

FOOTWEAR PLUS

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HERE COMES THE FUZZ

THE LATEST SLIPPERS IN ALL THEIR COZY, COMFY, FUN, FURRY, FEEL-GOOD GLORY



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Shoe Salon



DESIGNER CHAT

MARION AYONOTE



MAYBE IT WAS Marion Ayonote's first shoe-related memory that planted the seeds to her becoming a successful designer. Specifically, the magenta pink stilettos that she, then 12 year old, "wore everywhere" while attending boarding school until the day that one of the heels snapped. Ayonote loved the shoes so much that she tried to fix them—with a hammer and some bubble gum. (True story.)

Ayonote hammered the protruding nail back into the heel and glued the shoe back together with the gum. She flew home in her beloved pink heels, but as she got off the plane, she noticed her sister laughing uncontrollably. "Apparently, the bubble gum was all over my ankle," she recalls. "It was so embarrassing. I limped to the car and knew I'd never wear them again."

Fast forward to 2000 when the Cordwainers College alumnae launched her eponymous label and, in the two decades since, has built a strong following. Those fans include what Ayonote describes as HNW (high net worth) women, some of whom happen to also be celebrities such as Tyra Banks, Keri Hilson, Gabrielle Union, Kelly Clarkson, Ashanti, Christina Milian and Lady Gaga's stylist who bought the Conqueror boot for the Joanne tour.

Ayonote is known for her striking silhouettes, decorative detailing and playful design—all wearable and whimsical in equal measure. Asked about signature design elements and Ayonote answers, "Shape, form, balance and texture." She adds, "The aqua sole, a raised tongue symbolic of a shield, unique heel shapes, trimmings and the finest quality leather available."

Ayonote taps into her rich cultural heritage for design inspiration. That spans her childhood in Africa, extensive travel (including many flea markets along the way), an international education and being a patron of the arts. It is a potpourri of experience that the award-winning designer dips into each season for her Italian-crafted collections. For Autumn/Winter '22, the overall theme is dressage. "Navy, crimson, black, brown, cream and gold," Ayonote says of the season's palette. "And suede, kidskin and metallics, pointed toe boots, square toe sandals and bespoke heel shapes."

Who is the Marion Ayonote woman and what is she looking for in her shoe purchases? She is sophisticated, digitally savvy and most importantly, selective about the brands she buys. She is intelligent, well-informed, favors authenticity and seeks the finest quality footwear.

Where do you look for inspiration? Anything that captivates me.

EDITOR'S PICKS



ARE YOU PLUSHING?

Fuzzy slippers will be the envy of everyone.

In what way might your background be an asset in the designer shoe world? I'm not entirely sure, but I get told my cultural heritage is an advantage to how I interpret my work. Nevertheless, I believe in creative freedom, the ability to absorb what's around you or what you imagine something to be, and interpret it in a way your mind allows you to. In addition to form and function, there needs to be excitement.

Has the pandemic altered your approach to design? It's tricky as I specialize in occasion footwear. However, I have expanded the range to include lounge loafers and slippers.

How was business this past year—the good, the challenges, the surprises? The good: I had time to re-strategize my future goals. The challenges: the aftermath of an 18-month lockdown and the knock-on effect for the plans we had set for 2020/21. The surprises: orders for the more expensive handbags and some very exciting opportunities for the brand moving forward. I'm cautiously optimistic about 2022 and our plan for scaling up.

What was the best piece of design advice you've ever received? A very famous shoe designer, who acted as a mentor, advised me to focus on my work, not draw attention to self and not look at what others are doing.

Who are some designers you admire? Golly, there are quite a few. I think Roland Mouret is brilliant, Phoebe Philo, Manolo Blahnik, of course, and an amazing Nigerian designer, Deola Sagoe. They all have one thing in common: authenticity!

What is the perfect shoe? A perfectly crafted, almond toe stiletto.

What shoe must every woman have in her closet? A perfectly crafted, almond toe stiletto, or our Conqueror boot.

What shoe style needs to die now? LOL! Badly crafted platforms with shiny patent uppers. Hideous.

What do you love most about designing shoes? The reaction I get from those who make them and those who want them.

EDITOR'S PICKS PHOTOGRAPHY BY TREVETT MCCANDLISS



Flexus slipper booties.
Opposite: Cougar
fur-lined slip-ons.

