

Weddings

SUPPLEMENT

March 30, 2008

THE SUNDAY TIMES, MARCH 30, 2008

WEDDINGS SUPPLEMENT 7

Wedding fashion

One step, two steps... up the aisle

Marika Azzopardi

"I did not have 3,000 pairs of shoes, I had 1,060," said Imelda Marcos, widow of Ferdinand Marcos, former First Lady and influential political figure in the Philippines. Her extensive shoe, gown and jewellery collection is world-renowned.

You wouldn't think brides would make such a fuss of their shoes, seeing most are hidden away under all those metres of dress. Fact is, anything remotely connected with a wedding has to be just perfect with a capital 'P', and that obviously includes shoes.

In reality, it's the shoes that will lead her all the way up the aisle, stand by her as she claims to have and to hold from this day forth, ensue with all the jazz and the dancing and possibly allow her to float through the proceedings like it were a song.

In reality, most brides will moan and bemoan the fact that by the end of all the celebrations their feet are killing them, literally, and many of the neatest, primmest brides have been known to kick off those offending appendages and shuffle their way through most of their wedding, with their tootsies in full view for all to see.

Well, new shoes do have a knack for hampering blood flow, free movement and agility big time. But let's face it, everybody wears new shoes to a wedding and the bride is the woman who usually tends to tie her heart strings to the most outrageous pair of high heels, believing that the happiness of the day will dull all pain and her feet wouldn't really mind that extra twitch. In reality, blood and tissue don't really bother much about formalities, and once the ache takes over, it has to be tended to.

Nevertheless, most women will faintly blush at the notion that they tend to be obsessed with shoes and short of being as infatuated with the things as Imelda was, they would want to have a really extra special pair for that extra special day. Admittedly, all my own of pairs are extra special, but that's another concern.

So what makes a pair of shoes really special? Designer, design or price tag? Perhaps it should be none of these put together, because a bride will want to be unique and there is nothing unique about buying shoes from a shop window.

Wedding shoes should be about a fatal attraction, ultimate comfort and uniqueness that stands out in a crowd. One shoe designer who has tried to tackle all three and succeeded perfectly is Henrietta Rose Samuels alias Hetty Rose. A young British shoe designer, she is fully aware of the importance of reviving the old-fashioned personalised bespoke service, and has taken to create shoes on

order... but there's more to her shoes than just that.

Fresh from public exposure at London Fashion Week last September and the Pret à Porter exhibition in Paris in January this year, the concept behind Hetty Rose's select shoe has certainly caught attention, if anything for its unique take on revamping the shoe concept.



re-using and re-working vintage materials in a creative and sustainable way, hand-making shoes to fit individual feet, like these were the most precious things on earth.

Rose uses reclaimed and recycled vintage materials hand-selected from Japan and deriving primarily from Japanese kimono fabrics. For those who have witnessed Japanese kimonos at close range, seen them emerging from tissue paper-laced giant boxes as if they were holy relics of invaluable preciousness, this will conjure images of fabrics of unparalleled beauty, luxury and delicacy. Each material typically holds different meanings, as shown by the use of colour and design.

"I travel to Japan as often as I can, to visit vintage kimono cloth shops in Kyoto. I also have staff in Japan who can find me something if I am unable to get there."

These vintage fabrics are used as uppers for shoes, skilfully combined with hand-crafted wooden heels, recycled leather and natural leather soles, creating modern stylish footwear that speaks volumes. It all takes some six weeks to compose a pair of shoes from scratch, going through a lengthy process of cutting, stitching and consulting with individual clients, with one fitting at a halfway stage. The more time the better.

"Shoes are like sculpture to me. They have their own story and personality and can make you feel amazing. I love that. I am also really interested in construction and how things are made, and shoe making is such an interesting process, it keeps me inspired and active."

Following a training placement with the famous footwear designer Georgina Goodman, she delved deeper into shoe construction, materials and design development. Working with shoe-making companies specialised in hand-made footwear both in Italy and France has helped her further in the discernment of exquisite leathers and inspiring artwork.

One of the first shoes she ever made for somebody else, (because she always experiments on her own two feet first) was a pair of wedding shoes for a best friend.

"I personalised the inner sole with her name and wedding date. I liked the idea of personalisation and this is still very much the essence of my work. I regularly make shoes for brides looking for something unique and different.

"They like to pair them with a long dress and then surprise people when they lift their dress! Many girls are going for a more 1950s style dress, which shows off the shoes fabulously. I would say 30 per cent of my clients order shoes for their wedding."

Hetty Rose (www.hettyrose.co.uk) has gleaned some valuable hints to hand over to brides, at least in terms of shoes, and the prime advice is: "Don't go too high, but high enough to make you feel confident.

"You want to be able to dance all night in them, so comfort is key. I pad all the inside of the shoe so it feels great underfoot. It's a special day, so go for something really unique to you, because after all, everybody is different with individual desires."

