making quality products with a modern update. We are very lucky because we have a wide, diverse customer base with age ranges from 16 to 50-plus.

What do you see as the key styles which will work in the UK for a/w 18?

Flight jackets are currently performing extremely well for the UK market and have been for some years. We have seen a shift from MA-1 bomber jackets into A2 pilot jackets and B3 sheepskins. The CWU jacket, with the Velcro Schott NYC chest badge, is also proving very popular again

with the whole 90s trend gaining momentum. And, as we are the original creators of the Perfecto biker jacket, we always get a lot of enquiries about this timeless classic.

Will your offer at Jacket Required be wider and more prominent this time?

Yes, it most certainly will. We will now be taking three different collections to the show. They are Schott NYC, which is our commercial unisex collection, Schott Limited Edition, which is our contemporary collection, and Schott NYC Perfecto Brand, our US heritage line.

How would you best describe the Schott NYC mainline?

This collection is designed and made by our European licensee, which has been working with the brand for over 35 years. This collection is our most commercial range. It offers competitive price points and also introduces trend items that are key for the UK market. It's this collection that features some of our most iconic styles from the 90s, which people know and love.

What's the Schott Limited Edition collection all about?

In 2016, Schott NYC launched the new premium collection called Schott Limited Edition. The concept behind the collection was 'Watch your back!' This was inspired by a hunting jacket, where the back of the jacket was painted red, so hunters could identify each other and avoid friendly fire. Schott Limited Edition uses premium fabrication, contrast colours and blends elements from our rich history. The collection has a much more contemporary feel, and it is more fashion oriented.

Finally, what is special about the Schott NYC Perfecto Brand?

When Irving Schott began making his elite line of leather jackets in the 1920s, he called the collection Perfecto after his favourite cut of cigar. This collection of jackets represented the most special and unique pieces in the line, which still holds true today. The current Perfecto brand collection draws its inspiration from our family's archive, passed down over 100 years. Timeless classics are reinterpreted in modern fits, using modern materials. The result is a sharp, focused line of authentic Americana. The Perfecto brand collection is built for individuals who appreciate the history behind the garments, unique materials and vintage style trims. All styles are handmade in the USA at our New York factory.

CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER
SCHOTT NYC