



THE LOOK of LEATHER

Opera theme strikes the right note



PERTINI - by Juan Busquets Perelló.



SINELA - by the Sinela design team.

A collection of 25 special pairs of shoes that first went on display in Milan in 2005 before going to Tokyo in 2006 won a third airing in Düsseldorf in September.

To coincide with the GDS footwear event, the *Carmen's Shoes* exhibition was the centrepiece of an evening reception that the local Spanish chamber of commerce hosted at the German city's Tönhalle venue.

The collection consists of the creations of 25 prominent Spanish design houses, including **Agatha Ruiz de la Prada**, **Sinela**, **Camper**, **Spastor** and **Emilio Segura**. Their brief was challenging, but fun.

They had to imagine that Carmen, the eponymous heroine of the opera by Georges Bizet, was alive today and design a shoe that she would want to buy and wear. The combined result, according to the organisers, was "a unique demonstration of tradition, charm, passion, seduction and free spirit", all the qualities that define the bewitching worker girl from the Seville tobacco factory.

Leather was, naturally, an important element of many designs. This made it easy for us to pick out some leather-centred highlights for this feature.

Mallorca-based **Juan Busquets Perelló** contributed *Pertini*, a pair of knee-length boots in green python skin, with patterned perforations in the leather, red pie-crust detail along the unstitched joins and old gold buckles.

Boots were also what Santos Franco decided Carmen would wear today, in this case mixing lace and leather and incorporating "arabesque lines" to suggest femininity and the "frank sensuality" that makes Carmen irresistible to the opera's male lead, Don José. For the same reason, this design, which had the name *Amante* (Lover), used red and black materials, with the colours symbolising "passion and strength of character".

Members of the Sinela design team decided they would be more likely to tap into Carmen's taste by creating a remarkable bullfighter style ballerina shoe. It came in silver-tinted leather and had blood-red coloured laces as a contrast. ➤

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The frame of the rose

Less noticeable at first glance, but then unforgettable when you realised it was there, was a crystal clear, high wedge on the sole of the Sinela shoe, made from methacrylate. Encased inside this wedge was a red rose. Describing Carmen as “a woman of temperament, who was sensual, highly expressive and passionate”, the Sinela team thought this offering captured her character well.

Luis Mesquida Mascaró's offering was called *Looky*, a pair of shoes in purple calfskin, with a golden floral pattern inlaid into the leather. There was also a floral element to Emilio Segura's *El Dantés* boots, a design inspired by Carmen's home region, Andalusia, and by a painter from much further north (but whose genius consisted in capturing on canvas the passion and emotion of ordinary Spanish people), Francisco Goya.

The fine suede and calfskin boots incorporated (again) a red rose and were also memorable for their narrow toe and high heel. The colours that dominated were, as before, blood red and black, with forest green—the main colour of Andalusia's flag—also featuring. Swarovski crystals, also in red and green, provided the finishing touch on the back of the boot, with smaller, clear crystals setting off the metal-covered heel.

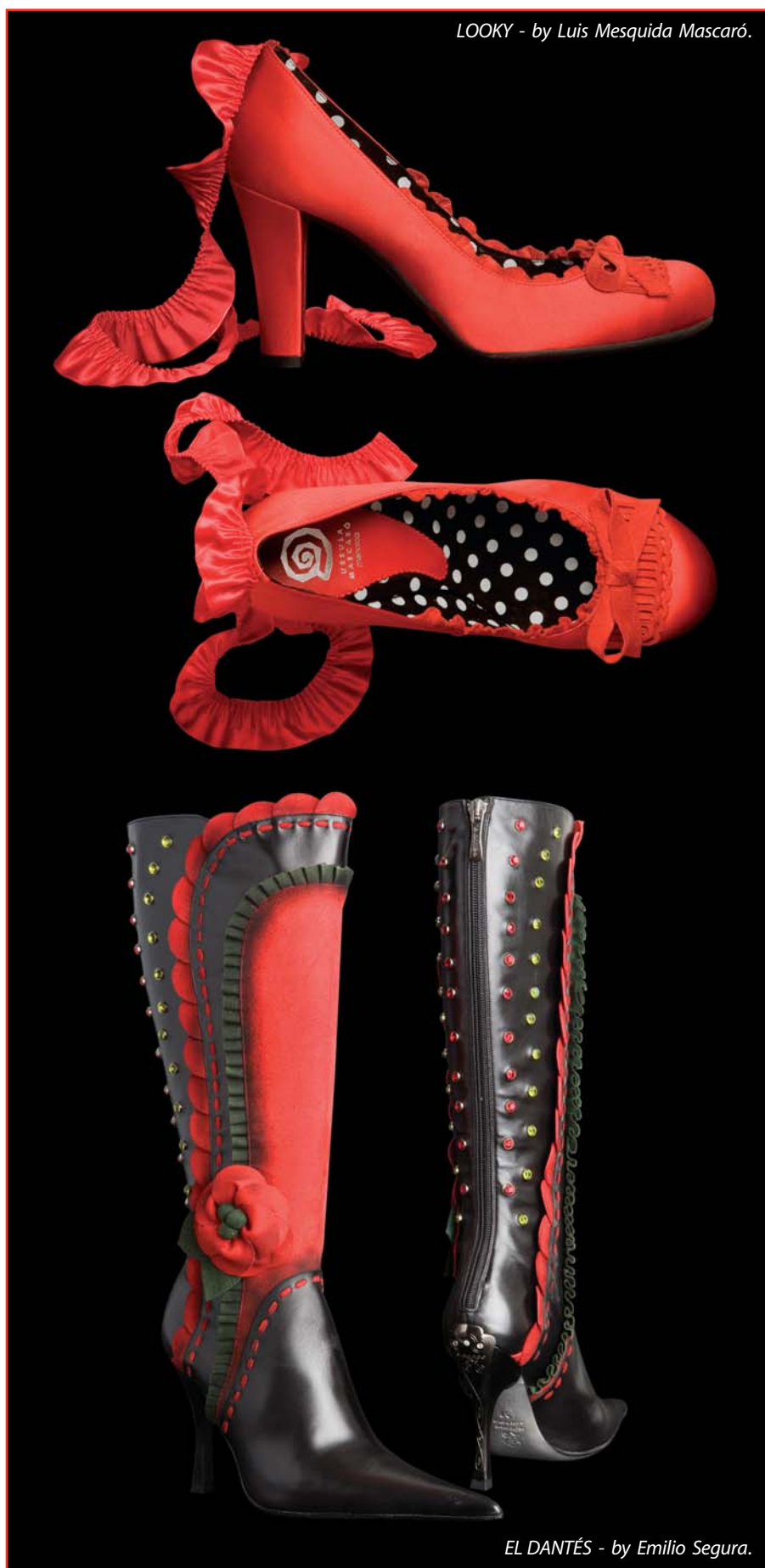
It had to be boots for Rebeca Sanver too. In her case, the right look for Carmen's strong character would have been a high boot with what the designer called “irregular and aggressive form”.

She used mixed material such as aged leather in light and shocking pink, patent leather, and a flower with a silk head and lace stem. The boot had a slight platform in the vamp and a high heel (seven centimetres).

The heel of the boot itself was open, as were the sides, where a leather lace brought to mind a corset such as the one Carmen might have worn.

Crossed lines

One of the designers in the collection, Sara Navarro, says she is certain the corset had the same connotations of seduction and eroticism in Carmen's time (the nineteenth century) as it does today. “The



LOOKY - by Luis Mesquida Mascaró.

EL DANTÉS - by Emilio Segura.

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REBECA SANVER - by Rebeca Sanver.



SARA NAVARRO - by Sara Navarro.



element of criss-crossing means sensuality," she explains, "and it always has."

She, too, incorporated the corset idea into her design, a slipper made entirely from Spanish suede, with long laces that cross back and forth along the length of the wearer's lower leg.

Ms Navarro selected the leather herself from a tannery near Barcelona to be sure of getting just the right colours. She has the green of the forests of Andalusia too, but she says the reds matter to her even more. There are lighter ruby tones, but a darker red predominates, one that she says signifies cherries and, especially, pomegranate seeds.

Another detail is a flower, inlaid in red Swarovski crystals, right at the back of the insole so that the wearer's heel will hide it from view the whole time. Nevertheless, Ms Navarro wanted to include this floral touch.

"All of this speaks of the south," she continues. "And although I don't come from there, everyone in Spain has a place in their heart for Andalusia, I think because it's the region that is most typically Spanish, but which still contains so many reminders of our Arab past."

It's the landscape more than anything else that she has tried to evoke in the pair of shoes that she contributed to the exhibition; it's wild and natural, like Carmen, she points out.

Since completing the initial pair in time for the Milan exhibition two years ago, Sara Navarro went on to design a whole collection based on the same idea. She says she had no difficulty in coming up with her design idea because she knows and loves Bizet's opera very well. Her own Carmen-themed collection has sold well, she says, either at the major footwear fairs or through the factory her family has run in Elda, in Spain's main footwear province of Alicante, for generations.

Not everyone in Elda is enjoying this level of success. "The people aiming at the middle market are really suffering," Ms Navarro says, lowering her voice. "The ones who are doing well are those who have limited production and who are aiming at a very high-level, selective clientele."

Whether Carmen would qualify as part of that customer group is another question. ☉