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Style Editor

**SHOE BUSINESS** was booming in Toronto last week with lots of soul-searching news:

## THIERRY RABOTIN

At a personal appearance in Toronto last week, footwear designer Thierry Rabotin, known for his pricey handcrafted works of art, appeared more like an acrobatic juggler than a shoe cobbler.

Tossing a sleek sporty style way up in the air, he'd catch it, bend it in half, one way, then the other, like it was a rubberband.

Featherweight and flexible are hallmarks of his distinctive designs

that women don't bat an eyelash

paying upward of \$500 for.

One avid fan travelling abroad wore a brand new pair of his best-selling Lena's for over 14 hours straight.

"It's like having your foot draped in silk," says Ron White, president of The Foot Shoppe, the exclusive retailer of the brand in Ontario. The

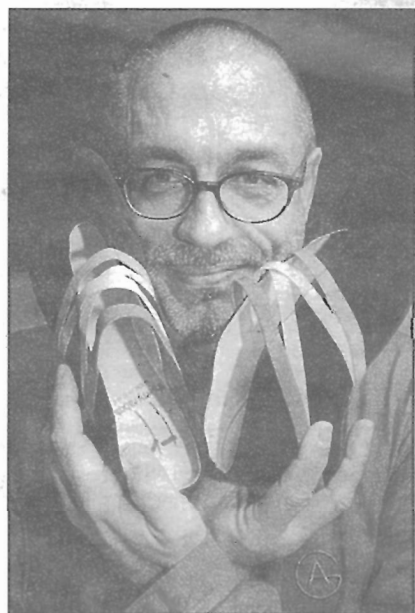
combination of buttersoft leather uppers, flexible heel-cup construction, NASA's Poron sock linings (used for beds in spaceships) and orthotic footbeds that contour like sand around the feet are what make the shoes so comfortable — and so expensive.

Another reason for the high price is their precision hand

crafting. "About three hours of labour goes into each pair — cutting, stitching, lasting. Compare that to the cost of a car repair, not including parts," says footwear manufacturer Karlheinz Schlecht, who produces only 100,000 pairs a year in his factory in Milan.

The event, held at The Fifth, featured Rabotin's spring and fall collections of foot flattering flats, wedges and sensible heeled styles in a variety of nappa leathers, patents and for summer, stretch linens and breathable microfibres.

Rabotin also launched the Libell shoe (named after The Fifth owner Libell Geddes). This technological marvel with unique

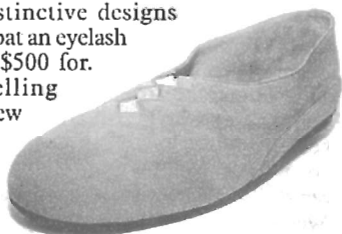


■ **FOOTWEAR** designer Thierry Rabotin holding his "Diva" nappa leather shoe with multi-coloured stretch straps, \$495. Diva has a shock absorbing covered wedge heel and Poron sock lining.

footbed construction offers the support and cushioning of a top of the line walking shoe in an elegant dress shoe.

From the outside, the dainty suede flats look slipper-like, but the interior is built like a brick house with padded Poron cushioning that is seamlessly lined with nappa leather.

Ask the 55-year-old French expat living in Milan what makes his shoes so desirable and he'll tell you: "If it's the cut of a Manolo Blahnik, or the arch of a Ferragamo shoe that women love, then it's the smile on her face when she puts on my shoes."



■ **LIBELL** slipper-like design merges a walking shoe footbed with suede upper, \$490.