



Mycoskie shares TOMS wares at N.Y.C. shop In God We Trust

give it
away now
TOMS SHOES HAVE
REAL SOUL

BLAKE MYCOSKIE HAS one of the coolest jobs around: he travels the world giving shoes to kids who need them. The charismatic 31-year-old is the founder of TOMS, a Los Angeles-based company whose M.O. is to donate a pair of shoes for every single pair it sells. Mycoskie's title? Chief Shoe Giver.

When we meet for coffee on a near-freezing winter morning in N.Y.C.'s SoHo, it's too cold to be wearing a pair of TOMS' signature-style shoes—simple rubber-soled canvas slip-ons—but Mycoskie is more than happy to talk about them, his enthusiasm rivaled only by the sweetness of his Texan drawl. "It started with one village in Argentina," he says. While on vacation there, he noticed the area was so impoverished that none of the kids had shoes, which inspired him to design a sturdier version of *alpargatas*—a type of shoe worn by many Argentinians. He planned to sell 250 pairs in the U.S. and donate just as many. When an article on TOMS in the *L.A. Times* led to 2,200 orders in one day, he says he "realized that people might really get behind this," and his philanthropic project

became a full-fledged business.

Two years later, TOMS has 18 employees, sells its shoes everywhere from boutiques to Urban Outfitters, and has given away 65,000 pairs to kids in Argentina and South Africa, a number the company plans to double next year. "It's intense," Mycoskie says of the "shoe drops," where TOMS employees hand-deliver each pair to a shoeless child. "It's a very humbling, intimate experience to take someone's feet in your hands when they haven't worn shoes so they're dirty and callused. But once the shoes are on, it's joyful. The kids play around, sing, and dance—it's like Christmas!" Which is what led to the idea he's working on now, TOMS-sponsored voluntourism: folks who want to get involved can participate in the trips, delivering shoes to needy villages, then sightsee in the neighboring areas.

TOMS' spring line features color-blocked classic hues, recycled-rubber soles, and sturdy, breathable canvas—the kind of shoe you want multiple pairs of. Which, for once, is a guilt-free endeavor. To get and give a set of your own, go to www.tomsshoes.com. [LISA BUTTERWORTH]