



Case Study:

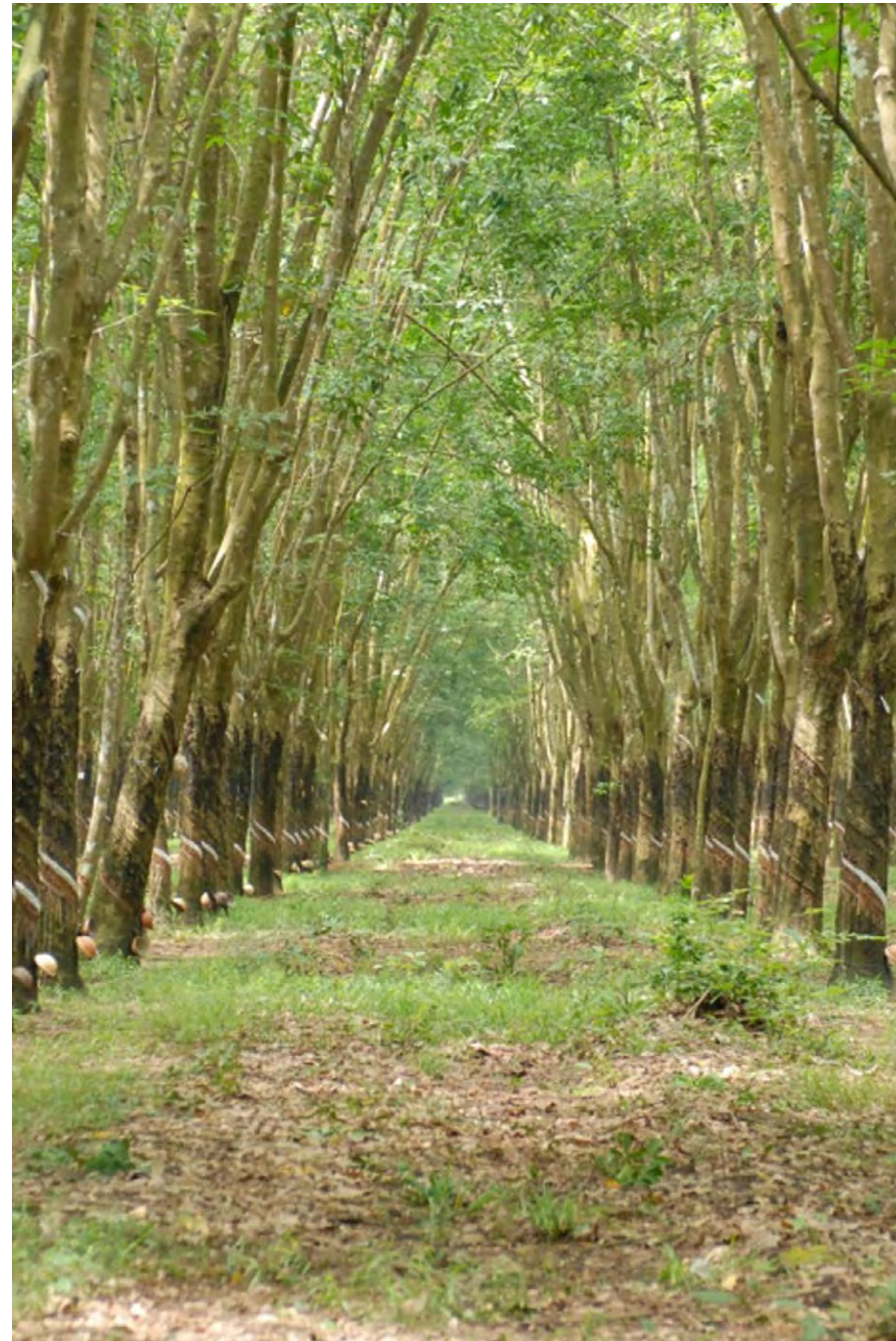
FEIT Latex Walker

FEIT is a footwear brand that makes handsewn shoes using all natural materials. While this is what sets the brand apart and is a core moral tenant of the brand and its founder, it can also be difficult to create market-competitive products with these constraints.

The challenge: **Design a cushioned walking sneaker for FEIT that solves the issue of heaviness in natural material sole options.**







FEIT has worked with a French supplier to source natural latex (rubber) for use on its products. Up to this point they had used this rubber for small portions of their outsoles as well as a few slimmer sole units. The drawbacks of this material are its **delicacy when made too thin**, as well as its **heaviness** as compared to other traditional sneaker sole materials.



Anatomy of a core FEIT shoe:

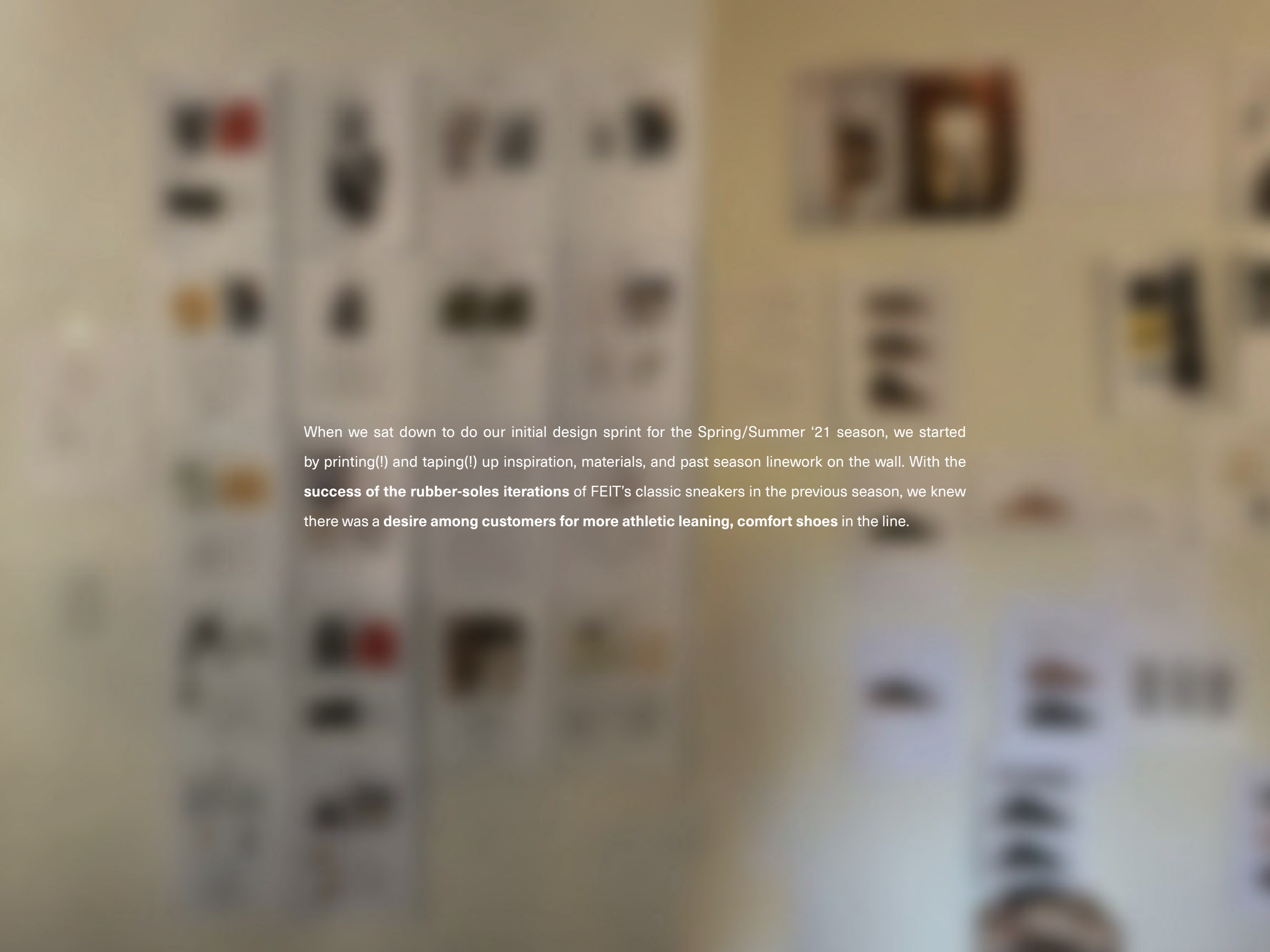






My “trend” work for footwear projects starts with a scroll through my iphone photos. Because of my fascination with shoes, I often will stealthily (creepily?) snag photos of people I come across wearing unique footwear in interesting ways. Usually I tend to take photos of styles that have interesting construction or patterning that catches my eye, less so shoes that are “trendy” as I find that segment of the market easier to follow online. I call this part **noticing what I notice**. Tull, founder and head designer at FEIT, and I sent the above photos of people we passed on the street or subway to eachother leading up to the design of the Latex Walker.





When we sat down to do our initial design sprint for the Spring/Summer '21 season, we started by printing(!) and taping(!) up inspiration, materials, and past season linework on the wall. With the **success of the rubber-soles iterations** of FEIT's classic sneakers in the previous season, we knew there was a **desire among customers for more athletic leaning, comfort shoes** in the line.

From there we benchmarked competitive athletic comfort shoes. After the **rise in maximalist running shoes and their transition into the fashion scene**, we had seen sneaker soles getting thicker and thicker, often paired with lightweight uppers. With this aesthetic showing no sign of slowing down, we sought to create an all natural competitor product.





Going into the design process, we knew utilizing **cork** would be vital in keeping the **weight** of the final product **to a minimum**.

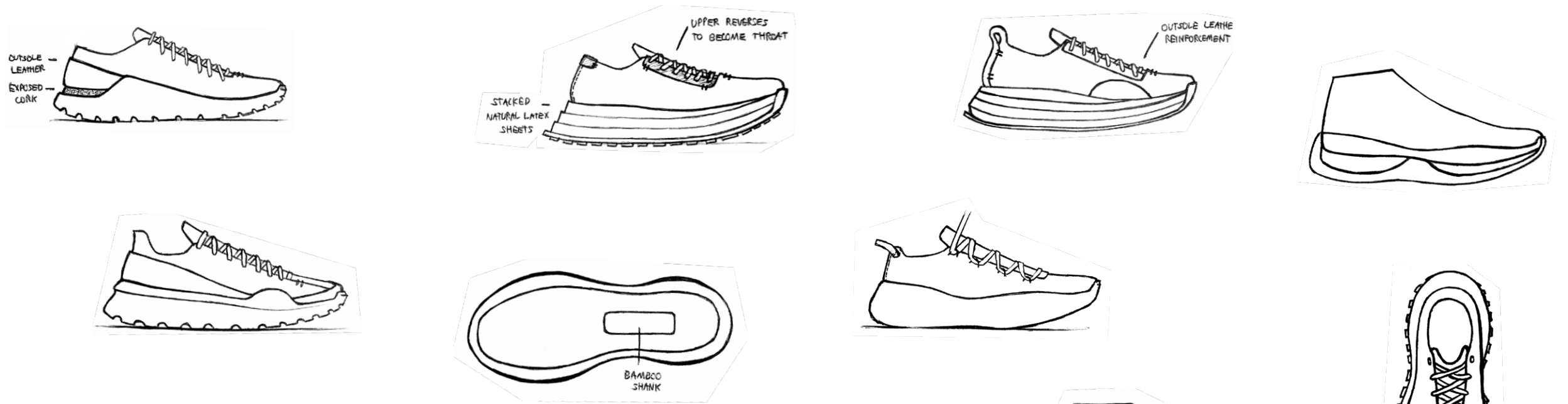




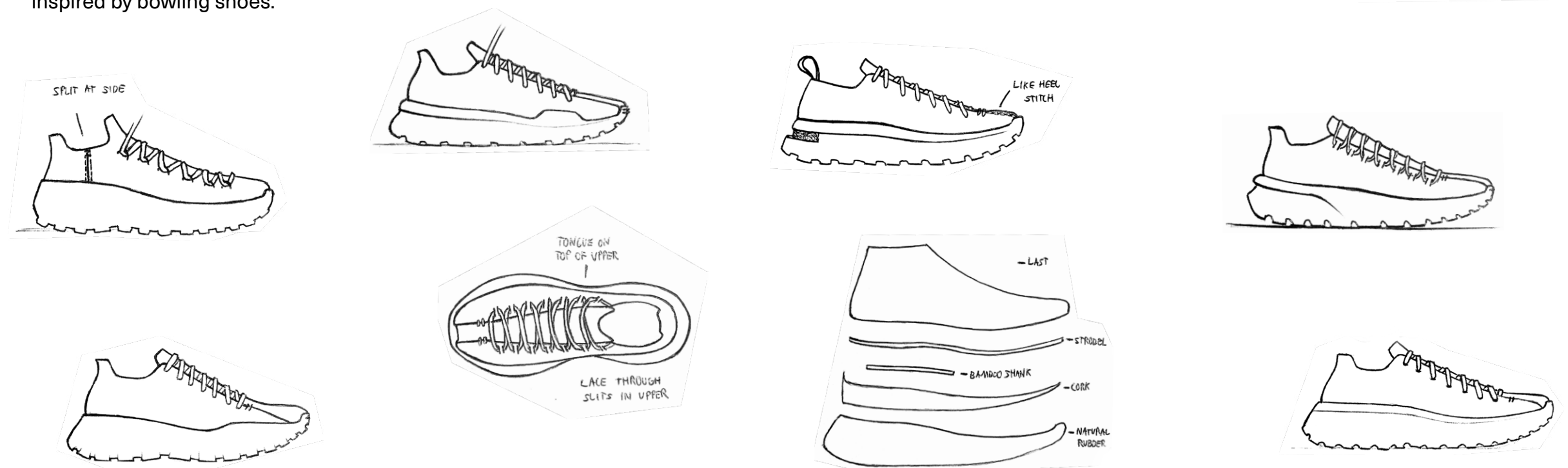
As many shoes do, this one started with a super rough sketch in the notes app of my iphone. In keeping with FEIT's aesthetic, we knew that the midsole for this shoe would have to embody **the essence of a maximalist walking sneaker** with the simplest lines we could finesse.







My sketching around this shoe focused on how to **evolve FEIT's one piece upper + tongue design** in addition to iterating on the sole unit. Concepts were built around ways to **add cork to build up the midsole of the shoe**, keeping the rubber to a minimum. We thought about a thick cork drop-in midsole that could be replaced after years of wear to keep the shoe in circulation, as well as strategically placed cork pods placed into inlays in the outsole mold. For the upper, we ideated around the tongue overlapping the rest of the upper and rotating the heel seam on FEIT uppers to the toe of the shoe, inspired by bowling shoes.



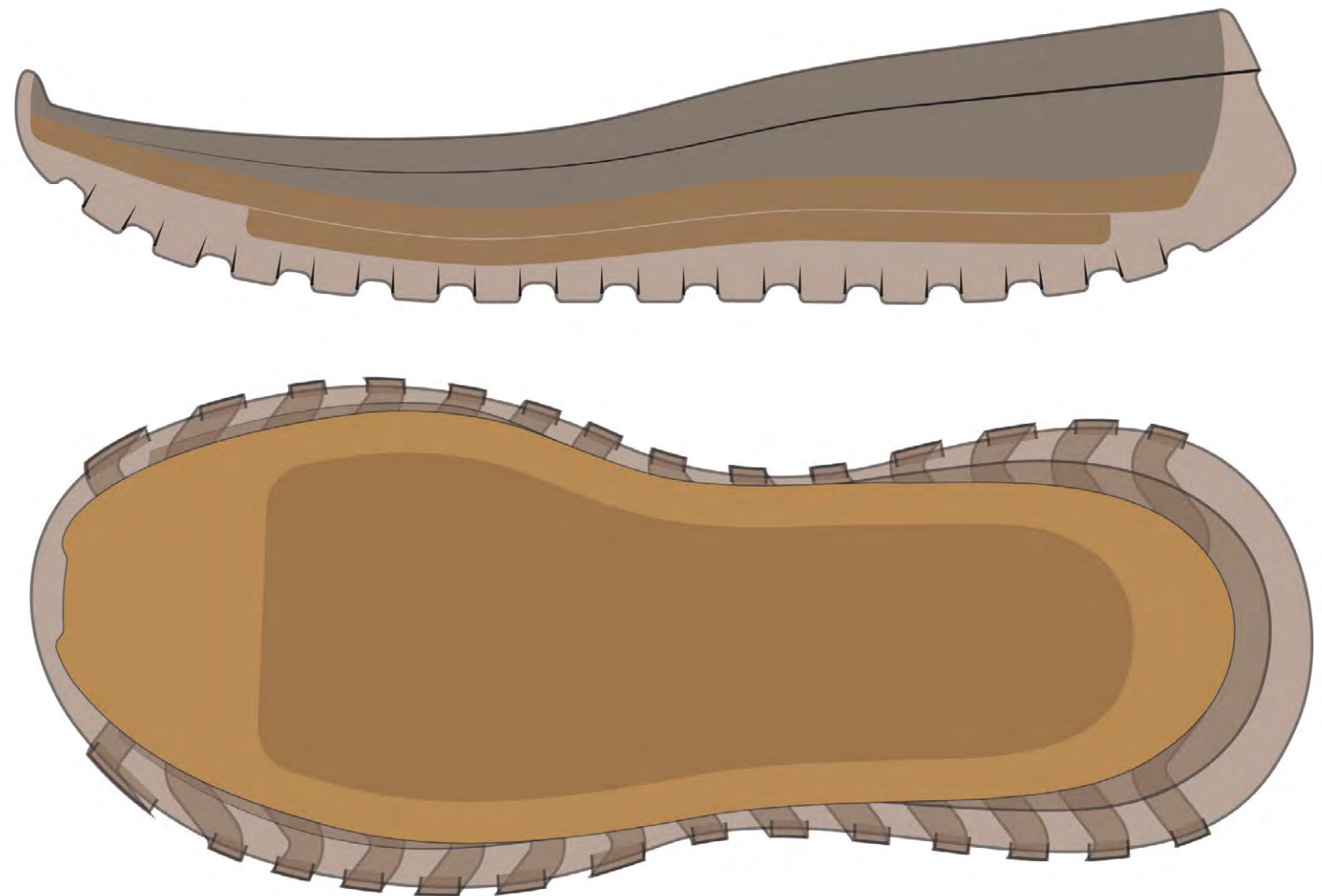


After choosing a general shape and construction for the sole unit, we refined the shape digitally; focusing on overall thickness, and refining the sculpting.

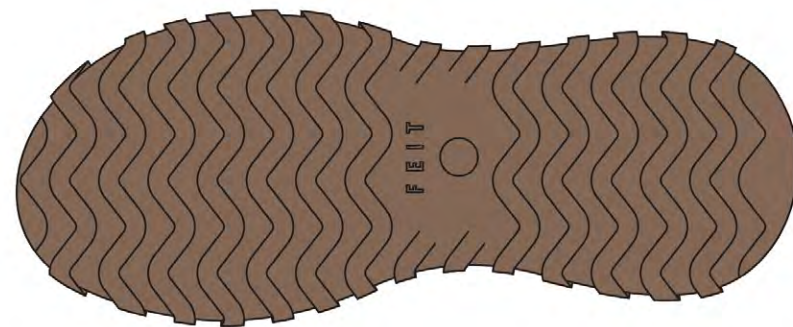
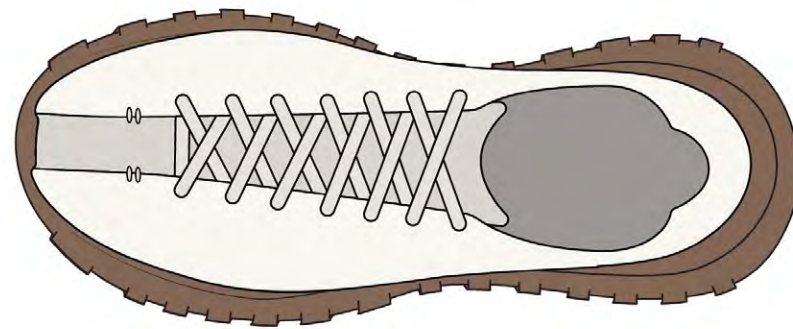




We worked with the sole supplier to get the **maximum possible amount of space cut away to allow for cork** to be inlaid in the rubber. We sent detailed drawings to the 3D specialists at the sole manufacturer.

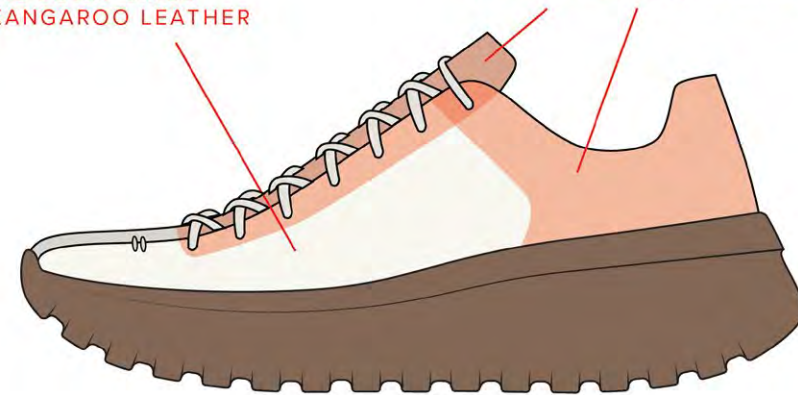




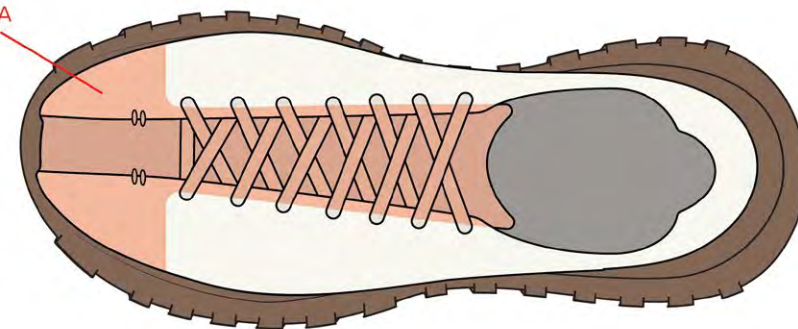


UPPER IS FULLY LINED  
WITH KANGAROO LEATHER

PADDING AT TONGUE AND COLLAR

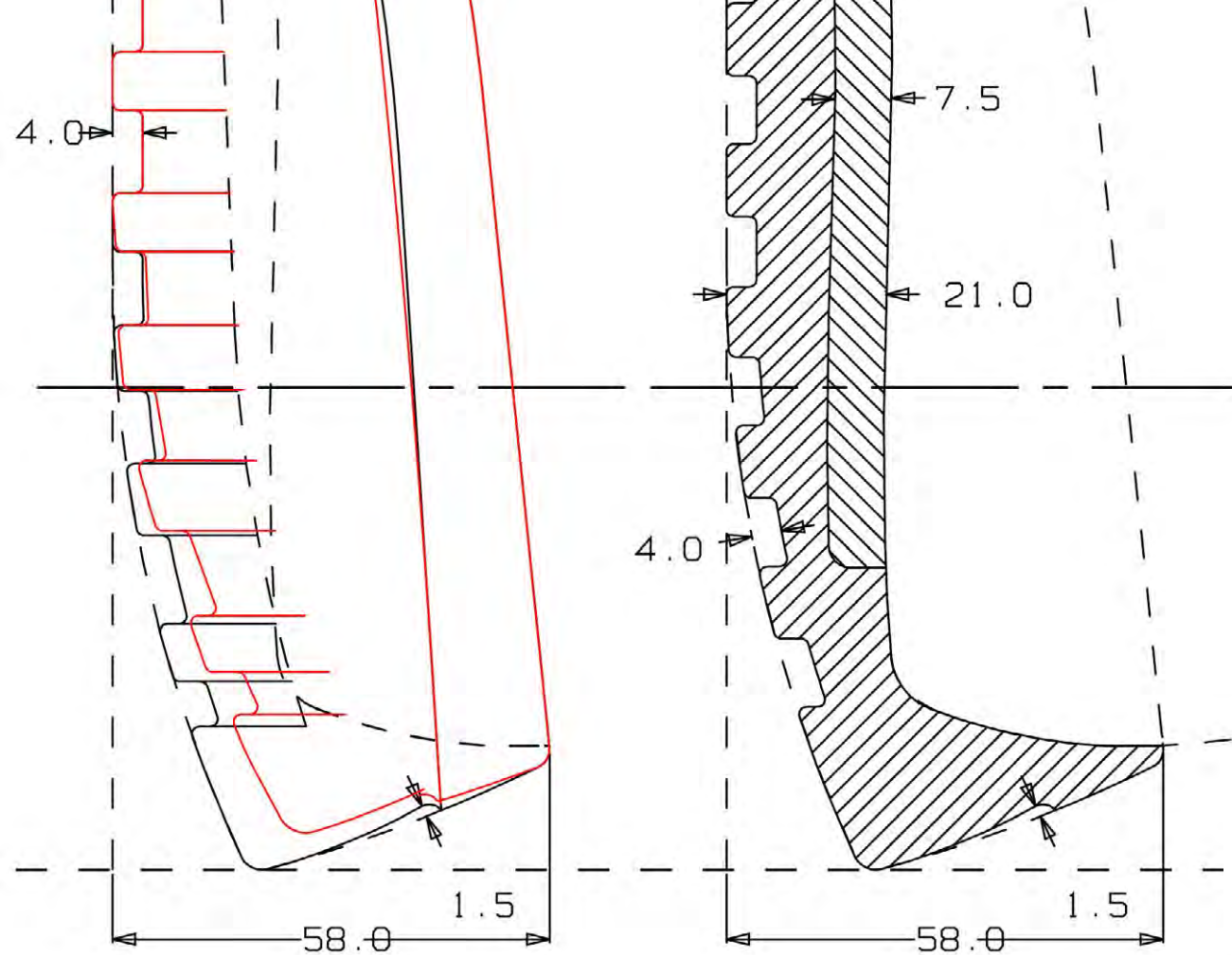


TONGUE PIECE GETS WIDER  
AND COVERS TOE BOX AREA



We landed on an upper that is two pieces: one that forms the tongue and extends all the way down the toe box, and one that wraps from medial, around the heel, and to the lateral, ending on either side of the toe to form a stripe down to the sole.



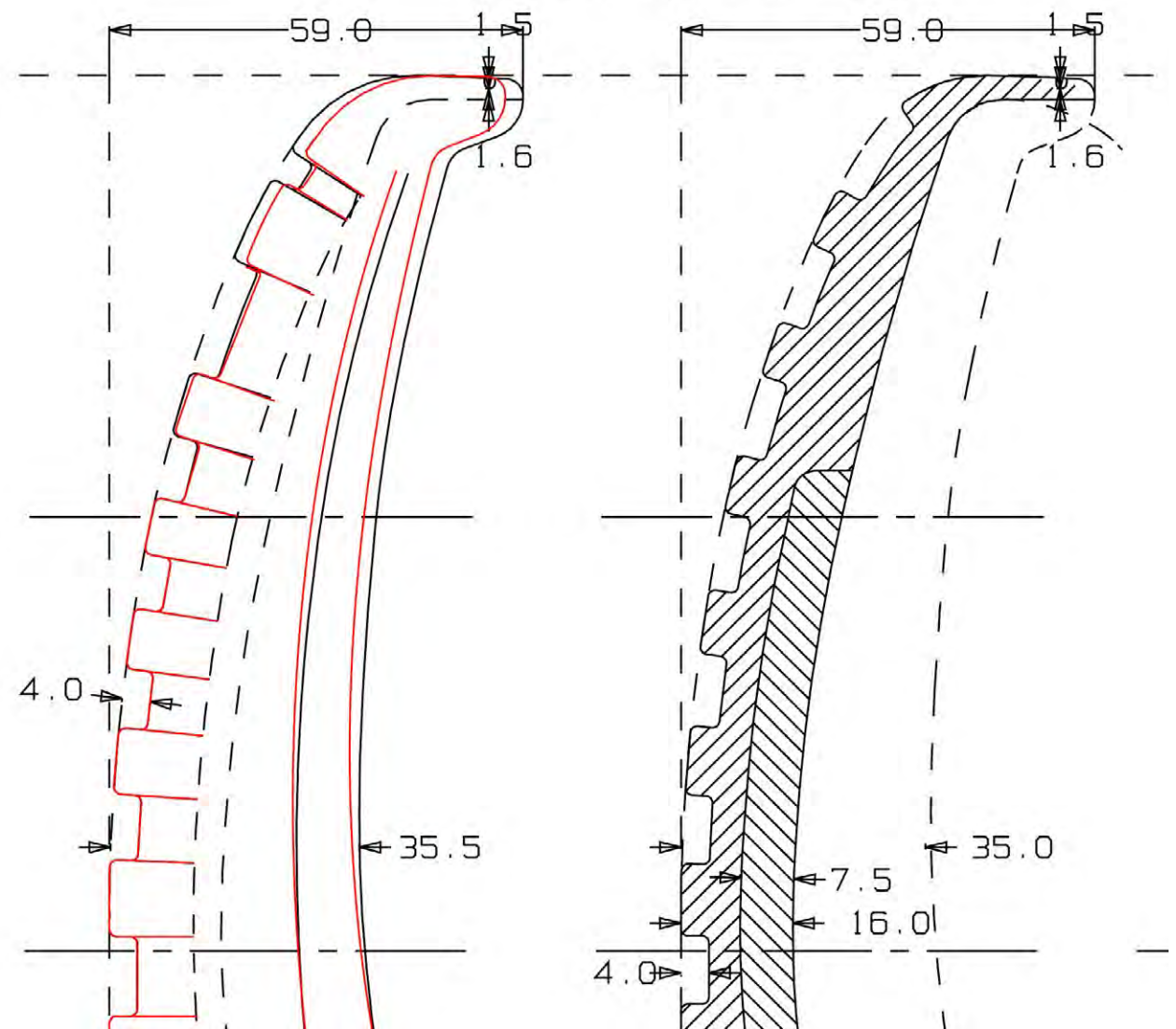


INSIDE VIEW

SECTION A1-A2

We tweaked the sole drawings that the manufacturer sent us based on our drawings, thinning the sole out slightly to further decrease weight.

SECTION B1-B2







We then traveled to FEIT's production partner to iron out the details of the shoe (and eat dumplings). Because FEIT footwear is so minimal and craft-focused, it was really helpful to talk with the hand sewers and pattern makers there when developing the shoe.

Rock, Factory Owner

Tull, FEIT Founder





From seeing the technical drawings of the sole, we knew that we needed to tweak the last for this silhouette. We wanted the toe shape to feel **wider, rounder, and more comfortable** than any of the lasts FEIT had used up until this point.

Once we had a last shape we were happy with, we made a few pullovers of the upper, tweaking the lines and padding slightly between each one, and mocked it up on the outsole design to get a feel for how the full shoe was balanced.



EDIT TOP LINE LIKE THIS



EDIT THROAT LIKE THIS



THINNER TONGUE PADDING



RAW EDGE  
(NO STITCHING)



REMOVE HEEL STITCH







We arrived at a 3D model that we were pleased with enough to open up a sample mold with. This is always an exciting step.

The Latex Walker is FEIT's take on a maximalist walking sneaker; simplifying the silhouette down to its essence with the utmost care taken on the details and construction.





The upper construction of the shoe plays off of FEIT classics by moving the one-piece upper **seam from heel to toe**, secured by the brand's signature double hand tacks. This not only creates the toe stripe, but also **allows padding to wrap fully around the heel** for more comfort.



In a similar vein, the tread on the Latex Walker is a blown up version of the tread grooves carved into FEIT's classic footwear line. We also liked how you could see a haloing of the cork midsole through the bottom of the rubber sole.



FEIT Handsewn Leather Outsole



FEIT Handsewn Latex Sole



FEIT Latex Walker Sole



The combination of cork and natural rubber in the design of the sole unit provides a **balance of stability, cushioning, and lightness** that we had never seen before on an all-natural sneaker.



Natural Latex Milk Foam Padding

Kangaroo Leather Lining

Suede Upper

Leather Insole

Cork Strobel

Leather Strobel

Bamboo Shank

Cork Midsole

Natural Latex







James Gall, 2022