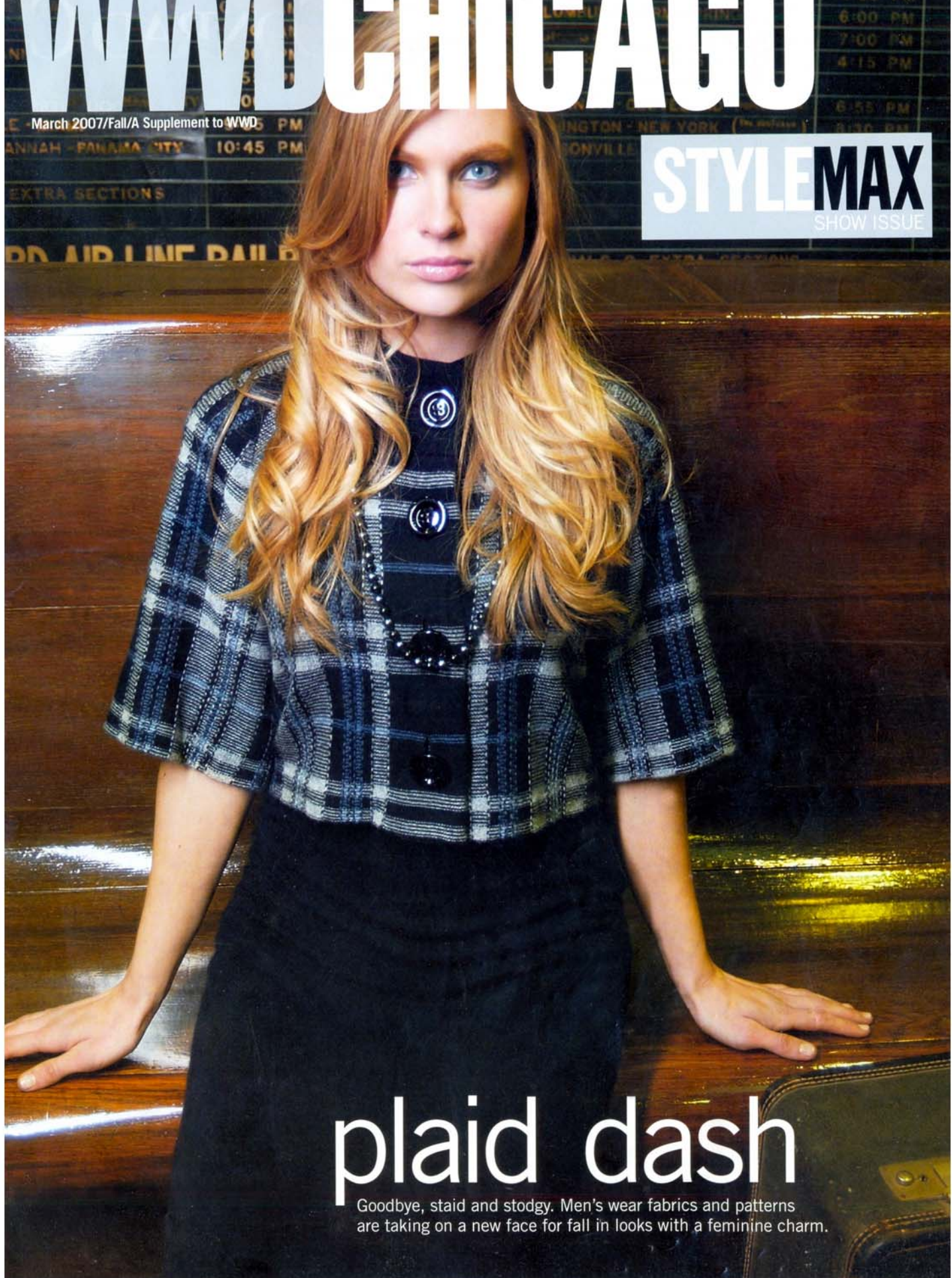


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plaid dash

Goodbye, staid and stodgy. Men's wear fabrics and patterns are taking on a new face for fall in looks with a feminine charm.

sole searching

Experimentation and creativity lead to a uniquely adaptable sandal line.

By Heather Kenny

Imagine a pair of sandals that can offer tens, even hundreds of different looks, just by your changing the straps and tying them differently.

That's the idea behind Mohop. Customers buy a pair of wooden soles and one or more pairs of ribbons, which they then thread through bungee-cord loops attached to the soles and tie up however they like: laced up the ankle to resemble espadrilles, tied at the front or zigzagging over the foot. The design won Mohop's designer, Annie Mohaupt, Gen Art Chicago's Fresh Faces in Fashion award last year.

Ironically, said Mohaupt, she got the idea for the ribbon and loop system because she didn't have a clue how to make the tops: proof that sometimes, necessity really does beget creativity.

As a kid, Mohaupt wanted to be a fashion designer — her mother worked for designer Nancy Miller in the Eighties, and Mohaupt occasionally helped out. She also flirted with the idea of becoming an artist, but instead became an architect, a profession she worked in for seven years. Then, in the spring of 2005, a jewelry designer friend asked if she'd share a booth with her at the annual Renegade Craft Fair in Chicago. Mohaupt was intrigued, but she wanted to offer something other than the usual handbags and craft-type goods. "I wasn't sure I'd be able to come up with something where I felt like I was adding a lot."

She'd always liked shoes, and she is a vegetarian and often had trouble finding footwear she liked that

also satisfied her conscience. Mohaupt got to work in her basement workshop, but the first few pairs she created were "really ridiculous," she said.

Much research and experimentation followed, during which her architecture background really came in handy as she figured out how to saw plywood cores and veneers of rosewood, maple, birch and pine, then create a sole out of recycled rubber tires and mold it all together using environmentally friendly glues, sealers and other materials.

"With the curve and firmness, it's really comfortable, especially compared with other high heels," she said, explaining that the sole makes the toes go up a bit, distributing weight further back on to the foot, and that there's more support along the length of the foot and the heel. Wood helps, too: "It's a good material," she said. "Even chefs working 16 hours a day in the kitchen wear clogs."

For the cords through which the straps are threaded, Mohaupt experimented with different types of elastic, trying to find something strong enough for every day, before discovering a mini bungee cord. She also creates the designs on the soles — ranging from hibiscus flowers to amoeba-like abstract designs — which she screen-prints by hand at a local company that's known for printing indie-rock posters. The ribbons come in both tie and buckle versions and feature bright colors, vintage fabrics and beads.

Locally, her shoes are sold at Wolfbait & B-Girls, for which she created a custom graphic on the sole: a bright red background with bluebirds. "I do a different



Annie Mohaupt's sandals can be tweaked into hundreds of different looks.

custom design for each store that I'm in," she said. "It's fun for them — it's totally exclusive."

The shoes are also available on her Web site, mohop.com, where customers' only problem may be figuring out which combination of sole and ribbons to order. "I get orders from all over the world," she said. "I just never expected that."

It turns out that all those years as an architect — she quit to focus on Mohop full-time in October 2005 — weren't in vain. "I really wouldn't know how to start without having a little knowledge about furniture construction and how to work with wood," she said. "There's so much in architecture that can be related to fashion."