

[Business](#)

## Canadian men snapping up boots, sandals, slippers and shoes

Prada, Louboutin and Jimmy Choo take note, Canadian men are snapping up fashion footwear, research shows and retailers confirm.



CARLOS OSORIO/TORONTO STAR

The men's shoe section at the Sears Eaton Centre location. New research shows men are buying more shoes.

By: [Francine Kopun](#) Business reporter, Published on Mon Apr 08 2013

[EXPLORE THIS STORY](#)

Now that they've nailed the skinny suit, Canadian men have started buying up fashionable shoes to match.

Sales of men's footwear increased by 13 per cent in Canada 2012, according to research from The NPD Group.

While women's shoes sales grew by three per cent in 2012, sales of footwear for men pulled overall growth in the industry up by six per cent, to a total of \$5.1 billion in sales.

"We're always quick to assume that women impel the success of the footwear market, but what we're experiencing instead in Canada is a complete takeover of the shoe closet by men's footwear," said Tracey Jarosz, executive director for Canada Fashion at The NPD Group.

Jarosz said sales grew in all men's footwear categories in Canada last year — athletic shoes, dress shoes, casual shoes, boots and sandals.

“We know it started with apparel last year as men started to purge their closets and buy more tailored clothes. I think footwear is the next natural progression,” she said.

It’s a new world for men’s footwear, one in which Toronto Raptor John Lucas III sports a pair of Christian Louboutin pony hair sneakers and feels comfortable admitting his love of shoes — he has collected 6,000 pairs of all kinds, which he pampers, it has been reported.

“I feel like I’m watching men step into a whole new moment in men’s fashion,” said Elizabeth Semmelhack, senior curator of the Bata Shoe Museum.

The museum is to announce today that it will launch an exhibit on April 25 called “Out of the Box — The Rise of Sneaker Culture.”

Semmelhack sees the rise of the sneaker as a step in getting men to loosen up their somber fashion, sparking a shift in idealized masculinity that emphasizes youth and individuality over the anonymous authority of a suit and black brogues.

“Footwear is a way of expressing a greater range of individuality. It’s also a way of expressing fashionableness and increasingly, we are expecting men to be fashionable,” she said.

Footwear for men has been a growth leader at Sears Canada, which is shedding its image as a dowdy fashion retailer, pairing with Buffalo International and Aldo Group to design and produce footwear and denim lines.

“Where a man would normally own three to five pairs of shoes, that same generation may now own 10 to 15 pairs of shoes,” said Patrick Dillon, vice-president of footwear for Sears.

“Whereas a man would normally wear a classic dress shoe with a suit, now he’s mixing it up with coloured footwear and athletic footwear. It’s no longer about the black brogue.”

One of the top-selling shoes for men at Ron White in the fall had a tangerine orange sole and matching laces.

Shoe sales for men are up because men are becoming more comfortable expressing themselves through fashion, said White.

Fashionplates like soccer star David Beckham have led the way.

“Society has evolved with more emphasis on men’s grooming and fashion, and with the Beckhams of the world making it okay to be a fashion guy while still maintaining your manhood, it’s really seeing growth,” said White.

Tan brogues to wear with suits are doing well, said Ron King, chief merchandise officer at Town Shoes and The Shoe Company.

“If you see the young, more fashion-forward guy, he’s likely wearing tan these days,” said King.

Boots of all kinds for men, from ankle boots to semi-casual, are another popular category, he said. “There is definitely some shift in the market. Some men are becoming more interested in fashion.”

“Women are no longer the only ones with a shoe fetish,” said David Clemmer, Toronto stylist and CEO of [the talent agency Judy Inc.](#)

The increase in women’s footwear sales in 2012 came from dress and casual shoes, according to the NPD data. While in-store purchases account for the majority of all footwear sales, online purchases continue to grow, increasing 25 per cent in 2012. Four per cent of men’s footwear sales last year were online purchases.

Michael Black, territory manager for German shoemaker Josef Seibel and president of the Ontario Shoe Travellers Association, said he hasn't seen an increase in sales in men's shoes at the \$150 to \$185 consumer price point.

Footwear for men is extremely sensitive to recessionary trends, he said, and an increase in sales in men's footwear may perhaps signal a new confidence in the economy.

"Whenever we're sort of recessionary, it seems that men pretty much immediately stop buying footwear."

But overall, men still buy far less footwear than women.

"It's a stereotype, but it's true," said Black.

Yoya Tolic, an assistant buyer at Get Outside, says conservative colours continue to be popular at the two locations in Toronto, which feature fashionable but practical footwear, but Converse and Vans have always done well in colours.

**Toronto Star Newspapers Ltd.**