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RIDING THE OUTLAW TRAIL

Bootmaker To The Stars

BY CORINNE J. BROWN

You've seen them. Pointed, smaller, lots of detail, graceful and striking. Bold and sexy, with contrasting colors and exquisite detail. Boots so exceptional you'd turn your head twice to get another look, so beautifully constructed they defy the term "footwear" and appear more like art.

Boots, just possibly made by the Tres Outlaws Boot Company.

Many fine bootmakers vie for the top list of "footwear as art." Their names are legendary. But how many can claim their product is still entirely made by hand, or can boast of a client list that reads like a "Who's Who" in Hollywood?

The Tres Outlaws Boot Compa-

ny, located in El Paso, Texas, claims both; and that star-studded list of celebrities who wear their boots grows longer by the year.

"A custom-made cowboy boot can and should be a unique expression of the individual," explains Scott Wayne Emmerich, co-owner with partner Jerry Black, and also the primary designer.

"In fact, I believe the wearing of a cowboy boot is a festive occasion. Or should be. It becomes one when the boots go on your feet. My job is to make that boot the perfect compliment to the wearer," Emmerich says.

Evidently, many celebrities agree. Back during the company's beginnings in 1978, actor Dustin Hoffman ordered one of the first pairs.

Sharon Stone bought some, too, long before she became a recognizable name. Her encouragement then, as well as her unique preferences in style, is partially responsible for the trademark look that defines Tres Outlaw boots today.

The VIP customer list currently includes such American film idols as Madonna, Kurt Russell, Jane Fonda, Tom Hanks, Nicolas Cage, Tom Cruise and Bruce Willis, to name a few, and dozens of politicians.

Over time, word of mouth in Hollywood spread. The boots, pretty as they appeared, actually looked better on than off, wore like iron and felt wonderful all day long.

"Without Hollywood, I wouldn't have had the opportunity

**"I believe the wearing of a cowboy boot is a festive occasion."
Scott Wayne Emmerich**



the low cut longhorns



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to grow and explore all the fantastic possibilities," Emmerich confirms.

"One custom order led to another. Back in Texas, where we started, the preference is for a more conservative, rounded-toe look. My Hollywood clients allowed the boot to go in stylish new directions," he says.

One of those is his innovative ankle boot or bootie, a Victorian-inspired design that eliminates the shaft completely, slipping on with a side zipper and finishing just above the ankle bone. The low cut was a perfect solution to the narrow leg jeans of the 1980s, when Emmerich created it.

Today, the popular and widely copied design, embellished with a contrast leather toe and heel cap, looks great under straight jeans or a long skirt and is simply one of the classiest boot styles around.

In addition to tall, medium and short boots, Tres Outlaws also makes marvelous mules, backless shoes that give great legs a leg up.

Whether a boot is the starting point for an outfit, or the finishing touch, The Tres Outlaws Boot Company offers an array of styles, colors and custom embellishments

that stir the imagination.

From understated simplicity to outright outrageous, there's a boot for everyone from the urban cowboy to the Nashville stage star.

There's even a small historical collection of sturdy traditional boots for the working cowboy made of heavy leather, based on early 20th-century designs.

Exotic leathers from more than 70 different species have been utilized in 20 different colors, and fine novelty leather work, from inlay to overlay, embroidery, fancy stitching, hand welting, engraving, tooling, filigree, carving, and hand-lacing, made from laces cut on site, are all options.

Leathers come from England, France, Italy, Spain and Australia; each import featuring unique finishes and colors.

But all that dazzle belies the real story, the magic of what's inside or underfoot. Thanks to the unfailing eyes and hands "of the best bootmakers in the world," according to Emmerich, each pair of boots made by Tres Outlaws fits like a glove.

Soles are hand pegged, leather

toe boxes are hand cut and no bootmaker can be hired who hasn't been at his craft for at least 20 years.

Today, master bootmaker, Pacita, who trained in a tradition of painstaking handwork implicit to his Hispanic heritage, tackles the toughest details.

According to Emmerich, "All our materials are of the highest quality. I use no cheap substitutes. The boot last or *horma*, the form, the lining, the innersole, heel, the shaft, everything is made of leather. The process is based on a century-old approach to boot making, the way it was done when the earliest cowboy boot design was created, between 1880-1890.

"In those days, a 20-penny nail was driven into the sole to protect it from the stirrup. Eventually, a steel shank replaced it, adding superior strength to this hardy kind of footwear.

The production shop, located in El Paso in a 103 year old adobe building, is itself worth a visit. Once owned by a church, then housing a print shop, the boot studio is set up to Black's and Emmerich's specifications.

Very few machines are in use,

and those that are date from the 1900s, by intent. Here orders come in and the time-consuming process unfolds, beginning with a pattern of the client's feet and culminating with the final product.

Between 200-400 steps are taken during the making of a single pair of boots created by this company.

"We not only build the best boot, we service our footwear, too," Emmerich reminds. "Worn boots come back occasionally for re-glazing, polishing, new heels or whatever the customer needs. Sometimes we just suggest a tune-up. Most people just wouldn't trust their boots to anyone else."

With select sales to boutique footwear stores and high-end Western retailers, Tres Outlaws are understandably an exclusive item. However, the most popular styles, as well as their own boot classics, can be found in their Los Angeles, California outlet called Falconhead.

Located in Brentwood and established in 1983, the boot store has a complement of one-of-a-kind, handmade sterling silver and/or gold buckles, many with gemstones, handmade belts in an array of leathers and exotic skins, leather jackets, fine jewelry, and other unique Western-inspired gift items.

"Some of my customers have literally become very significant," Emmerich explains. "Jennifer Tilly and Arnold Schwarzenegger are both serious about our boots. For Arnold, we recently created a museum-quality pair with inlays of sterling silver on some of the finest hand tooling ever created. He was very involved in the design, which was stunning."

Emmerich is inspired and energized by his business, an evolving one that he feels more passionate about as it grows. At a recent trunk show in Aspen, Colorado, the response was so enthusiastic he now has a standing ap-



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pointment for two return engagements each year.

His boots have been featured at The Grace Museum in Abilene, Texas, and the Museum of the Horse in Ruidoso, New Mexico. They will be included in the permanent collection of the George H. Bush Presidential Library and Museum in College Station, Texas.

"I am constantly inspired by the ability of the cowboy boot to tell a story," he adds. "Because I'm an acute observer and love the natural world, the story is expressed in all kinds of shapes, colors and themes.

"From plants to trees and ferns to flowers, Western images and fanciful animals, the possibilities are infinite. Each customer brings me a new idea. At the moment, decorative trends seem to focus on fine hand-tooling, sterling silver appliqués and beadwork," Emmerich adds.

Western culture king Tyler Beard included an entire chapter about Tres Outlaws in his consummate book, *The Art Of The Boot*, photographed by Jim Arndt.

Arndt has selected the product for the cover of his annual boot calendar in 2004 and 2005, as well.

In a country known for magnificent obsessions and celebrated fetishes, foot lovers can rejoice. Boots that transform the wearer have arrived and made their mark. Customers who adore indulging their feet but are tired of the monotony of other brands have an infinite resource for enjoying the boot anew, whether it's for walking, riding or just feeling totally fabulous.



The Beaded Hummingbirds