

# THE RED KING

*Christian Louboutin is the world's most desired cobbler. Maybourne caught up with him in his second London store on Mount Street*



## Why high heels?

When she is wearing high heels, a woman's body shape changes, her attitude changes and she becomes much more body conscious. I totally understand that a woman does not want to be body conscious all day long, but when you wear heels you are definitely more so. I remember one woman saying to me, 'since I have been wearing your shoes, I now love my street. Before, I was walking fast with my head down, but now I have to take it more slowly, I look around and enjoy it.' It is much better to allow yourself time for everything around you instead of passing life at maximum speed.

## What do you want women to feel?

Freedom, and also to look good. I love women and I have been brought up by women. A shoe can look good on the shelf but if it doesn't look good on, then it is not a good shoe. I remember my older sisters looking at the mirror, and [I recall] their reactions if they didn't like the way they looked. It definitely influenced my designs. If it doesn't look good on – for example, if it fattens your ankle – then

I erase it, because it makes no sense. I don't think women want things that make them look ugly.

## Should women suffer to wear beautiful shoes?

There is one thing I do not believe in and that is this French adage that one has to suffer to be beautiful. It makes no sense because, if the woman is suffering, you see it on the face and it affects the way in which she walks. So, I have technical secrets that I have been learning about through dancers. They have to feel great and super comfortable in their whole outfit in order to live the expression that is dancing – to be completely free. If there is one thing that I put above almost everything else, it is the quality of freedom. Freedom in your life, but also freedom in your design.

## How do you balance design and function?

I always start with imagination, and then I sketch. Technique comes after. If you put all your brain into technique, you forget that the first thing a woman is going to see, or want to see, is a design. She is not interested in knowing that there is only one nail in her heel. So, I make a point of being a bad technician, because

I don't want to be overwhelmed by technique, because then you shrink your designs.

## There must be some advantages to having such a high profile name and company...

Yes, you don't have too many problems in restaurants! And it's nice that people come to you to tell you nice things. A shoe can also be a communication between people. If a man stops a woman in the street and says, 'Did you realise that you have red soles?', and the woman is lying and saying, 'Oh, really, I didn't know', it's a way to communicate. I think that when you are designing, when you are creating, it comes from the fact that you want to communicate things to people and so if people are communicating to you and telling you nice things about what you do, you cannot be anything other than happy.

## What's the story about the showgirls?

I always liked the Parisian dancers. I would see every show in Paris. My best friend and I had figured out that when you were coming in after the intermission nobody was checking your tickets, so we would see the second part of every



*JUST AS MOUNT STREET IS THE PERFECT STREET FOR LONDON, CLARIDGE'S IS THE PERFECT HOTEL*

show for free. Because of that, I would see those shows over and over. A dancer is basically a fantasised woman; they are sort of imitations of Birds of Paradise – a naked body with feathers and a pair of shoes. As the feather was already invented by birds, the only other element was the shoes, so I sort of focused on the shoes.

**You say you are not inspired by fashion.**

My dream has never been to be famous or to work in fashion. The only place where I don't find any type of inspiration, or very rarely, is the fashion industry. My designs come from my personal life, which is not such a 'fashion' personal life in a way; they come from my travelling, they come from everything. I am inspired through conversation, through the way a person walks, a movie, anything. I buy a lot of textile: it is a huge inspiration, but inspiration can definitely come from anywhere. Talking to you now, I am looking at the lamp and it is almost like shredded glass and I was actually thinking that it could be a nice element on a buckle of a Mary Jane. Inspiration comes from the environment, you just have to look around.

**You collaborated with David Lynch on a series of photographs featuring your shoes. Are film directors an inspiration?**

Definitely, *definitely*. He is a wonderful director, but not only he is a wonderful director and a wonderful person, he's also an aesthete. A lot of directors are good directors, but with few directors can you say a colour 'à la Lynch', or a colour Fellini-style, or a woman Lynch-style. If you say David Lynch, you can definitely put a palette of colours, a style of woman – a sound of music, a whole universe of forms. It is very rare to find directors who have a style going through every aspect. David, he's a full, full aesthete.

**Why red?**

Because I think that in the palette of colours, red comes first. A woman who only wears black is still going to have red elements – nails, lips. So the red is coming before the other colours. You don't like colours? You still like red.

**Do you spend much time in your shops?**

I was my own salesman the first year and a half, so I know the life of a shop; so whenever I go to my own shops it is very funny because I turn

myself into a salesman. I just look at the women inside and I can't help myself telling them, 'oh, you should try this, or you should try that'.

**Why Mount Street?**

It is a very special street for me and I have always loved that street. For me, it is the perfect London street, due to the mix of a great butcher, a nice hotel, the shops, a wonderful restaurant... But even before that, the architecture is perfect. If I had to sketch the perfect street in London, I would sketch Mount Street.

**You are a long-standing admirer of Claridge's.**

Again, as much as Mount Street is the perfect street for London, I would say that Claridge's is the perfect London hotel. It's beautiful. I love all the patinas, and the people working in the hotel are incredibly nice. It's like a kind of 1950s music hall movie. Also, they have barely changed; at a time when a lot of people were doing modern hotels, Claridge's understood that staying the way you are is the best thing. ☒

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