

SHOES FROM PINET TO THE PRESENT

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For those unfamiliar with the shoe world, Pinet (1817-1897) was a contemporary of Charles Frederick Worth, the great Parisian couturier. So I look at the glamour shoes and the world of haute couture, and indeed the development of the named designer. That is a concept we are all familiar with now. So it is not easy to comprehend the lack of names for most of the exquisite work before about 1850. But straightway I have to say that the number of noted shoe designers is far fewer than famous dress designers. However I will introduce you to some of them, against the background of their contemporary shoe fashions.

François Pinet was born in the French provinces (Indre-et-Loire) in 1817, two years after the end of the Napoleonic Wars. His father, an ex-soldier, settled to shoemaking, a comparatively clean and quiet trade. It had a tradition of literacy, when many manual workers were illiterate, always interested in politics, usually radical and free-thinking, an attitude which extended also to religious beliefs. It was known as 'the gentle craft', and with these characteristics attracted the more intelligent of the people who worked with their hands.

We should presume that father would be helped by the family. It was usual for a child to begin by the age of 5-6, tying knots, sweeping up, running errands and gradually learning the job. The mother of François died in 1827, and his father in 1830 when he was 13. This coincided with the time when exports of French shoes, especially the light women's styles, were flooding world markets. They were made with black or creamy-white silk upper, square at toe and throat, with a pair of narrow ribbons to cross and tie round the ankle, no heel on the sole, sueded for indoor wear (the shape familiar to us, as it has survived as the ballet shoe: this is the time when dancers first went en pointe). They were exported and sold, folded flat, in the thousands by firms such as Melnotte and Est (later Viault-Est), both founded in 1821, whose labels survive and give details of address and often customers. Many museums have examples, not just all over Europe to Russia, but in north and south America and Australia, often treasured and the uppers re-covered, and much more rarely with the sole also repaired: the shoes were really too flimsy to mend. Many had a heel added 20-30 years after manufacture, as women chose 'something old', perhaps their

mother's shoes, for a wedding.

Francois went to live with a master shoemaker, was not well treated, and three years later set out on the Compagnonnage tour-de-France. This was a way of gaining experience with other masters, making different types of footwear, and generally seeing the world. Some travelled beyond the borders of France, even overseas, to England and beyond. He worked with masters in Tours and Nantes, where he was received as Compagnon Cordonnier Bottier du Devoir and given the name, Tourangeau-la Rose d'Amour (the rose of love, a name to prove most appropriate for the style of shoes he would later make). He went on to Bordeaux, where at 19 he became president of the local branch. In 1841 he moved to Paris, as so many others wished, and in 1848, revolution year, as delegate for his corporation, he managed to persuade the shoemakers not to go on strike. By now they either ran or worked for huge 'warehouses', which were combined retail shop and workshop, with many outworkers.

Boots had by now replaced shoes as the main fashion for both sexes. The styles were generally front lace ankle boot for men in plain black leather (knee boots being for riding and now rare for daily wear). The women's ankle boots laced at the inside waist, and still more commonly had textile uppers, venturing into more colours, silk for dress wear, tough prunella or wool for daytime.

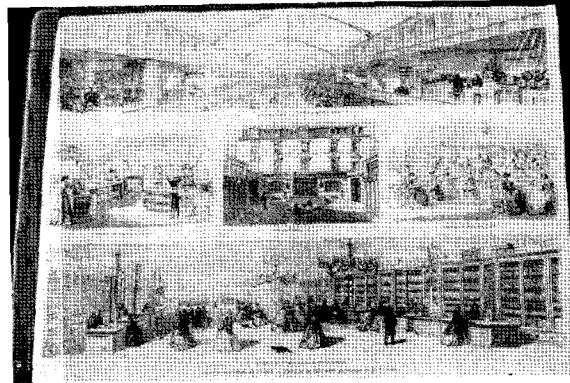
In 1855 Pinet at the age of 38 set up his own factory, at the time that the first machines (for sewing just the uppers) were appearing. In 1863 (when the American Blake sewer, for attaching the soles, was about to be perfected) he moved to new ateliers and shop at Rue Paradis-Poissonire 44, employing 120 people on the premises and 700 outworkers, a huge establishment for those times. A print in the *Grandes Industries de France* series shows a large shop on the ground floor with counters and cabinets almost to the ceiling, and big rooms of machines, women stitching uppers and men cutting leather, the faade showing three stories, attic and basement.

Women's styles were changing mainly to front lace boots in the 50s, now with low heel, and by the 60s became much more sturdy, mostly of leather for day wear, and with the heel gradually rising to 1 inches. The *English Woman's Domestic Magazine* in 1867 records changes in the boots: the soles are now also wider, so that



<Fig. 1> Shop and workshop for women's shoes of M. Massez, Paris, c1850. The only shoe machine a press for cutting, in the back room. Northampton Museums and Art Gallery.

it is no longer necessary to walk on the uppers (many of the earlier boots are stained round the bottom, or have leather patches to cover damage). There is interest in eastern Europe (at the time when Hungary gained some autonomy from the Austro-Hungarian Empire), the 'Polonaise (named after Poland) boots with rosette of cord and tassels' and 'Bottines Hongroises with two rows of buttons, much ornamented'. It comments on short dresses, and recommends that 'the chaussure should



<Fig. 2> Shop and workshop of F. Pinet, Paris, c1863. Northampton Museums and Art Gallery.

correspond to the rest of the toilet'. These could already be seen in Pinet's boots: tassels and superb flower embroidery on the higher bootleg, which he showed in the Paris Exposition that year. I think his more slender and elegant 'Pinet' heel, based on the louis (with the sole continuing down the heel breast), was also patented then or 1868. As heels go, it is perfect sculpture, worthy to be associated with French art of the time. I have found little evidence for colour-matching: an English fashion plate of 1860 shows startling emerald green boots with a violet-coloured dress. A few of the green boots survive, at least one pair with gold braid at the front lacing and matching tassel at the top, mock bow on the front with gilt buckle over it.

Although we associate Worth with the Empress Eugenie, the end of the Empire in 1870 impeded neither him nor Pinet. In fact Pinet reached his peak in the 70s, winning a prize at the 1873 exhibition in Wien. As well as exquisite floral embroidery, he was famous for painting flowers directly onto the silk, many of them resembling the flowers hand-painted on porcelain. Though Paris had been the fashion leader since 1660, the latest impetus



<Fig. 3> Pinet advertisement in 'Le Figaro' 1875.

was the 1874 first Impressionist Exhibition. So the outmoded traditional painter could perhaps turn to painting Pinet boots, though I suspect most were done by women, a useful outlet for the accomplishment then acquired as part of a lady's general education. His 1875 advertisement in 'Le Figaro' reveals him exporting all over Europe, to Moscow, Egypt, north and south America and the Far East. I found some,

perhaps the most finest embroidered boots had come from a shoe shop in Hobart, Tasmania, where they had been too admired to discard when outmoded. It would be good to know if any have survived in Asian museums, and how many of his exports penetrated into French colonies in Asia.

Some shoes were coming back into fashion again about 1870, front lace or with little bars across the stocking, fastening in the middle with a button, for summer wear. Pinet expanded into the next door premises in 1881, in the decade when the curve of the back of the boots seems to reflect the close-fitting line of the bustle dress.

In 1885 there is a major change in toe-shape, to the less comfortable point, coinciding perversely with the move to dress reform, and with the growth of American influence. The USA had become a powerful nation with wealth generated by trade and advanced mechanization, and was now sending its boot and shoe exports all over the world. Most, even in Australia, called it the American Invasion. The Naughty 90s produced some outrageous footwear, as so often at the end of a century, then with high heels on boot and shoe, perhaps the most extreme (up to 6 inches have been worn) in 1897, the year that Pinet died.

Around the turn of the century the most superb art nouveau boots and shoes were made in Philadelphia, Paris, Wien and Italy. Sometimes the style, especially on men's boots and shoes was manifested merely in a sharp angle on the sole at the big toe joint, with a sweeping in-curve under the arch, to fit the foot like a glove. Both sexes could also choose shoe, or more often boot, with asymmetric scrolling applique of leather in contrasting colours, exquisite and expensive work. The new century saw Picasso beginning his cubist paintings, and some startling Wiener Werkstatt designs



<Fig. 4> Embroidered silk boot by Pinet 1870s.



<Fig. 5> Red velvet shoe with brass buckle by H. Marshall, London 1883-85 (with man's). Northampton Museums and Art Gallery.

for women by 1912, these now generally printed on textile uppers. The designs for the tango shoes (the latest dance craze) are quite startling, and could appeal to the young today. The tango gave the opportunity to reveal the cross-lacing extending well up the leg, a daring fashion then. They were soon to be subdued by the terrible slaughter of the First World War.

By 1920 with the realisation of the full horror of that war, aggressive boots went out of fashion for women, apart from a brief flirtation with so-called Russian boots (to the knee) in the mid 20s all things Russian being of interest after their 1917 Revolution. It was usually a wellington style with straight top, and elegant louis heel, the appeal mainly in the cut and texture of the leather. The colours were now generally browns and tans, the new colour for leather introduced in 1885. Men continued to wear ankle boots, not unlike the army boots they discarded, and as Europe drifted through strikes and then the general slump in 1929, with talk of a new menace and war in the 30s, there was no incentive to abandon them.

But there was a new couturier for shoes in Paris at the corner of Place Vendme and Rue de la Paix, Yantorny, a man who traded on his mysterious origins, amid rumours that he was Asian. He rejected the innovations in design and concentrated on making the lightest and most elegant shoes for ladies. Though often seemingly based on older styles, his shoes are instantly recognisable as unique, like Pinet's, pure sculpture. He was reputed to use old materials: Genoese velvets and Byzantine silks, and violins for the shoe trees, though I have seen only 17th century lace on new leather and embroidered silks and velvets. His shoes with tiny jewelled buckle and strap over a high tongue are far more elegant than the late 17th century style on which they were based, and even with a wooden tree inside, much lighter than most contemporary shoes. But this harking back to earlier styles, so much practised during the nineteenth century, meant he was out of



<Fig. 6> 1897 buckle shoe by Gooch, London; striped court by Bauer, London 1890-95; yellow beaded shoe by Lissiansky, Wien c1900. Northampton Museums and Art Gallery.



<Fig. 7> Pair of embroidered red velvet shoes by Yantorny, Paris 1919. Northampton Museums and Art Gallery.

tune with contemporary shoemakers, incapable anyway of imitating his expensive practice. The customer was expected to pay a large sum before he would make a last (the stylised mould on which footwear is made) for her shoes, and then kept her waiting, up to two years, for the first pair. One of his best customers, whose three trunks full of Yantorny shoes survive in the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, was Mrs. Rita de Acosta Lydig, though Nancy Lancaster as well as other English society ladies also succeeded in buying at least one pair.

The popular style of the 20s was the bar shoe, sturdy leather upper and sole for day wear, with silk, artificial silk or metallic brocade uppers for evening. Factories now were employing 'designers', usually women, to devise variations on a theme, often using a limited range of lasts, with just different colour, material or trim to make what seemed a huge choice. In England H & M Rayne, who had begun in London as theatrical shoemakers, were making smart and desirable shoes, long before they became shoemakers to the ladies of the royal family from the 1930s. The Pinet company was now making bar and T-strap shoes, still beautifully embroidered, though lacking the excitement of the 1870s. But it was Andr Perugia, who began in Nice in the south of France before the War, that now set the fashion lead in Paris with jazzy styles, often with angular applique and continually inventive new shapes, for the 'Roaring 20s'. His designs in the 30s were inspired by Braque, Lger and Matisse, and he worked with Picasso in the 50s.

The 1929 slump brought more sober colours, followed by the rise of Hitler and talk of the next war. The great innovation then was the sandal, baring the foot which had not been seen since the 4th century. That was begun in Hollywood in the early 20s by Salvatore Ferragamo, who had emigrated from Italy in 1914. He made footwear for the early epic films and for all the famous stars personally, Valentino, Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, Pola Negri and many more. Sandals were necessary for the new craze for sunbathing, thought to be healthy in the 20s. Worn not only on the beach, they were quickly transformed with embroidery and 'jewelled' heels for evening wear. Even for day wear, shoes with open sides (no upper between a short vamp and the quarters) were popular, so that it is sometimes difficult to decide which is shoe and which sandal. The search for enjoyment in those worrying financial times was to become even more desperate. From 1935 onwards the



<Fig. 8> Man's tan leather 'slipper' shoe by Lotus 1936. Suede tie shoe by Crockett & Jones c1943 (both Northampton). Northampton Museums and Art Gallery.

shoes are higher cut and more clumpy, and reveal how Europe talked itself into the Second World War. Ferragamo had returned to Italy in 1929, as the supply of skilled hand-workers dried up in USA, only to find the same happening all over Europe. Then as wartime shortages restricted the materials available (Italy was already fighting in Africa before the general European war began), he made the most exciting shoes from what were basically substitute materials. He modified designs with the peep-toe, sling-back and wedge heel, to use less material and scraps. The wedge also overcame the problem of his desire to provide women with high heels, when the steel for the shank to support the arch was no longer available. His masterpiece is probably the flamboyant 1938 style with multi-layered platform sole, each a different colour, and gold leather sandal straps to keep it on.

After the War in 1947 he made the shoes to accompany Christian Dior's 'New Look', a conspicuously extravagant style which took austerity Britain by surprise. He used the thinnest, almost invisible nylon straps and a refined wedge heel, 'F'-shaped. Thus the new synthetics were accepted. In 1952 he began to use *tavernelle* ('Swiss lace'), and the next year saw the first mention of the stiletto heel. Gradually through the 50s the toe became more pointed and the heel thinner, more in tune with the New Look elegance. In 1954 Pinet (and Worth) was taken over by Paquin, and sunk without trace. In the late 50s Roger Vivier replaced Ferragamo at Dior, using even more extremely thin heels and the comma and choc shapes, pure engineering, combined with beautiful materials. He has continued to make elegant early 60s style shoes, with occasional digressions into daring thigh boots, for loyal customers, though wearers have commented on their discomfort. Ferragamo had always insisted his shoes must be comfortable, after much study of the anatomy of the foot in his early American years.

But the last shoes to be made by Ferragamo (died 1960) already showed the thicker heel, which was to be generally fashionable in the later 60s and 70s: he led style right to the end of his life. Thick heels only became volume fashion again in Britain in 1964, the year the Beatles turned to drugs, and we elected a Labour government. The toe changed to square in keeping. Courrèges in Paris appeared to chop off the winklepicker toe and stiletto heel, to produce the instantly desirable white leg boot for a new era, many in shiny plastic. By now the war years' baby boomers



<Fig. 9> 1964 Beatle boot by Lugano's, Italy. Mock crocodile shoe by F. Wright & Co., Kettering (Northamptonshire) 1960 and shoe by Benevento c1963. Northampton Museums and Art Gallery.

were creating their 'street' fashion, setting up on their own to make the sort of clothes they wanted. But they found shoemaking much more difficult, and for some years it was almost impossible to persuade the older manufacturers to make these styles for the young.

My country seemed then to divide between 'traditional' and the glorification of the working man, producing clumsy styles and ultimately the platform soles of 1972-76, when punk reared its ugly head. The punks chose the Doc Martens work boot, a perverse choice when so many of them had no job. The Griggs Company had been making work boots since the beginning of the 20th century, and added the patent Maertens sole in 1960. From 1976

it soon became a fashion item for the disaffected young. Nonetheless in '79 we elected Mrs. Margaret Thatcher and the conservative government, the change signalled the previous year with the return of the pointed toe and thinner heel for women. Briefly there were pretty floral dresses. But soon young girls, always the most attractive it seemed, were combining them with the clumpy ankle boots, looking perhaps for the best of both worlds.

Since then there has been an infinite range of variations on these two aspects of our society, as each dresses to please himself or his particular mood. A whole network of young people, Manolo Blahnik, and ex-London Cordwainers College students Jimmy Choo, Patrick Cox, Emma Hope, has grown up supplying trendy shops. But being more expensive, those who survive make the more impractical styles for dressy wear, especially high heels and sandals, rather than everyday. Vivienne Westwood, especially in the 1990s, included in her creations outrageous footwear in keeping with her clothes, such as variations on the platform, some with distinctly oriental overtones. Such influence had already been seen in USA in designs (one called kabuki) by Herbert and Beth Levine in 1968; Beth was the first woman to make a deservedly international reputation in the 40s as a shoe designer. Their company established in Manhattan by 1950, continued to make innovative shoes to the mid 70s. In 1970 the Japanese Tokio Kumaga began designing shoes in Paris, and later in Milan into the 80s, though his individual styles appeared to owe little to the east.

The Doc Martens is still much worn, though now in trainer styles and shoes as well as boots, and the factories are also copying the wildly impractical as well. It



<Fig. 10> 1964 plastic boot by Souillac, France. (Left-right: shoe by Parmen, Italy 1962-3; 'Hush Puppies' lace shoe, England 1963; Dr. Scholl's exercise sandal 1969.) Northampton Museums and Art Gallery.

almost looks like desperation, as well it may be. For our shoe manufacturing has nearly ceased to exist, as we import 90% of the shoes in our shops. 51.4% of the world's shoes are made in China, with a total of 74% from Asia. Our designers and factors still send designs to Asia, but for some fifteen years we have inevitably seen a growing oriental influence on the shoes, from the 80s 'Chairman Mao' simple cloth bar shoe onwards. It will be interesting to see if globalisation of sentiment and desires can coincide with globalisation of trade (are we yet one world?), and whether Asia can continue to provide shoes that express our feelings and fantasies, as well as reasonably practical daily wear. The events of September 2001 may make us wonder if the global life is really so desirable.

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