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A supplement to

novelty

These Shoes Aren't Made For Walking

The skinny on the sexy shoe market

BY CAROLINE RATH

There are many reactions to shoes that have been alternately dubbed "sexy shoes" and "stripper shoes." For some, the sight of them evokes images (appealing or not) of scantily clad girls twirling on poles. For others, reminders of fun party nights like Halloween or other special dress-up occasions. For another group, they are a curiosity—seemingly impossible to wear and sometimes even precariously, improbable works of engineering ingenuity.

But to those in the sexy shoe business, they are works of art, and also of commerce. Just how are these shoes manufactured and distributed? And how can you effectively integrate them into your own business as a platform to increase profit?

POWER PLAYERS

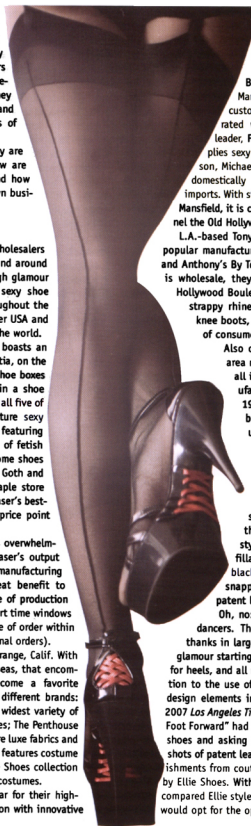
There are many sexy shoe manufacturers and wholesalers in the U.S., many of which are situated in and around Los Angeles, the perfect intersection of the high glamour and over-the-top extravagance befitting the sexy shoe industry. Two major manufacturers known throughout the sexy shoe industry are Los Angeles-based Pleaser USA and Ellie Shoes, both sold in retail outlets around the world.

Pleaser USA, launched in 1993 by Ben Hsu, boasts an impressive 130,000-square-foot facility in Placentia, on the outskirts of L.A. Thousands upon thousands of shoe boxes are neatly piled sky-high, 35 feet straight up in a shoe lover's paradise. Contained within are shoes from all five of Pleaser's brands: Pleaser, the company's signature sexy shoe line; Luscious, a more playful collection featuring wilder colors and materials; Devious, a full line of fetish shoes featuring 6-inch single soles as well as some shoes that were truly not made for walking; Demonia, Goth and rockabilly selections often available at mall staple store Hot Topic; and Funtasma, a wide selection of Pleaser's best-selling and holiday-only styles, set at a lower price point especially for seasonal sales.

The sheer volume of shoes available onsite is overwhelming, and this just scratches the surface of Pleaser's output potential, which is crafted overseas at its own manufacturing plant. Having in-company production is a great benefit to Pleaser, which can monitor and control the rate of production and ensure maximum order fulfillment in very short time windows (orders ship within three business days from time of order within the continental United States, five for international orders).

Not to be outdone is Ellie Shoes, located in Orange, Calif. With a broad range of styles, also manufactured overseas, that encompasses over 600 distinct looks, Ellie has become a favorite mainstream commodity. The company has four different brands: Ellie Shoes, the company's main brand, has the widest variety of shoes, with heels ranging from 3 inches to 8 inches; The Penthouse by Ellie Shoes features 3- to 6-inch heels with more luxe fabrics and higher-end design sensibility; the 1031 Collection features costume styles for men and children; and the Leg Avenue Shoes collection is a licensed brand designed to pair with trendy costumes.

Other sexy shoe manufacturers are also popular for their high-heeled entries in the industry, demanding attention with innovat-



styles and ever-more-competitive prices.

Hollywood Heels, a bastion of Old Hollywood style, has been in business since the 1950s, when founder Norman Kaplan debuted the line in a retail store situated right in the Beverly Wilshire Hotel. Film sirens, such as Marilyn Monroe and Rita Hayworth, were regular customers, and eventually Hollywood Heels collaborated with that other famous Hollywood industry leader, Frederick's of Hollywood, for whom it still supplies sexy shoes. Now under the leadership of Norman's son, Michael Kaplan, the manufacturer wholesales its own domestically produced line as well as select European imports. With style names like Pickford, Monroe, Swanson, and Mansfield, it is clear that this manufacturer still aims to channel the Old Hollywood panache on which it was founded.

L.A.-based Tony's Shoes, Inc., in business since 1986, is a popular manufacturer that carries two main lines: Tony Shoes and Anthony's By Tony. Though the company's primary business is wholesale, they are also known for their retail outlet on Hollywood Boulevard. With wares ranging from prom-prett, strappy rhinestone heels to dominatrix-evoking lace-up knee boots, Tony's Shoes is popular across a wide swath of consumer demographics.

Also on the scene is Karo's Shoes, another L.A.-area manufacturer with over 1,000 original styles, all in the United States. A long-time shoe manufacturer, Karo's expanded into this market in 1996 and has built a strong customer base both here and abroad, with European distributors in France and Spain.

WHO'S THAT GIRL?

The sexy shoe demographic is no longer just the realm of girls who can bust a move on a fireman's pole. While they do represent a significant segment of sales, particularly for the most outlandishly impossible 8.5-inch styles such as Ellie's Glitter platform, Pleaser's fillable Tip Jar style and Karo's Shoes neon pink black-light boots, they aren't the only ones snapping up marabou kitten slingbacks and patent leather platforms.

Oh, no: Sexy shoes aren't just appealing to exotic dancers. Their mainstream appeal is rapidly growing, thanks in large part to their bargin' price points (instant glamour starting at \$19.99 and peaking at under \$100 retail for heels, and all manner of boots from \$40 to \$200) in addition to the use of ultra-high platforms and other fetish-type design elements infiltrating haute couture. In fact, an April 2007 *Los Angeles Times* article titled "Designers Put Their Fetish Foot Forward" had a pop quiz of sorts featuring similarly styled shoes and asking "Classy or kinky?" and showed alternating shots of patent leather heels with stainless steel spike embellishments from couture house Dolce & Gabbana and sexy styles by Ellie Shoes. With one D&G style coming in at \$560 and the compared Ellie style at \$60, it's easy to see why glamour-pusses would opt for the optically similar, fashionably affordable style.

photo courtesy Pleaser USA

ANB INTIMATE Buyer's Guide



Diamonds may be a girl's best friend when she answers the question in public, but behind closed doors, an overflowing drawer of lingerie and pleasure objects is what she keeps closest to her chest. Not to mention, in the modern boudoir, men too wish to enhance their assets. Toys, lubes, oils, and body products are essential to bedroom exploration, but before the key turns in the lock, there is a dance of seduction enhanced by intimate apparel. Whether a lacy teddy hides under prudent garb for prurient interests later or an adorned couple entertains each other on a bed of roses, the modern adult retailer will do well to "fully outfit" customers with *all* things erotic. Since we've already got you covered on the novelty side, we've put together a Buyer's Guide for the increasingly important intimate apparel segment. The following hand-selected items are meant to give you an idea of what's out there. Order every item or take mental notes...we're only teasing you with a sprinkle of the many delights your customers can add to their most intimate moments.



2pc Lace & Mesh Mini Dress Set
Hustler Lingerie
HustlerLingerie.com
Ruched, semi-sheer, brilliant pink, halter top mini dress with lace detail will suit many body types and bedroom tastes with Hustler charm.
Style number: HL217
Fabric: Nylon/Spandex
Colors: Pink, Black
Sizes: One size fits most
MSRP: \$\$



Party Time After Hours for Her
California Exotic Novelties
CalExotics.com
For erotic execs and sexy secretaries staying late. Garter belt, bra top, and tie make the set get down to business quick.
Style number: 4005-00-3
Fabric: Cotton/Spandex
Colors: Black/White striped; White Trim
Sizes: One size fits most
MSRP: \$\$



Triangle Bra and Skort Set
Magic Silk
MagicSilk.com
From country honeys to rockabilly babes, this two piece polka dot set with lace trim is demure and fun.
Style number: 7437
Fabric: Chiffon
Colors: Watermelon, Blueberry
Sizes: S-XL, Queen
MSRP: \$\$



6.5-inch Beau Pleaser
PleaserUSA.com
Get your mistress on with these playful platforms. A clear strap across the top of the foot flaunts the toes, while a crimson ribbon ties through the heel around the ankle.
Style number: BEAU692/C/B
Fabric: Vinyl upper/
Rubber sole
Colors: Clear/Black
Sizes: 5-12
MSRP: \$\$



Padded Chiffon Far-Away Boxer
Prado
Prado.net
It's gently jingle for men who want to go the full nitty. Semi-sheer fabric tied together with Velcro fast and easy removal.
Style number: 4976
Fabric: Polyester
Colors: Red, Black
Sizes: M/L, L/XL
MSRP: \$