



body of evidence

L.A.-BASED BRAND **CORPUS** IS NOT JUST ABOUT SKINNY JEANS ANYMORE. BY ANDREA CUSICK. PHOTOGRAPHED BY AMANDA MILIUS

Cornish, the sandy-haired, clean-shaven, former actor. Without investors for the first two and a half years, the pair formed Corpus quite literally with their bare hands. "I remember screen-printing 4,000 T-shirts by myself," laughs Cornish. They rapidly gained notoriety for their skinny jeans, and after seeing girls wearing the menswear, launched a women's line in 2007. And in a city in which premium denim is a multimillion-dollar industry, Corpus made a surprising decision (or perhaps savvy) to step back from the denim, and focus more on their burgeoning upscale line.

"Our thing is that we wanna be A.P.C.," continues Cornish. "We wanna build a longstanding brand that remains a little bit under the radar, yet everyone has a piece or two from that line, you know?" Indeed, you'd be forgiven for mistaking Corpus for a European brand, with its dark colors, sharp tailoring, luxury knits, crinkled leather jackets, printed scarves, pins, and button-downs—all of which, it must be said, is not so easy to sell to the surfing, skating, West Coast dude. "We don't really sell our heavy knits in L.A.," says Richardson, taking a break from a pattern meeting in New York. "In fact, we can't even make the knitwear in L.A. The main reason we started with denim was because it's so readily available and all the factories sew that there, it's kind of natural to start out at that point." But the design duo realize this will always

be a popular market (having mastered the slim-fit jean and printed T-shirt when they first began) and have recently expanded their line to include a diffusion line for Urban Outfitters called By Corpus. "It's for those customers who still want acid wash, tight denim, and T-shirts, at an even cheaper price-point."

For a brand so intent on creating an antidote to what L.A. fashion is known for, surely a move to New York would make more sense? "We like living out here in the sunshine," enthuses Cornish. And in many ways, not blending in is exactly what makes Corpus work. "We want to be different but you can't reinvent the wheel," says Richardson. "People know how menswear should look. You can't go too crazy." But then living in L.A. allows them a little excess every now and then, including forays into celebrity work. "One project we recently finished was constructing Kanye West's light-up jacket for his Grammy performance," says Richardson. "It ended up being pretty amazing." With further accessory collaborations planned, a potential stand-alone store, and demand across the globe from New York to Japan, the only thing Corpus haven't succeeded in is remaining under the radar. "So many brands have the same recipe, the same cookie-cutter shit. And in that regard they all blend together," adds Cornish. "We never want to be like that."

To hear Jerod Cornish tell it, Corpus was born out of sheer frustration with the L.A. denim market. "It was all stonewashed, boot-cut garbage, like LA-crazy, baby-blue ocean crap," he says while driving through the city, which he now calls home. Cornish, who along with Keith Richardson, set up the label just over four years ago, makes their

success sound exceptionally easy. But as monochalantly as he describes how their ever-expanding clothing line came about, he and Richardson do have a knack for producing menswear (and womenswear) that channels a laid-back contemporary coolness.

Cornish and Richardson met while working on a movie set and decided

to abandon their not-so-lucrative day jobs to form Corpus back in 2003. "I was acting for five years here in California after spending 10 years modeling in Milan and I just got sick of the up and down nature of the job," says Cornish. "Keith went to school for fashion and I was just like, 'Yo, I'm gonna start a line.' So we decided to do it together," adds



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THE COOL CLIQUE

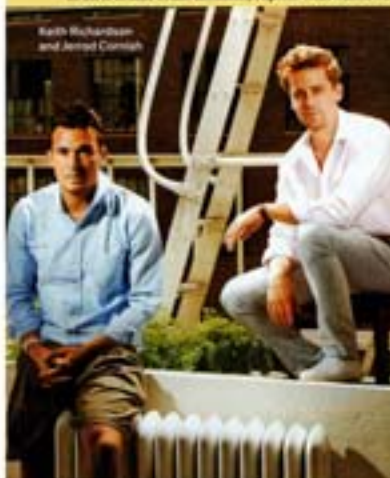
Corpus Clothing

L.A.'s it-brand moves nimbly beyond skinny jeans

BY DAVID LIPKIN

Koith Richardson and Jerrod Cornish, the partners behind L.A.-based Corpus Clothing, have a lot going for them. Both are highly photogenic and were models earlier in their careers. Both are blessed with talent—Richardson played professional soccer in Germany prior to Corpus, and Cornish is an actor who has appeared in a slew of commercials for blue-chip clients like Mercedes-Benz, Polaroid, Subaru and Miller Lite, as well as in independent films. And the fashion industry would apparently love to see them succeed—Vogue ran a small profile of them before they sold a single garment, and their first customer was Nina Garcia, Ron Herman's influential *Sex* star's wear buyer.

But don't think it's been an easy road for the duo, who met on a film that Cornish was acting in and Richardson was styling for about seven years ago. "People think we've had this overnight success, but they don't see how much work we've put into this," says Richardson, 34, of the ascendance of Corpus as an it-brand of the moment, replete with windows



in the Barney's Manhattan flagship last season. "We have been hardcore into this and have had to hustle everything we've achieved. We had to sell our line to Barney's Japan from the trunk of a car in a parking lot because we didn't have a showroom."

Today, Corpus does enjoy the luxury of its own showroom in L.A.'s high-profile Cooper Building, and the line is sold in about 45 of the trendiest stores in the U.S., including Maxfield, American Rag, Odin, Billowing, Ian, Jake, Bolo and Hejlska. The company is aiming for \$4 million in sales this year.

"I really feel like we've found our rhythm this



year, we had really strong collections for both men and women this past spring, we delivered on time and the quality was there," says Cornish, 30. "We had been changing our aesthetic and themes so much from season to season, I think it was hard for customers to understand who we are. But I think Corpus is making sense as a big picture now."

Taking advantage of L.A.'s built-in denim manufacturing infrastructure, Corpus debuted at the end of 2003 with a line of jeans, and the label has made its name with its signature skinny-fit denim. But Richardson and Cornish always intended to create a full collection, which is why they trademarked the company as Corpus Clothing.

Helping Corpus on its current growth path is Patrick Assaraf, a Canadian apparel magnate who made an investment in the company two years ago. Assaraf, who is also an investor in the fast-growing Earnest Sewn denim label, has provided a team of technical designers and product developers in his Toronto headquarters available to the Corpus team.

The cool quotient in Corpus's offerings stems from its deft melding of preppe, workwear and streetwear influences, from both America and Europe. "I grew up in Texas with the whole preppe Ralph Lauren movement, so my designs tend to pull from that as well as more current streetwear trends," says Richardson, who has a design degree from Los Angeles Trade Tech College and oversees the Corpus fashion collection, while Cornish tends to denim production and business issues. "We're moving away from that whole hipster-suspend-

ers-indie rocker movement, and towards a very American, youthful JFK mood. It's kind of twisted Tommy Hilfinger."

For spring, that attitude is evoked in oxford shirts with innovative shawl collars, baby polka dot shirts, shiny double-breasted blazers, cardigans with drawstring details and pleated chino shorts.

Earlier this summer Corpus acquired a denim sewing facility in L.A. to produce all its jeans, and the category is expected to comprise about 60 percent of sales this fall, although the fashion component of the collection may overtake it next year.

"We'd like to model ourselves after APC, in that denim is always a staple, but the brand is a true collection," explains Cornish. For spring, Corpus is moving away from its signature raw denim and offering more washes, including icy blues and acid washes.

A key selling point for Corpus is its sharp prices, with jeans retailing for \$145 to \$225—relatively affordable for a brand with its current cachet. Sweaters retail for \$120 to \$180, women for \$135 to \$190, outerwear for \$220 to \$600 and jersey tops for \$60 to \$120.

For all their momentary trend appeal, Cornish and Richardson are acutely level-headed and more interested in building Corpus into a consistent brand with longevity and its own story. "I like the hipster movement and all that, but we want to create a long-term business here, making classic, wearable clothes that have a little design direction," says Richardson. "Like cool, striped oxford shirts. When are men going to stop wearing dress shirts?"

CORPUS



ELLE AUG 2007



need to know

WHO Corpus.

WHAT Brainchild of Keith Richardson and Jerrod Cornish, Corpus is an LA-based label championing laid-back, contemporary cool.

BACKGROUND Starting out as a menswear label, the brand came to embrace all things unisex (left) after the boys noticed girlfriends wearing Corpus clothes in smaller sizes.

INSPIRED BY A menswear aesthetic, which Richardson describes as a 'hybrid of military and modern sophistication'.

THE LOOK Scruffy chic. Corpus honours 'fit, detail and style' – it's all about achieving maximum effect with minimum effort. Favourites include stonewashed, spray-on denims and oversized boyish shirts.

WHO WEARS IT Rachel Bilson, Michelle Williams and Cameron Diaz.

STOCKISTS Prices from £80 to £425, enq corpusclothing.com.

CORPUS



ANGELENO June 2007



DUDES AND BOOS

Timed by *Angeleno*, it's good: For years in Corpus (Lute for Lute), an L.A. suburb, guys have worn button-down shirts and cardigan sweaters and jackets that are sporty, casual, and comfortable. "It's punk-rock band and beach boys, which isn't all that far from the jeans hit over-the-top. On the contrary, it's not what you're on the bottom; it's what you leave off," says Jared Gosink (left), who, along with Keith Richardson, make up the much sought-after (and impossibly handsome) design duo. From Ken Herman to Barney's New York, seemingly every top-drawer outpost in town stocks the label—which means your corporate desires can easily be used.

CORPUS

DETAILS

WHY YOUR SIX-FIGURE SALARY JUST ISN'T GOOD ENOUGH

INSIDE THE WORLD OF FAT SEX

THE ULTIMATE GOURMET GRILLING GUIDE

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FINDING THE PERFECT SUMMER SUIT, HOW TO PULL OFF WHITE SHOES, AND THE ONLY WAY TO KNOT A TIE

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thelabel

CORPUS

WHAT Keith Richardson (pictured, left), 34, and Jerrod Cornish (right), 31, were making slim-cut dark jeans long before they became fashionable. The same foresight is evident in their expanded line, which is full of classic pieces with practical modifications. Peacoats have detachable sleeves, button-down shirts have hidden pockets at the waist, and seersucker blazers have side buckles for fit adjustment. As for jeans, the

designers predict the demise of the dark, skinny breed. "We are backing off the legging thing a little bit," Richardson says. "You don't always want to dress like you're 17."

WHERE Barneys New York; Beams, in Tokyo; and T&T, in Toronto.

ON KEITH RICHARDSON: Vest (\$150), shirt (\$150), and pants (\$150) by Corpus, corpusclothing.com

ON JERROD CORNISH: Blazer (\$225), shirt (\$150), pants (\$150), and tie (\$55) by Corpus, corpusclothing.com



PHOTOGRAPHS: LEFT: BY PAUL ARMBRUSTER; RIGHT: BY MARK HEITHOFF; GROOMING BY DAVID COX FOR NIATRIX MEN/CELESTINEAGENCY.COM

CORPUS

**The designing duo
of Keith Richardson and
Jerrod Cornish pick up
where the premium-jeans
craze left off.**

In Los Angeles, a well-fitted T-shirt and brilliantly cut jeans can spawn a multimillion dollar business. Ever since 2000, when L.A.-based 7 For All Mankind posted first-year profits of \$13 million, dozens of denim lines have sprouted to cash in on the premium-jeans craze. For some, the fame was fleeting (Von Dutch), while others (True Religion, Rock & Republic, and Antik Denim) have continued to flourish commercially by branching into accessories or opening storefronts. Amid these department-store denim juggernauts, smaller lines have emerged, earning critical praise, along with hipster credibility for their fashion-forward fit and independent spirit. One such line is Corpus. The label's signature piece, the skin-tight legging jean, arrived just as the skinny jean was becoming de rigueur for both women and men. It now comes in a rainbow of colors, from acid wash to bright yellow.

Corpus are designers Keith Richardson and Jerrod Cornish, two friends who met in 1999, while working on a film—Richardson in the costume department and Cornish in visual effects. "The movie's name isn't important," Richardson smirks, "but it's not porn." They quickly bonded over frustration at the lack of innovative and sophisticated but lower-priced menswear. "I think people are still shell-shocked from that whole four-hundred-dollar jeans thing. There are still going to be people buying those brands, but I think there's going to be a market for people who want to dress

and feel good [for less]. It's exciting to find something amazing for a real price."

Corpus obeyed the local custom in the city, that, since Guess? in the early 1980s, has enshrined denim as a successful business model, even a way of life. "I knew in the beginning that jeans and T-shirts would be easier to execute," says Richardson, a native of Dallas, Texas. "You're in L.A. It's easier to break into that. It's not easy to go and put a collection out."

In 2003, they started with graphic tees, two jackets, one sweatshirt, and four denim styles, including a tapered-fit style that caught the eye of retailers. "They mastered that skinny jean trend by taking it to the next level," says Theodore Gilliam, a buyer for Collage, a Venice boutique that carries Corpus. Gilliam discovered the line while working as a buyer for the now defunct Vice store in Silver Lake. "Jerrod walked in and I couldn't help but admire the jeans he was wearing," muses Gilliam. "The unique pocket details were just wicked. Once the suspender versions and solid washes came out, it was over. Men's jeans at the time were so boring, so Corpus really created a whole new look around theirs." The result, structured yet feverishly rebellious, were jeans that hugged silhouettes closely and loose striped cardigan sweaters that draped as if haphazardly put on. Guys donned the suspender jeans not with the suspenders worn conventionally, over the shoulders, but with the thin straps hanging down around the knees, an homage, perhaps, to punk.

Skater kids, sneaker heads, and fashion insiders took notice of their early collections. A story on the California denim craze in *Vogue* followed, and soon Richardson and Cornish found themselves showing the line to Barneys Japan, from the back of Richardson's car. In 2005, PVA Importer, the parent company behind the jeans label Earnest Sewn, invested in Corpus, giving them the financial flexibility to move the line in a broader direction—and out of Rich- >

From left: Cotton tank with neckline buttons, sleeveless hook-front hoodie, and acid-wash tapered jeans by CORPUS, and The Beast shoes by PUMA. Cotton T-shirt with neckline buttons and belted shorts by CORPUS, and shoes by VANS. Cotton People T-shirt and acid-wash tapered jeans by CORPUS, and shoes by DC. All props from Palace Costume & Prop Co., L.A.

Written by ENID PORTUGUEZ Photographed by YU TSAI

CORPUS



ardson's apartment. Last season, Corpus launched a womenswear line to appease women who were buying smaller versions of the men's pieces. Like the men's jeans, the women's cuts came in skinny and extra-skinny, in colors like lavender and lipstick red. Who but stylish risk-takers would be bold enough to wear bubble-gum-pink denim leggings? This spring, they'll launch a line of jersey tops and bottoms that aims for unisex appeal. "Unisex seems to be a movement for us," explains Richardson.

Along the way, their vision of modernizing classic pieces like cardigans and jeans, as well as their idea of the Corpus

customer, began to take shape. "It's someone who is aware of fashion but might not follow it obsessively," says Cornish, who hails from Minnesota, and seems the shyer of the two. "They can definitely tell a tastefully cut garment and if something has flavor." Richardson and Cornish admit that the Corpus customer is basically just like them.

"I don't remember designing for anyone other than us," says Richardson. "It really didn't have anything to do with what the market wanted."

"The question would be," Cornish adds, "Would you wear that? If you wouldn't, it would get cut."

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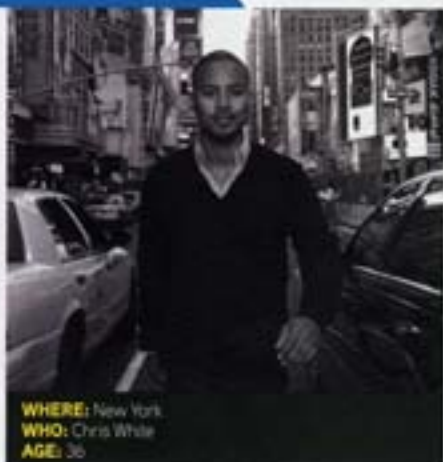
STYLE RECON

STYLE RECON

East meets West as Complex goes trendspotting with the L.A. denim gurus behind **CORPUS** and a New York City **BRANDING EXPERT**.



WHERE: Los Angeles
WHO: Keith Richardson, Jerrod Cornish
AGES: 33, 28



WHERE: New York
WHO: Chris White
AGE: 36

DENIM BRANDS: Levi's, A.P.C., Tsubi, Cioak, big-ups to Earnest Sewn for its true premium quality, and last but not least, **CORPUS**.
SNEAKERS: Vintage Vans high-tops, old-school throwbacks like Swear, and 1963 **Lacostes** that we find at one-off shoe shops.
CLASSIC TROUSERS: Kim Jones, Ralph Lauren, old-school Marc Jacobs—even though we're the same age.
SHOPS: Fred Segal, Ron Herman on Melrose, Scout for their killer collections of Surface to Air, Rogues Gallery, Ck, and NOM'D.
"UNDERGROUND" BOUTIQUE: Carve on Fourth & Main. The sneaker shop in front is a genius distraction for their secret "meat locker" in back, with 25-foot-high ceilings and stacks of Margiela.
RESTAURANTS: The Bridge on La Cienega Boulevard, **Magnolia** on Vine & Sunset, Lucy's El Adobe Café for awesome Mexican food.
TECH GADGETS: Pocket PC, BlackBerry, Sony digi cameras, for gaming **Xbox 360**, PSP, waiting for PlayStation 3.
RIDES: Tricked-out BMW and Audi wagons—it's like the crossover soccer mom gone crazy.
THE TREND READY FOR BURIAL: Highly commercialized style.

Richardson and Cornish are co-founders of the L.A.-based denim brand CORPUS.

DENIM BRANDS: For fit and wash, **Earnest Sewn**, **Hudie**, **Jeano Co.**
SNEAKERS: adidas Originals, Creative Recreation, vintage Nikes, and the staple—**Air Force 1s**.
KEEPING IT SWANKY: When I need to show and prove, I'll drop by the Alexander McQueen shop in the Meatpacking District or hit up Margiela on Greenwich Street.
SHOPS: James Perse, Union for limited-edition Nikes; Marc Jacobs on Mercer; and Nom de Guerre.
"READY FOR TAKEOVER" BOUTIQUE: My boy Dao-Yi's opening. Arrive New York in early '07, so definitely be on the lookout for that!
NIGHTSPOTS: **60 Thompson's** rooftop lounge and the bar at Hotel Rivington are great for keeping it cool and sophisticated, but there's also Cain and Stereo for when you wanna turn up the volume.
RESTAURANTS: Bayou on Lenox Avenue and Buddakan for East Asian-influenced cuisine, Coffee Shop, for the classic NYC eatery.
RIDES: The **Hummer H2** keeps you moving in this big city.
THE TREND READY FOR BURIAL: Dudes wearing flip-flops with jeans. They're great for the beach, but any other time just say no!

White is the president of Project 2050, a full-service lifestyle marketing and branding agency.



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CORPUS