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Shoe Time!

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DESIGN-AS-YOU-WEAR SANDALS

With Annie Mohaupt's wood-and-ribbon shoes, the wearer becomes the designer.

BY AMY O'NEILL HOUCK

If you've got the craft bug, and a house remodel means your basement is filled with power tools, where does that lead you? If you're Annie Mohaupt, it means reinventing the wheel, or rather, the shoe. Mohaupt's not unusual in loving shoes, but as a trained architect, she's constantly thinking about materials and how things are made. Often her musings stray from buildings to everyday objects. "When I walk around, I see materials and think, 'That would be great for a shoe.'"

As an architect, Mohaupt worked at a small firm in Chicago. She says her job, more project management than design, kept her behind a desk and away from the more artistic aspects of the profession she

loved. "I wanted to do more with my hands." She made jewelry and handbags as a creative outlet.

In 2005, a friend asked her to share a table at Chicago's

Renegade Craft Fair. Mohaupt saw the fair as a new opportunity, and was excited to participate. "I wanted to create something other people weren't making."

It wasn't long before she came up with an idea: "I was inspired by a skateboard I saw, and it got me thinking about wooden shoes." Mohaupt devoted a summer to devising a new shoe design. She researched how skateboards were made, and how wood is bent for furniture. "I studied shoes that I thought were comfortable."

Mohaupt told herself, "If the shoes sell, I'll quit architecture." Even though it rained both days of the fair and attendance was low, she did well, and was convinced. She quit her job and founded Mohop Shoes.

The result of her research is a shoe that defies convention in many ways. The look has an air of Danish Modern furniture with clean lines and clear-finished wood. Wedges and heels come in three heights, and there are three toe shapes in the current collection — pointy, rounded, and an asymmetrical box shape. The shoes are made from solid cherry, walnut, or veneered birch plywood that Mohaupt imports from Finland, and some designs have abstract silk-screening on the wood base.

Though Mohaupt has refined her shoemaking process, she still makes each pair by hand. She's careful to use sustainable materials throughout her manufacturing process. She has incorporated recycled rubber soles and environmentally friendly glues and finishes. She screen-prints on the shoes, by hand, at Chicago's Screwball Press.

Mohaupt's shoes have caught the attention of fashionistas, greenies, and crafters because of the unusual materials and patent-pending design that features elastic loops secured to the base of the shoe with brass rivets. Each pair comes with a set of ribbons that can be laced through the loops and tied in various ways. The wearer becomes the shoe designer, choosing which ties to use and how to tie them. Wearers often come up with unusual ties of their own, incorporating buckles, vintage rickrack, or crocheted lace. As Mohaupt says on her website, "You can play Imelda Marcos without requiring the budget and storage space for 5,000 shoes."

■ Annie Mohaupt's Mohop Shoes: mohop.com

Now turn the page for a DIY shoe-making lesson from Annie Mohaupt. »

Amy O'Neill Houck crochets, knits, and writes at her home in Washington, D.C. She blogs at hookandi.blogspot.com.

SHOE POTENTIAL: Annie Mohaupt looks into the soles of her shoes to envision what they are to become. Always a fresh slate, each base has the potential to become innumerable shoe designs at the whim of the wearer.



Photography by Brian Ulrich