

STYLE & BEAUTY

• A SEASONAL COMPENDIUM TO SARTORIAL FLAIR, ENCHANTING JEWELS AND HAUTE HORLOGERIE •



NORITAKA TATEHANA

Along with handbags, shoes are the accessory today that cannot be ignored, with major brands launching key “It” models every season and shapes changing as fast as clothing trends – longevity is not a word their creators might favour. Yet there is a growing undercurrent of designers who believe the exact opposite. They never study trends but take their inspiration from art, from their own observations and from history, and the craft of the shoe – often handmade and traditionally built to last – is paramount. The movement is global, from London via Holland to Japan, with some names known to a worldwide cognoscenti and others fiercely hiding out under the radar.

The best are shoe couture. **Caroline Groves** (carolinegroves.co.uk) comes from a long line of West Country artist-craftsmen and became fascinated by leather as an underused craft material. She learned to make shoes the old-fashioned way, wet-moulding different textures around adapted antique wooden lasts to create all the parts. Her bespoke shoes have a period look, often decorated with embroidery or feathers ▶

OUT OF THE BOX

ART & SOLE

Some shoemakers design wearable art, others create shoes for art’s sake – **Avril Groom** examines avant-garde footwear

PHOTO © NORITAKA TATEHANA

CAROLINE GROVES



IRREGULAR CHOICE



IRREGULAR CHOICE



Clockwise from top left: Caroline Groves's Turquoise Parakeet; an Irregular Choice creation with unicorn heels; United Nude's navy and hazel Bolt and navy Mashama; Marloes ten Bhömer's Greyglassfibreshoe; hand-beaded and embroidered arched wedge shoes from Irregular Choice. Previous page: gold, heelless platform boots with rhinestones from Noritaka Tatehana

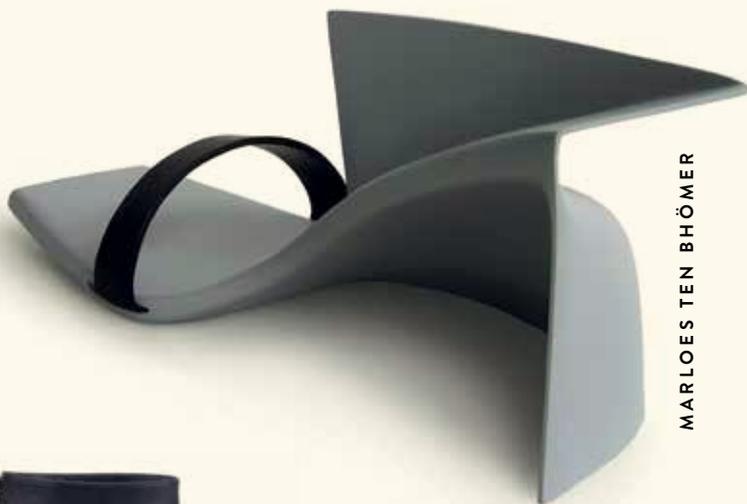
from vintage taxidermy. "I see my shoes as decorations, not decorated shoes," she says. "Some people buy them as art, but they come to life when worn."

Tracey Neuls (traceyneuls.com) would agree: she hangs her quirky, vintage-looking shoes in the windows of her two London shops "because they need to be seen from 360 degrees, as in wear". Her widely drawn inspiration includes string envelope ties for fastenings and sculptural burnt logs for "scorched" heels, yet shapes are always wearable. The craft side of her Italian artisan-made shoes is important, too, as it is to Japanese designer **Hajime Sonoda** (sonomitsu.com), who describes handmaking retro styles in his Tokyo atelier as his life – his website features lovingly photographed close-ups of the well-used tools of his trade, and half-constructed shoes.

Others are intent on creating art objects, with wearability secondary. **Aoi Kotsuhiro** (aokotsuhiro.com) in Japan and Dutch designer **Marloes ten Bhömer** (marloestenbhomer.com) sculpt unconventional materials like wood, carbon fibre and antelope horn into architectural shapes for the brave to don, and collector Daphne Guinness is often seen rocking back in her towering, heelless creations by Japanese designer **Noritaka Tatehana** (noritakatatehana.com), who has also worked on some of Lady Gaga's most extreme stage footwear.

Not all art shoes are so rarefied. Adventurous midmarket brand **United Nude** (unitednude.com) does collaborations with architect Zaha Hadid and fashion designer Iris van Herpen on extraordinary shapes that are more accessible than shoe couture, while London label **Irregular Choice** (irregularchoice.com) achieves the colourful quirk factor, if not the craft, without breaking the bank. So something arty for everyone then – whether they end up on your feet or a plinth. ◀

MARLOES TEN BHÖMER



UNITED NUDE



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