



These Shoes Are Made for Looking

[By Anique Gonzalez]

Over the past few years fashion footwear has exploded as the accessory of choice for women around the country, taking the place of apparel as the means by which to demonstrate personal taste, style, and wealth. According to an NPD consumer data report, American women spent \$20 billion on footwear in 2005 alone. As NPD chief industry analyst Marshal Cohen said at the time, "Women consider footwear their signature item now."

There are several factors fueling this must-have shoe trend, including jewel embellishment, the use of rare materials such as alligator skin, never-before-seen designs, and the designers themselves.

"When you see a pair of shoes that you're just dying to have, there's a talented designer behind them. Their time, creativity, and ability to create a unique design is as billable as an accountant's skill with taxes," Desiree Stimpert explained.

When all of these factors are taken into consideration, it's no wonder, then, that prices can start at \$1,000 for a single pair of shoes. However, if a designer is adept enough at bringing all of those factors together instead of merely focusing on one alone, then the piece that is created and the price tag that accompanies it are extraordinary. Such a designer can be found in Mai Lamore.

Lamore is reinventing the artistry and beauty of high heels by creating pieces that mimic nature and incorporate exotic materials. Born in Bangassou in the Central African Republic, Lamore grew up the granddaughter of a queen during a time that saw the end of the colonial and sultan-rule era. This transitional period deeply impacted her: "she poses herself as the heiress of these two worlds, the values of which she has employed to fashion for herself a deeper, richer universe."

It was while Lamore was attending boarding school in France that she began to recognize

her creative drive and develop her unique fashion acumen. After graduating, she quickly immersed herself in the industry, serving as the director of boutiques and a consultant for several up-and-coming collections. Lamore's artistic passion during this time also led her to open a restaurant, establish three art galleries, and found her own magazine before transitioning to the role of creative director for several well-known shoe companies, where she stayed for the next six years.



Still, she became "more and more convinced that nothing sufficiently prestigious yet existed to put in valor a woman's foot," so she secretly developed a collection of her own to embody elegance, sophistication, and a touch of mysticism, incorporating inventive designs, exceptional materials, and jewels.

Two shoes from Lamore's current haute couture collection, Leopardo and Sentiment Profond (Deep Sentiment), costing \$93,000 and \$31,000 per pair respectively, vividly demonstrate this fanciful and stunning handiwork.

Leopardo was designed to resemble a leopard, from paws to tail. Each shoe features mink "shaved with original serigraphy for the body and the tail of the

leopard," a silk satin interior, an ogee and heel carved out of 18-carat gold, jewels that adorn the leopard's gold head and agate paws, crimped onyx, gold rings, and gold chains for the toes.

Sentiment Profond is a striking piece that is meant to resemble a red rose. The shoes feature red petals made of hand-dyed silk and leather, silk interiors, and heels carved out of 18-carat gold. The pair also features a jewel-studded bee made with crimped agate, onyx, and wings cut from rock crystal.

By developing such breathtaking shoes Lamore has achieved what few designers before her have accomplished: she has created "a high-luxury shoe that offers to the feminine foot the degree of prestige which had until now been reserved for other parts of the woman's body."

If you are interested in purchasing a pair of shoes designed by Mai Lamore, please contact her at mailamore@wanadoo.fr.

ON THE NET

NPD Reports U.S. Footwear Industry Takes a Big Step Forward in 2005
www.npd.com/press/releases/press_060210a.html

Expensive Shoes: Are They Worth the Extra Money?
shoes.about.com/od/shoe_tips_advice/qt/expensive_shoes.htm