

Shoe smarts

BY JOANNA BECKET

Tech-savvy shoemakers are proving that style and comfort can go hand in hand

Shoes, shoes, beautiful shoes! It seems we can't get enough of them. Usually, women are quick to sacrifice comfort for great style, choosing those irresistible high heels that wreak havoc on our feet over 'sensible' (read 'style-less') shoes. Until now. As affluent, fashion-conscious boomers face the issues of aging, they're demanding more from their footwear, and market-savvy companies are responding. An influx of great designers and smart shoe manufacturers are finally giving consumers what they really want and need - shoes both stylish and good for their feet.

What women want

While sky-high Manolos may hold a special place in our collective hearts, a recent survey by The NPD Group Canada, finds that when shopping for footwear, a 'fashionable look' becomes less important as we age. Canadian women (who spent \$2.3-billion on footwear in the 12 months ending June 2008) chose comfort first; one third reported 'comfort' as the lead driver behind their shopping decisions. Only in the youngest group (14-24), is fashion the key motivator.

Feet hurt? You're not alone

Estimates vary, but on an average day, women take about 5,000 steps (and health experts are promoting a heart-healthy 10,000-16,000). That's a lot of wear and tear on the 26 bones, 33 joints and more than 100 tendons, ligaments and muscles that make up the foot.

"My feet are killing me!" is a familiar refrain, and although some foot ailments are inherited, many are caused by the cumulative effect of years of abuse.

If the shoe fits

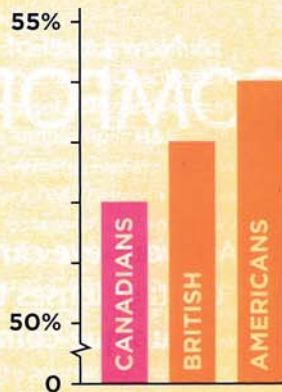
"The feet are to the body what a foundation is to a house," says Annette Bourdon, a Montreal-based chiropractor and spokesperson for the Canadian



93%
of Canadian and
American women
admit to wearing
uncomfortable
shoes!

FOOT FACTS

A worldwide survey in 2004 by the American Podiatric Medical Association (APMA) found that Canadians had the third highest rate of foot problems (52%), after the Americans (54%), and the British (53%).



Chiropractic Association (CCA).

Dr. Bourdon, who treats patients with foot pain starting in their teens, believes that many of the currently popular shoes are bad for our feet. "What it comes down to is you must choose a shoe that supports the natural alignment of the foot and doesn't stress the joints or deform the foot," she explains. "An ill-fitting shoe or high heel, worn over an extended period of time, will alter the alignment of the

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bones of the foot: a pointy shoe will squish the toes together, a high-heeled shoe will put more weight on the ball of the foot, a ballet slipper or flip flop won't provide any support which can lead to fallen arches. This can all lead to joint malfunction, changes in posture, pain and eventually arthritis."

Sore points

Dr. Turanovic, President of the Canadian Podiatric Medical Association (CPMA), agrees that finding a good fit is the best way to avoid potential problems. "In our offices, we see blisters, hammertoes, corns and calluses caused by excess friction from shoes. Choosing a shoe that fits well, with proper arch support and cushioning, eliminates many of the friction points.

"Technology has had an impact on shoe design and performance over the last few years," Dr. Turanovic adds. "There's a lot more shock absorption and lighter weight. "We're seeing a lot of better-designed shoes."

Technology steps up

Many brands are reinventing themselves; some are seeking solutions in athletic shoe technology, building stability, flexibility and cushioning into everything from wedge heels to sling-backs.

Recognized worldwide for its trademark quality and comfort footwear, **Rockport** (www.rockport.com), part of the Adidas Group, has ramped up its style quotient over the last decade, becoming a brand that continues to surprise and attract consumers. The company has integrated the Reebok proprietary Dynamic Suspension™ air cushioning technology into its line of women's shoes to increase comfort and added rubber outsoles for superior traction. Rockport's spring selection includes floral-printed wedges, ballerina flats and strappy sandals; \$90 to \$180.

Launched in the 1990s in Montebelluna, Italy, and known for its fine leather and craftsmanship, **Geox** (www.geox.com) set out to improve both the form and function of shoes. Geox has built its brand on its key technological solution, the internationally patented, waterproof and perforated, 'breathable' sole. The Geox spring collection showcases more than 100 new styles, from patent wedges, to moccasins and peep toe pumps; \$90 to \$200.