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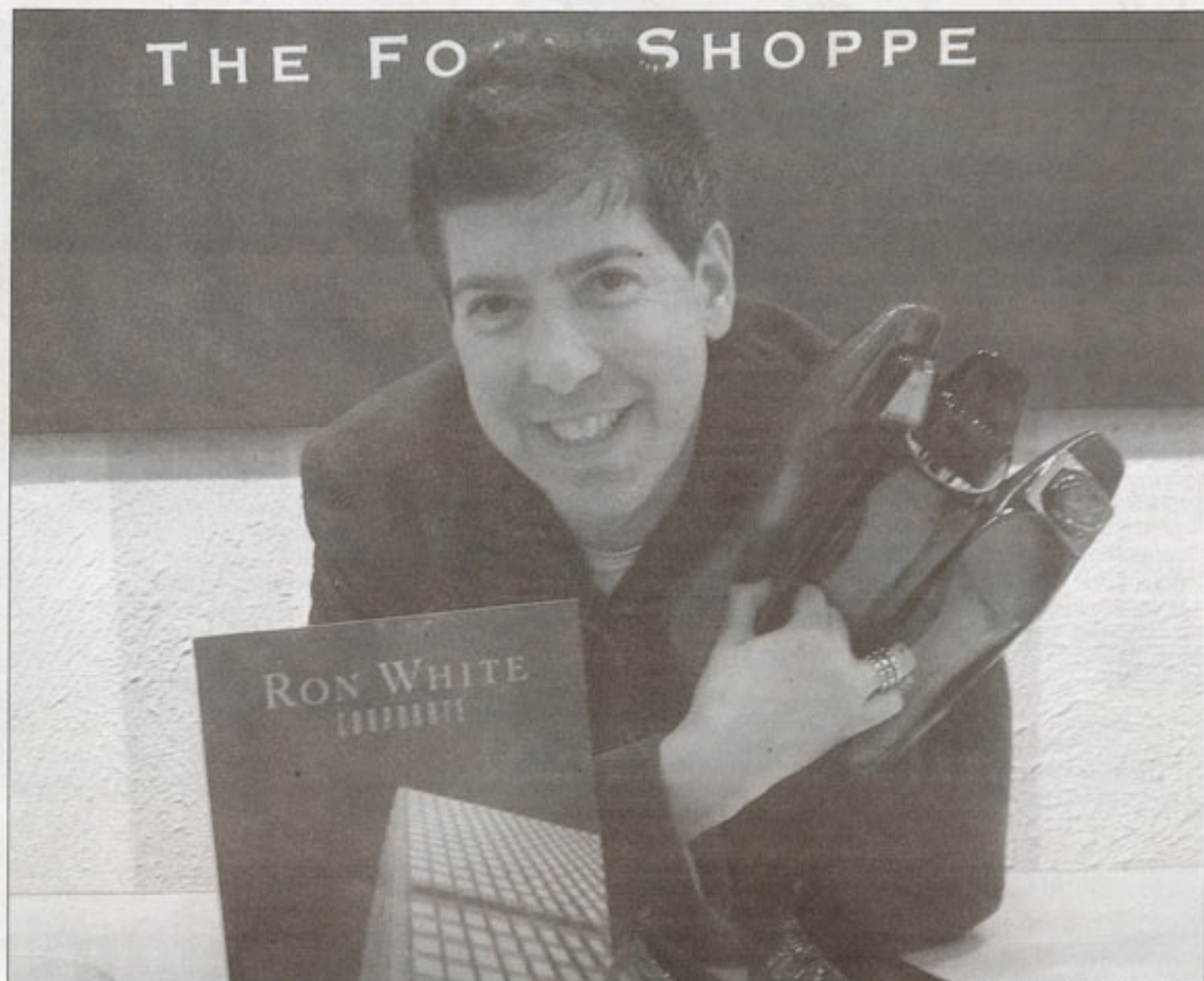
TownBusiness



Gone Shopping
Kelly Gadzala

Yuletide heeling for your tender tootsies

Travelling to Yonge and Eglinton yields the perfect cure for ladies' holiday shoe shopping woes



KELLY GADZALA/TOWN CRIER

BUSINESS CLASS: Ron White poses with shoes from his latest footwear collection called Corporate.

Santa, all I want for Christmas is a pair of Ron White shoes stuffed in my stocking.

Heck, do this for every woman in the Western hemisphere and you may just become the hottest dude in red with abs like a bowl full of jelly.

Here's why the ladies will go wild: they'll be completely jazzed to know that footwear can be swish yet full of delish tootsie bliss.

Translation: there is such a thing as a happy medium between the often sadistic pointy-toed torture devices known as fashion shoes and the clunky comfort shoes I'd rather beat to a pulp than let anywhere near my foot.

Toronto shoe designer and retailer Ron White calls these latter types Kleenex boxes, an image I couldn't have improved upon unless we throw actual shoeboxes into the mix.

After meeting Ron and taking a shoe boo at his eponymous Yonge and Eg shop, I'm now wondering how my increasingly sore soles are going to handle being stuffed into the foot-sized torture chambers piled in my closet. (That's where you come in, Santa).

Trained in orthotics and biomechanics before opening the first of seven stores (including the online shop) 15 years ago, Ron knows his way around toes and soles.

Not only can he look at your foot, as he did mine, and tell you what type of shoe would suit you best (something with a strap for me, to keep my flat feet from sliding down — no wonder I loved those Mary Janes from Kindergarten). He can also fit you into gorgeous footwear that feels as though your feet barely exist. That's a good thing, by the way, to not be feeling your feet.

Ron's trademarked phrase, All Day Heels, applies to almost every bootie and shoe in the joint. Lawyers, CEOs, media types like me — women from all walks of life who lead crazy, on-the-go lives — love wearing these shoes . . . all day long.

The footwear in Ron's shop sport technological innovations you'd expect in some serious athletic shoes. Special air bubble padding, shoes that bend all the way back, heels that have been set in to create an illusion of height and still be comfortable — I love it that Ron thinks outside the shoebox and gives us chicks what we want and need in a shoe.

He's shoed the best of 'em. Jeanne Beker's a huge fan. Mila Mulroney wore his latest collection to her son Ben's wedding. Across the pond, Fergie (the actual Duchess) has also donned his latest creations.

Having released three collections this fall — a first for him — Ron's on a definite shoe roll, and in the spring he plans on expanding the collections. The first, inspired by the Hollywood glam epitomized in movie stars of the 1930s, 40s and 50s, is the Murano collection featuring hand-blown glass beads and embellishments alongside gorgeous bow detailing.

Black cashmere suede ones known as Grace are named after the regal Grace Kelly. With orange and black Murano glass balls encrusted around the yoke of the shoe, they're swish beyond belief.

They also feature Poron — a high-tech cushioning material — and a superflex construction that allows the shoe to bend like a rubber band. That equals royal comfort, ladies.

The Joan booties honouring Joan Crawford are divine. They're made with the softest black suede and have a darling bow at the back, from which drips a jangle of Murano glass beads.

Then there's Ron's Rock Star collection, a series of 1980s-inspired booties created with some of Ron's rocker pals in mind that will have you belting out "I love rock 'n roll" and rolling on layers of liquid black eyeliner. A pair named Glam is for me, a bronze metallic leather ankle bootie with tall tapered studded heels.

There's also Sass, inspired by friend Sass Jordan, and Madge, named after you-know-who. These boots were really made for walking, so if you're an aspiring rock star take note: As official shoe sponsor of the Junos, Ron says it was important to design boots that were comfortable but didn't slip on stage.

Ron's final collection, called Corporate, is for the gal climbing that ladder who wants a strong, confident shoe that's tailored yet sophisticated enough to bring her from day to night meetings.

I love Passion, a purple flat with a big purple jewel detail on the buckle.

A word for any shoe snobs out there: Ron doesn't beat around the design bush. His collections are made in Milan.

I realize after I suggest we try some shoes on me that I've somehow managed to go to a shoe store wearing scraggy black tights with holes in the toes and ladders up one leg.

I'm mortified to the tips of my exposed big toes, but Ron and his colleagues are gracious. They even set me up for a foot massage with one of the store's electric foot

Shoeman works with designers

Cont. from Page 9

massagers. They're for sale too and quickly have my shamed feet shuddering with delight.

Ron fits me in shoes I adore on sight, a black quilted Anyi Lu with an extreme Louis-style heel, on sale into December for \$319 from \$595.

A former competitive ballroom dancer, Lu has mentored with Ron and has incorporated his comfy design elements into her shoes, which are exclusive to Ron in Canada.

Ron works with many of the designers whose shoes he sells to integrate his technical needs for a comfy shoe. His Stuart shoes, designed by Stuart Weitzman, are made to Ron's specifications — a woo-hoo fact that blows this shopping gal away.

'They even set me up for a foot massage with one of the store's massagers.'

The next pair we try is the store's wonder shoe called Yasmin (\$430) by Thierry Rabotin. It's such a staple that it's regular not included in the sale. The reason: the peep-toe at the end features a buckle that isn't just decorative — it can be tightened or loosened to accommodate a smaller or larger foot (and yes, it's common to have one foot

larger than the other).

I'm skeptical about this claim as Ron slips the shoe on my larger foot. But after he adjusts the buckle, my formerly cramped foot feels footloose and fancy free.

Next, a gorgeous platform open toe heel by Cole Haan feels like a dream. Called the Jena Air High Pump, it has Nike Air technology built right into the platform of the sole. Score one for fashionistas everywhere.

Santa, I'm chucking my scraggy tights and hanging another kind of stocking by my closet.

You know what to do, so just do it.

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www.ronwhite.ca.