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Stepping Out, in Style

BY MARYBETH STANLEY · PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROHAN VAN TWEST



WHENEVER I WALK ALONG THE STREETS OF VENICE (or anywhere for that matter), I come to a screeching halt every time I see a shoe store. On my most recent visit, my Italian guide, Francesco, cannot help but notice my shoe obsession. He suggests that I meet a “friend of a friend,” and takes me to **Segalin a Venezia**.

Entering the shop, I am surrounded by leather, suede and exotic skin swatches and a wild mix of shoes and boots. A few standouts among the many exquisite pairs I see are bright red shoes in the shape of gondolas, seven-inch black platforms and huge alligator men’s shoes.

I am warmly greeted by lifelong Venetian and store owner, Daniela Ghezzi. Ghezzi is a master shoemaker, one of only a few masters in the world today. She tells me it takes ten years to become a shoemaker and fifteen years to be considered an accomplished master artist.

At thirty-four years old, Ghezzi has been designing and making shoes since the age of seventeen. Although she is a modern







woman with a degree in art, she adheres to all the old traditions passed on to her by her Italian masters and those before them. Says Ghezzeo, "There is no future for this artistry without the traditions of the past."

Ghezzeo still does everything by hand—never by computer. Looking at a client file, I see sketches and notes, all done in pencil. I think how this very file could have been found just this way decades or even centuries ago.

When Ghezzeo is commissioned to make custom shoes, it becomes a very personal experience. She begins the process by meeting with the client and establishing a relationship and sense of trust. She takes the measurements of the foot, discusses design, style, and any physical problems that need to be accommodated. The client then chooses a leather or skin. Some clients will bring a photo from a fashion magazine or a pair of shoes they would like to replicate.

In the back atelier, Ghezzeo goes to work. She takes a standard shoe form and creates a leather mold for the individual foot and style of the shoe. She adjusts the arch and instep and shapes the shoe to a perfect fit. This is the creative part of the



process, which she says is relaxing and enjoyable. The actual shoemaking, she explains, is very physical, and it takes her approximately thirty-six hours to complete one pair. Handmade shoes are not inexpensive and typically cost \$1,000 to \$3,500.

I ask her about the red shoes in the window. "They are for a Dutch clown," she says. The sky-high black platform shoes await a Saudi Arabian woman. And the oversized alligator men's shoes? They will be picked up by an American football player.

As I get ready to leave, Daniela says I can't leave without trying on a pair of shoes. She hands me a pair of gray suede wedge slides. They fit perfectly and feel like a pair of slippers. This is luxury!

Segalin a Venezia, Calle dei Fuseri, San Marco 4365, 30124 Venice 041 522 2115

