

she's gotta have it

the new shoe

First it was spikes,
then it was
Sabrinas; now
the shoe of
the moment
is a Mary Jane
gone mad with fat,
flared heels.
Marina Rust
senses trouble
afoot.

PRADA'S
CHUNKY
NEW HEEL

heodore and I are in Montreal for a wedding. Two hours to kill; we set out to see the sights. Half a block from the hotel, we see a department store. Armani, Gucci, and Jil Sander line the windows.

"What do you think?" asks Theodore.

Truly a world-class city.

"With a favorable exchange rate."

Holt Renfrew's Prada boutique. The salesgirl reemerges from the stockroom, her voice lowered to a hush. "This is the accessory book for fall. I hadn't put it out yet because I didn't want to start a *frenzy*."

The salesgirl places the black book on a table. I somehow sense that Theodore and I are not to touch it. We look on as she flips the pages.

The colors are browns. "Curry, olive, paprika," she recites. "A lot of antiqued-leather patterns." She stops at a photo of a brownish floral Mary Jane with a high, stacked heel. "*The shoe for fall.*"

"I see ugliness is having a moment," says Theodore, scarily fluent in fashion jargon.

"The shoes are printed to match the clothes," explains the salesgirl, as if to reassure. "Keep in mind that with the new heel, the eye might take a while to adjust."

The chunkiness of the heel concerns me.

"It *is* substantial. Some might say exaggerated," says the salesgirl.

"Kind of an elegant wicked-witch look," says Theodore.

The salesgirl flips the page. "It's better in a boot."

The boot.

Pointer Sisters, circa '73?

"No," ventures Theodore. "Wealthy Soviet ballerina. Pre-glasnost."

"Really?" says the salesgirl. "I was thinking Mary or Rhoda."

Rhoda. Definitely.

OK. I know practicality is pedestrian. But this one?—I point to a photo of a four-inch green pump—Who'll buy it?

"The green two-tone we'll see in Montreal, but not Toronto. Women here wear color. It's a French thing."

But how will the French feel about the chunky heel?

"They'll love it. *view* ▶ 196

Exaggerated that way, it's chicer than a spike."

For the wedding, I've packed spindly satin Manolo Blahniks. They were on sale; they matched my dress.

The reception is on the bride's lawn. My heels sink into the ground, like champagne-colored golf tees. I begin to see the advantages of chunk.

Chunk versus spike. Back in L.A., my entire week seems focused on this issue.

Monday. My chiropractor's office.

"High heels wreak havoc on the double AS ilium [anterior-superior]," says Dr.

Berk. "They can cause pelvic rotation and an accentuation in the lumbar curve due to subluxation."

Layman's terms: They're indefensible, correct?

"As a chiropractor, I'd have to say they're horrible. As a man, I think they're great."

Herein lies the problem.

His position on skinny versus chunky?

"A wider heel will keep you more stable, relatively."

Personal preference?

"Four-inch spikes."

You can't really blame the doctor nor his gender (of which most shoe designers seem composed). The problem lies deep in Darwinian precedent.

Tuesday. Penelope calls.

"Did you know," she says, "that female baboons, when in heat, walk on their tip-toes, their behinds in the air?"

Watching the Discovery Channel again, I see. What about the males?

"Always in heat."

Her position on chunky versus pointy?

"I've always preferred chunky. In narrow heels, I tend to *mince*. Not a power statement. Also chunky . . . makes your butt look smaller."

Wednesday. Lunch with Cary, an L.A.-based fashion stylist.

"Chunky is what works with the *pant*,"

Cary explains. "If you wear a spike with pants, you'll look like Cheryl Tiegs in 1981. Visually, you need something to end the pant. That's why the Gucci platform was photographed a lot."

Which Gucci platform?

"You know. The transvestite boot."

Fashion-wise, I think I'm going to sit this one out.

Thursday. My Beverly Hills Prada salesperson calls. They've received the book for fall.

I'm sitting this one out, I tell her.

"Keep in mind that the shoes shipped won't necessarily be as high as what you're seeing. Our owner ordered the heels not so high as the runway, because when he was at the shows he noticed the models were having trouble walking."

But those heels

are *chunky*. I thought that was the whole point. Walking.

"You're still on your toes with your butt in the air. They're still, like, as high as Frederick's 'Lay Me Down and Do Me' shoes," though she doesn't actually say "do."

OK. Now I understand. For fall, shoes will be neither sexy nor comfortable. I formulate my survival plan. The pants issue is easily solved with short boots of a moderate height. I've already ordered two pairs of Ralph Lauren's perfectly proportioned numbers—one black, one brown. Pumps remain the problem.

What are women going to wear with skirts? I ask Cary.

"You're not going to be *wearing* skirts," she repeats. "This is a *pants* season."

Forgive me if I'm a little grouchy Thursday when Lonnie calls from the Neiman Marcus shoe department. "Fall's arrived!" he announces, all chipper.

My eye has yet to adjust.

"Blahnik's done a *block heel*."

Manolo. The last holdout. Delicate. Feminine. Previously immune to trends. Say it ain't so.

"You'll like them. I *swear*. Come see."

Friday. Neiman's shoe department.

"'Cubana,' 70 mm heel," says Lonnie, presenting me with Blahnik's simple black pump.

The heel is squared but narrow. Ladylike but sexy. I try it on. It's even comfortable.

Survival of the fittest. Darwin would be pleased.

On tippy-toes, I'm up the escalator, in search of a skirt. □

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