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How unwanted kimonos become desirable shoes

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The tale of the red talons of Christian Louboutin's assistant – responsible for inspiring the footwear maestro's trademark scarlet soles – may have gone down in fashion folklore, but shoemaker Hetty Rose's own "eureka" moment came from an equally improbable source. Hopelessly lost during a visit to the picturesque mountains that flank Kyoto, the Cordwainers-trained designer stumbled upon small textile shops selling unpicked silk panels from unwanted kimonos for recycling techniques such as Sakiori (rag weaving) and reinvention into home accessories. Rose bought as many of the scraps as she could carry and arrived home in Essex with the idea of creating bespoke shoes from the ornate – and ancient – swatches.

Several years on, Rose's fabrics are still sourced from Japan (from kimono markets), but everything else – from the vegetable-tanned, sustainably sourced leather, hand-crafted wooden heels and moulded lasts (from the UK's only existing last factory) – is British. Each pair takes between six and eight weeks to complete, beginning with a consultation process that incorporates a fitting and a collaborative approach – clients are encouraged to specify heel height, colour, strap arrangement and embellishment.

Regular photos are sent to customers to keep them updated during production. And any remaining offcuts can be used to create matching accessories or handbags, thereby keeping the spirit of Sakiori alive.

From £350, depending on style and size.

| Hetty Rose, 07905-083 745; www.hettyrose.co.uk.

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