

Measure for Measure

No longer strictly a guy thing, made-to-order shoemaking for women is gaining momentum. << By Randi Gollin

Hetty Rose Ltd., Kimono Collection

Launch: 2007

Headquarters: Chelmsford, England

Designer training: Henrietta Rose Samuels, the British designer behind Hetty Rose, spent the year after high school deconstructing and experimenting with shoes, before earning a degree in footwear design at London's Cordwainers College. While at university, she gained a one-year study placement with designer Georgina Goodman, and then further honed her skills in London and Italy working for handmade shoe specialists.



Background: About five years ago, while traveling in Japan, Samuels was so taken with vintage kimono fabrics that she left her clothes behind, filled up her suitcases with the panels and began to experiment in her workshop. "Since the fabrics are one-offs, they can't be reproduced," she said. "So when I find something gorgeous, I have to do it justice by making it into something wonderful." She now makes yearly fabric-shopping pilgrimages, largely to Kyoto, where she haunts the Sunday morning markets on temple grounds.

Design philosophy: To make an environmental statement in an aesthetically pleasing way, Samuels' handmade shoes combine uppers made of exquisite reclaimed, recycled and vintage kimono fabrics with handcrafted wooden heels, recycled leather and natural leather soles.

Signature: Samuels is best known for her high-heels. "The designs are simple yet provocative, with color being the overriding attraction," she said. They're perfect for women "who crave authentic and individual products."

Made-to-order appeal: "Made-to-order shoes have a special feeling attached to them that can't be found in off-the-shelf footwear," Samuels said. She involves customers in each step of creation, so the shoes become a more meaningful product to the customer. "Also, there is no waste produced as the shoes are made for a purpose and for an individual."

Effects of the recession: "I've found more clients seeking something that will be transseasonal and an investment buy," Samuels said. For many, she added, unique shoes that offer years of mileage "override a fast-fashion alternative that might not be as lasting."

Retail range: \$425 to \$825

