

Paris Plastic Polo : Michael Young Designs Lacoste



*Successful, British product, furniture and interior designer, Michael Young was commissioned to design a Lacoste polo shirt. His work is collected by design museums internationally and is seen as inspirational, always using materials and manufacture in original ways. Launched to the press at a buzzing, fashionista party in Paris in July, Michael describes the polo project's creative process.*

When Lacoste invited me to be a part of their unique Holiday Collector's Series, where each year the brand selects a designer, outside the fashion world, to 'reinterpret' its iconic polo shirt and to challenge its production methods and processes, I was honored. Then I found out that I was in fact the second designer to be commissioned, so of course, my first question was, "Who was the first?" That turned out to be Tom Dixon, and his Eco and Techno polo's were a hard act to follow. I felt that he had already used some of the best ideas for packaging (vacuum packed aluminum for the Techno and recycled egg carton for the Eco) and he actually produced not one, but two, distinctly different polo's for the project.



So, I started out thinking about how I could distinguish my polo from his; I immediately hit upon the idea. Years ago, I discovered these colourful gardening gloves in Japan that had a latex coating and started collecting them, but until now I never found any use for them. Plastic has always been a favorite material of mine, and for Lacoste, I wanted to experiment with combining plastic and fabric to create a fresh, futuristic polo that would reflect the heritage of the brand. It was also a great challenge, as a product and interior designer used to working with hard surfaces, to be faced with soft, flexible fabrics.



I visited the Lacoste factory, in a city called Troyes, a couple of hours outside Paris, to better understand how a polo is made and how we could replicate the gardening glove plastic technique on the piqué cotton of a polo. After many, many tests, we finally got it right with heat-activated ink. Instead of a standard silk-screen printing process, the ink is applied directly to the piqué cotton and is then baked causing it to blister and become the thick, plastic fake croc 'skin' itself. Now, the next step was to think about how to use that technique to make a statement on the polo. Since the crocodile logo is such an icon, I thought that it would be fun to deconstruct it. So, I did, creating what looks almost like a fossilised crocodile. It literally swims up the front, over the shoulder and down the back of the polo. So the Plastic Polo was born, and will be at Lacoste shops and concessions, globally, from November. I cannot wait to walk down the street and meet someone wearing one!

I also designed a super-limited edition called the PLASTIC POLO +, where the croc skin print is covered with a metallic leaf film and pressed with a hot iron, leaving a distressed, vintage feel to the skin. The PLASTIC POLO+ is available for men and women in a limited edition of 1000 each, in two colour combinations; silver on black and gold on white. It will be available from October at multi-brand shops, such as Colette in Paris, Dover Street Market in London and Isetan Tagline in Tokyo.

As part of the project, I wanted to challenge the notion of plastic as a wasteful, disposable resource. So, for the packaging, I designed a tray, with a re-sealable lid, that could find a new life after carrying the polo, as a storage unit on a desk or a table. The Plastic Polo tray is white, while the limited edition, Plastic Polo +, is black. Even the media kits, which I also designed, took this reusable plastic concept further. I designed a USB bracelet with the crocodile skin pattern printed into the mould. This white accessory contained the press releases and images of the Plastic Polo project from which the media and buyers could download the info they needed but then keep the bracelet and reuse the storage device when and where they wanted. This was a reaction to the incredible amount of waste I witnessed in Milan at the Salone (furniture show). I met many journalists and was very surprised by how much paper and printed catalogues they were given. Only to see them again at the airport, on their way home, with only the CD-ROMs in hand. Hopefully too, in my way, I have also been able to save some trees with the Plastic Polo.

