

FASHION'S FANTASIES FOR FEET

By ELIZABETH R. DUVAL Associated Press, Knopf-Pix and New York Public Library
New York Times (1857-Current file); Apr 14, 1940; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times
 pg. 108



Footgear for the eternal feminine.—Fitting sandals in ancient Greece and trying on shoes in a modern store.

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By ELIZABETH R. DUVAL

HATS this year, according to reports from Paris, are saner than before, but if any conservative soul feels that he can now heave a sigh of relief and settle back to enjoy a period of moderation in dress, all he has to do is drop his eyes to ground level and have a look at women's feet, to be upset all over again. Shoes this Spring seem to have reached new extremes in fantasy. No sooner has the public gulped quickly and adjusted to the high wedge heel than a new sensation is sprung—a scooped frame of a shoe without any instep section at all. The fact that the spotlight of fashion has been focused with increasing intensity on shoes for the past five years probably can be attributed to three things: short skirts (previous to the Nineteen Twenties short skirts were worn only by children, over-athletic Greek maidens and cave women), American mass production, which, whether it is in baby blue pumps or

If women's shoes seem to have reached a new high in oddity, it is fair to add that men began it long ago.

Right now, men are almost unanimous in disliking the wedge. Those delicate high insteps pattering along on spindle heels were a sight that brightened their day, they say.

Actually, if forced to return to such a basic wardrobe as one shoe for rough wear and one for light, many women would have quite a time adjusting their mental outlook. As it stands now, they feel funny in the country in light shoes, funny in the city in heavy ones; few of them would feel dressed in the evening in leather or suede and all would be definitely unhappy during the day in satin or gold kid.

Given a fairly versatile low-heeled shoe, a woman can feel in her more exalted moments like a combination of Greta Garbo and a Grecian goddess, but in the same shoe in a less cheerful mood she can feel like a flat-footed fool; bright-colored slippers can alternately make her think she is the cutest one on the block and like something won last year in a raffle. No woman wants to tower over her escort; on the other hand, it is fairly tough on the ego to go bobbing along under a tall man's elbow.

All of which evolves into the need of a shoe for every mood, and one for each of about 999 purposes.

TO men this must seem, and is, of course, absurd, but in the past they and not the women were the ones whom moralists denounced for going to fantastic extremes in footgear; it was not until the dawn of republicanism cast a blight on men's dress in general that men's shoes sobered down to an approximation of

what is worn today. Until about 1600 women just wore modified versions of shoes worn by men.

The male who smiles condescendingly at the sight of open sandals decorated with bells or flowers might be a little sobered to know that men started the whole thing, but that is the fact. One of the earliest "novelties" to hit the boot trade was a gaudy sandal, worn by Egyptian men and later by women, which had a small figure of an enemy captive painted on the inner sole. Men also were sponsors of the first platform soles. Athenian actors wore



A 1900 style—High-buttoned boot.

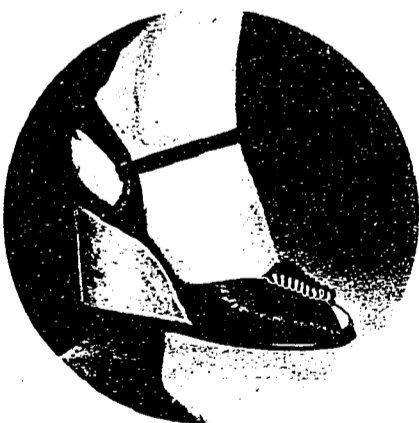
cept for occasional excursions into gaiters and dancing pumps, ever since about 1700 men seem to have had little interest in their feet.

Women in the meantime had taken to heels with squeals of pleasure, and in the days of Louis XV a slipper was worn at court that had a heel measuring fully six inches in height and about as thick in the middle as the shank of a spoon. During the first Empire feminine shoe fashions underwent a reaction and women pattered about in Grecian sandals and ballet slippers. But high-laced boots with squat spool heels came in under the decorum of Victoria's reign. These continued into the Nineteen Hundreds.

THE real shape of the foot seems to have varied from time to time just as the figure did. People alternately admired the wide, square look of the classic foot and the long, narrow high-arched look associated with an aristocrat.

At all times, however, the fragile small foot has been the feminine ideal, so it may be a shock to women who pride themselves on their feet today to be told that the generation born since 1900 have the biggest feet of any on record. So, unless the traditional preference for a small foot alters radically in the next few years it seems safe to prophesy that the high heel for dressy wear is here to stay. No other means yet has been found for decreasing the apparent size of the foot.

Doctors and health authorities have waged an unsuccessful war for years against the vagaries of women's shoes, blaming everything from maternal mortality to insanity on their pernicious effects. In the main, experts hold, a moderate heel, well supported through the arch and amply wide in the toe, is the safe and sane prescription; but it is one that the normally vain woman will take only for a five-mile walk or when she is dead sure no one is looking.



Three 1940 styles—1. Wedge heel.

motor trucks, lives by turnover, and the American woman's cult of her feet.

For quite a few years now American women have been conscious of the fact that they have, on the whole, better-looking extremities than their sisters in other countries. As a result, the nation can now be said to be possessed of a mild shoe fetish.

MOST American women endowed with reasonably good-looking ankles and feet are latent if not active shoe collectors, and there are many who will scrimp on warm clothes, lunches and new curtains in order to buy the newest bit of nonsense that passes for a foot covering. Men take a pretty active interest in the situation, too. In all the polls of their likes and dislikes, shabby or clumsily shod women's feet seem to come in for the most ranting.



3. Archless.

shoes with cork inserts to increase their height, an innovation that was adopted by the nobility.

Medieval fops wore slippers with such tremendously long points that they had to be attached to the knees with light chains. This fashion eventually had to be restricted by law and only the nobility were allowed to wear toes extending more than two inches beyond the foot.

THAT peculiarly feminine appendage, the high heel, appeared for the first time on men's shoes around 1500. Its advent coincided with that of narrower, open stirrups on saddles. The extreme was reached by Spanish gallants in the early eighteenth century, who wore boots with four-inch heels.

Nor was this the end of masculine whimsy in footgear. The cavaliers of the English Commonwealth swaggered around in boots with such enormously wide cuffs that only bow-legged men could walk at a normal speed without falling on their faces. This, however, was the end. Ex-



2. Open toe.