



SHARON DUNN / NATIONAL POST

Thierry Rabotin and some of his stylish yet comfortable creations at The Foot Shoppe.

News you can use about shoes

Space-age padding brings comfort, but it doesn't come cheap



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Women will relate to this: Remember the days when you could buy a pair of spike heels from the five-and-dime, wear them to work all day, then continue on and dance all night?

Nowadays, if you're like me, the thought of standing on heels for hours sends terror through your toes, heels and arches. Which explains why many of us have developed an interest in that previously shunned article of footwear, the comfortable shoe.

But do they always have to look so dowdy? Not any more, according to renowned Italian shoe designer Thierry Rabotin, who has teamed with an American orthopedic surgeon to produce a shoe that envelops the foot, giving the sensation of walking barefoot. They look pretty sharp, too.

The partnership began when Dr. Taryn Rose, who has been featured on CNN and on the covers of *The New York Times* and *People* magazines, decided she had treated one bunion too many and

was going to help the poor unfortunates with misshapen feet.

She contacted Rabotin, who manufactures shoes at his factory near Milan. Together they came up with a high-tech design that uses arch supports, complete foot beds and Pouron, a shock-absorbing material and a non-compressing padding developed by NASA.

"It's a cushion that never presses down," Rabotin says during a recent appearance at The Foot Shoppe, on Bloor Street. "It's never been in shoes before. We've researched to make a shoe that's soft, feather-light and you can walk all day."

He adds: "People who went to bed with a sore back say that once they wore the shoes, it didn't happen. It's because the shoes are shock absorbing and therefore there is less fatigue."

Ron White, owner of The Foot Shoppe, says "customers usually look up and say, 'Oh, my God, I've never felt anything like this before.' We can't keep them in stock."

On this day, the store is jammed. I discover that Oprah wears only these shoes, as does Barbara Bush. I know what you're think-

ing — just old people. But Demi Moore is wearing them as well. And in Toronto, I'm told, all the top chefs are wearing them because they're on their feet all day. Skater Kurt Browning and actor Lou Diamond Phillips apparently swear by them. But at \$500 to \$700 a pair, the prices are a killer — that is, of course, if sore feet don't kill you first.

Rabotin admits the shoes are cre-

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ated for people who want comfort and the highest quality materials. But are they willing to pay for it? On the day of my visit, an American woman walked out with seven pairs, with a price tag of more than \$3,000. Others are picking up four or five pairs at a time. Then again, this is Bloor Street.

I'm skeptical, but my feet are

killing me, as usual. I fall into a seat and remove my shoes. Don, the salesman, gives me a fitting and a foot massage. (They do this in the better stores, you know.) He brings out a boot he's just tried on a woman next to me. "She has a very tiny, very narrow foot," he says. "Now we're putting the shoe on a ... a ... different kind of foot."

He slips on the boots. They really do feel nice, but maybe it was the massage. With some suspicion, I take a little walk in them. I have to admit, they do feel a bit like walking on air. I decide to try them out for a day, to find out why the celebrities are wearing them.

"Celebrity is very exciting in Canada and the U.S.," Rabotin sniffs. "We don't care about celebrities in Europe. For example, we don't go around saying that the Austrian Prime Minister is wearing our shoes, even though he is, or that Demi Moore is wearing our shoes, even though she is. We don't care about that publicity."

"By the way, when is the story running in the paper?" White asks.

I pose one last question: Does Italy's greatest sex symbol, Sophia Loren, wear your shoes?

No, Rabotin admits. "They're not sexy enough for her."

Too bad for Sophia. As for me, I'm following in the footsteps of Barbara Bush. I've got to tell you, a day after donning the boots, my feet feel great. And, as a bonus, they even look nice enough to wear to bed.

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