



(Counterclockwise from above) An NSW logo tee; the Forbidden City before the unveiling; the Nike Sportswear launch, with video installations by artist Robert Wilson

(Clockwise from above) Gold medalist Liu Xiang's image before the Olympic uniform unveiling; a Nike Sportswear sweatshirt, inspired by the 1977 Athletics West line; Chinese athletes in their Olympic gear; the new Windrunners, equipped with "Flywire" technology; Nike Dunk Hi's; a gallery in Beijing's 798 Art Zone

LUCKY CHARM

In honor of its collaboration with China for the XXIX Olympic Games, Nike doubled down, creating a new sportswear collection and unveiling its Olympic uniforms in Beijing's Forbidden City before 08/08/08

"This is the Beijing of your...imagination!" the tour guide yelled to the back of the bus as we pulled up to one of the city's last remaining *hutongs*, ancient neighborhoods made up of Venetian-thin alleyways and courtyard-centered houses with signature gray tiled roofs. (Since the Maoist revolution in 1949, an estimated 2,000 hutongs have been torn down to make way for high-rises and Chinese-style Starbucks, and now only about 600 are located within government-designated historical areas.) A group of reporters, including me—wary from jet lag and back-to-back events unveiling Nike's Olympic uniforms for 22 Chinese federations, as well as its new Nike Sportswear collection the night before—burst out laughing, probably because we knew that what our guide declared was true. It was more comforting to gaze, nostalgia-bitten, at symbols of China's heritage than at the forest of cranes and workers raucously erecting the new glass-and-steel Beijing just across the traffic-jammed *jie* (street).

Two months after I departed and a month before the opening ceremonies on 08/08/08, those machines and man power were booted from Beijing to help Olympians, you know, breathe. This is Nike's first official time partnering with China in this capacity (for which, luckily, the company has steered clear of criticism for manufacturing items in the politically controver-

sial country instead of in the United States), as a sponsor of the Olympics and an outfitter of the majority of China's athletes. Meanwhile, it's taking advantage of being in the world's spotlight to launch Nike Sportswear.

In teaming with the new global powerhouse, Nike seems to have caught the superstitious spirit, sprinkling its Nike Sportswear line with digitally printed octagons, arranging armpit vents in the shape of figure eights, and placing four lines on both sleeves of their Windrunners (get it? 4+4 = 8). There's more: The collection was revealed 88 days before it will become available to the public on 08/08/08. The number eight in Chinese culture is considered the most auspicious digit, signifying status and imminent wealth. In January, an "88888" license plate was auctioned for 800,000 yuan (about \$115,000), and you can bet there will be wedding tea ceremonies aplenty the same day the Olympics kick off.

For inspiration, Nike Sportswear designers looked toward Nike's long-standing history and resurrected some of the label's classics, including the Air Force 1, AW 77 Hoody, Nike Dunk, and NSW Tee, enhancing them with technologies such as laser-bonded (no-chafe) seams and "Flywire" (high-tensile threads that allow for major support with minimal drag). "We wanted to bestow love and attention on products people loved and remix them," says Dermott Cleary, vice president of Nike Sportswear. "We decided to launch on 08/08/08 because it's spiritual for the athletes, and, after all, they are the ones who drive our innovation." —LILI TAN



Shoe and NSW T-shirt: Len Lagrue; remaining images: LiLi Tan