



“All Shoe Fashions From 7 Basic Styles”

By William Rossi, DPM

The shoe designers are a seemingly bottomless well of creative ingenuity. It's estimated that in the U.S. and Europe alone about 200,000 "new" footwear fashions are introduced each year--a million every five years.

While perhaps fewer than 20,000 ever go into actual production each year, it's still a torrent of inventive artistry that seems to have no limits.

But few realize that of this super-abundance, all footwear fashion stems from only seven basic shoe styles: the pump, boot, oxford, sandal, clog, mule and moccasin.

You might be quick to claim that other basic styles should be added to those seven. But no, they'd prove to be simply adaptations of one of those original seven.

For example, sneakers or athletic footwear are merely spinoffs from the oxford. A slingback or strap shoe is a version of the pump. The loafer is a clone of the moccasin. And so on.

Now, two very interesting things about those seven basic styles. Not one was originally designed by or for a woman. All began as men's styles and later evolved into women's versions.

Second, the "newest" of those seven basics is the oxford, introduced some 350 years ago. Not a single new basic shoe style has been introduced in nearly four centuries. Not one, despite all the creative energies of the designers.

Now, right here it's important to distinguish between a style and a fashion.

A style is something basic. The word is from the Latin "*stylus*," a pen-like instrument used to draw an outline or form.

A fashion is a treatment or adaptation of a style. A basic pump for instance, can have an almost unlimited number of looks consisting of different combinations of materials, silhouettes, designs, colors, heel shapes and heights, solings, ornamentations, patterns, etc. But the shoe is still a pump.

Thus you can have millions of fashions with only seven basic styles. It's like the basic numbers 0 to 9. Only ten numbers, but their possible combinations are infinite.



Let's briefly trace the origin of these seven basic shoe styles.

The moccasin. The oldest of all footwear. One unearthed "fossil" moccasin has been carbon-dated 14,000 years, used by prehistoric men as a simple protective foot covering. A piece of crudely tanned leather wrapped around the foot, held on by thongs or lacing. The original "custom-fitted" shoe.

It probably originated with Mongol tribesmen who migrated across the Bering Strait, later evolving into the American Indian. Our word "moccasin" is from the Indian "*moccasinah*," meaning a foot covering.

The sandal. From the Babylonian "*sandalon*" and the Roman or Latin "*sanis*," meaning a board. That was the original sandal some 7,000 years ago--a slab of firm leather sole attached to the foot with thongs. Probably from ancient Asia. It is today the most universal footwear.

The boot. It dates back some 6,000 years. Its origin is uncertain, but probably from the ancient Mongols. It started as a simple, moc-like low-cut with a separate legging for warmth in colder climates. When shoe and legging were joined as a single unit--presto! the boot.

The early boots of Europe had widely flared tops and resembled a bucket. So the French called it "butt" for bucket, and later evolved into "*boute*." When the Normans crossed the Channel in 1066, the English adopted the style and called it a "boot."

The clog. This basic shoe style is at least several thousand years old. Originally a piece of soft wood carved out inside to accommodate the foot, worn as protection in cold weather. Still used today by European peasants and laborers. Also adopted as a "Fashion." The word "clog" is from old English, meaning a clump of wood.

The mule. From the ancient Sumerian word "*mulu*," an indoor shoe or scuff. The original slipper. Many centuries later an elevated heel was placed under the back and the mule became a popular open-back evening fashion. The flat-heel mule is still commonly used as an indoor slipper.

The pump. In the Elizabethan era a thin slip-on shoe was worn by carriage footmen who were called "pumps" because they pumped the carriage pedals. The gentry adopted the style, adding elevated heels, expensive fabric uppers and ornamentation, but retaining the name "pump."

COACH RJ

FOOT FITNESS

The oxford. The “newest” of all shoe styles, first introduced in 1640 when the early laced lowcuts were adopted by the students at Oxford University in England. Later, as the style spread in popularity, Thomas Jefferson was to be called “a foppish follower of Parisian fads” by his peers when he became among the first in America to switch from traditional buckle shoes to laced oxfords.

From these few styles have come a ceaseless torrent of variations that become “new” fashion. It’s a tribute to the creative ingenuity of the designers.

But aren’t there limits to these inventive talents? Yes and no. The world of footwear fashion concedes that fashion is constantly repeating itself by giving fresh looks to old ideas which look new to each new generation.

But then, consider geometry, there are only a limited number of basic forms: the square, circle, oval, triangle, rectangle, etc. Yet look what the world of art has been able to create, and continues to create, with those limited number of forms by use of innovative combinations and treatments.

However, when it comes to the shoe designers they have left one huge vacuum: designing shoes that fit and function properly. They have yet to match art with science, fashion with comfort.

First shoe design is like a Picasso or Salvadore Dali painting: great art but unrealistic liberties taken with natural form.

Only a tiny handful of shoe designers has ever taken as much as a single lesson in basic foot anatomy or the elements of foot and shoe biomechanics to enable foot and shoe to live together in peace and harmony.

A shoe is married to a foot, and vice versa. To outside observers it may appear to be an ideal marriage. But if, in private, the shoe is frequently abusive to the foot, it’s a marriage posing with a false front.

The shoe designers should seek counseling--to learn how to make a happy, compatible marriage with its partner, the foot.

**Digital conversions by Ron Jones, MS. Article from Stonehill College Archives and Historical Collections. Original Source: The Selling Floor, September 1998.*