



Nanotechnology leather by Tre Effe

Leather gets the Hollywood touch

Italian tanners pulled out all the stops when they showcased new leathers for winter 2007 at Lineapelle. Old style black and white movie star glamour was a recurring theme. Deep, rich, glossy leathers with subtle metallic surface finishes were often presented on a shiny black backdrop, with spotlights all aimed at enhancing the gloss and glamour of the leathers.

For women's shoes and bags there were lovely bronzed and metallic back-lit effects on soft calf from Rino Mastrotto, with semi transparent metallic finishes on a blacker base. Classic colours such as dark blue, bronze, pewter and purple were all around but Mastrotto's rich red, added at the last minute, looked new and fresh. Glitter and glamour were everywhere. The Flash Lite collection was totally eye-catching with a full range of brilliantly reflective synthetic materials for those who want to be noticed. The material is soft and comfortable, and can be printed and decorated, so it is not just for accessories but for all over red carpet glamour.

But not all was dark and Hollywood dressy; there were plenty of soft colours, often with a natural touch. Even though the leathers at Lineapelle were for winter 2007 there were many paler shades, especially sands and beiges moving all the way into the old rose spectrum. These colours also appeared in real fur and wool felt, all part of the feeling for natural materials. ►



Mirror finishing from Miura

WORLD FOOTWEAR



Used look textile
by Panatex



Satin finish heels by Tacchificio Val di Chienti

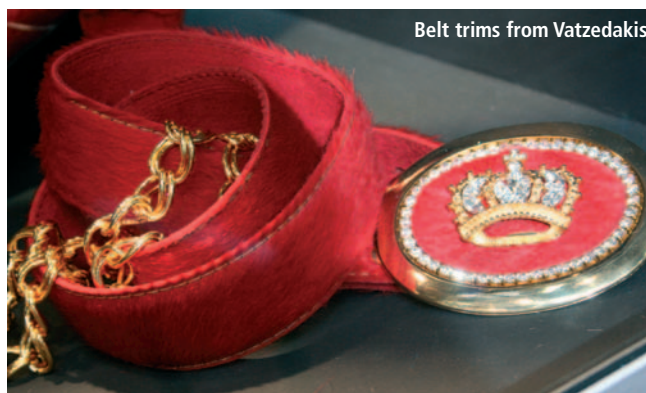
Hollywood glam from RCM



Bubble leather from Penta Working



Belt trims from Vatzedakis



Navy is an alternative to black and there were several other shades of blue with a surprising vivid cyan as an accessory highlight colour.

CREATIVITY PAYS OFF

The Italian creative attitude seems to be paying off. There may have been fewer Europeans around the fair, but they were more than made up for by visitors from Japan, Korea and China who were busy buying top grade, creative and different accessories and trims. Non-Italian exhibitors also got in on the act, with better looking stands and a lot more individually designed and fashionable merchandise. Jeon Shim from Korea had extremely colourful all over print kid skins, decorated with intricate colour transfer designs. They were made up into bomber jackets, mini skirts and bags, and were difficult to miss. On the Japanese country stand, semi-transparent vellum had been updated into rich clear colours such as fire orange.

Bags are such important leather accessories today, and there were lots of made up samples on show at the fair. Dark metallic reptiles from snake to croco from Dolmen were brightened with huge metal buckles and intricate closures. Miura had bags made up in luridly bright metallic leathers with bright mirror finishes, and in colours such as red and silver. There were casual leathers for bags too, including in the high end. Borge's new leather had a totally different core colour from the surface, a special request from a high fashion bag manufacturer that wanted to make a feature of 'inside out' seaming and raw edges.

WORKERS OF THE WORLD

Not all fashion leathers were elegant, as the diametrically opposed grunge trend is still going strong. The 'old' look is still with us for men's shoes, especially on pebble grain leathers with a slightly whitened look, which has superseded the less subtle cracked leather look. Surfaces were folded, crinkled and wrinkled, especially in the tan and matt brown spectrum, and looked great on waxy leather riding boots. Outsoles were worn-looking leather, or two tone whitened rubber or thunit. The second-hand, used look for textiles is all year round, with waxy and matt finishes given an older look with frayed edges and creased and wrinkled surfaces by Panatex.

Italian tanners are making a good job of promoting vegetable tanned leather. Nova Empresa was pushing vegy leather, which is totally metal free, and Titanik leather, which uses titanium, a non-heavy metal that is so non-allergenic that it is used for human implants. Going a stage further, the company's Origami leather is both metal- and vegetable-free, and is produced using organic synthetic agents. A feature is made of the tanning, and as this is totally synthetic, the leather has a papery feel, which also happens to be trendy.

Innovative leathers had unusual effects and lots of surface volume. The bubble effect is coming more popular with outward puffing bubbles of leather seemingly created by extreme irregular shrinkage and often in a matt finish, as by Penta Working. Similar effects were also gained by elasticised ruching and shirring, '70s style. Flocking, surface laser cutting and gaucho type embossing appeared in 'fin de siècle' swirly patterns or smaller repetitive '70s geometrics.

TECHNICAL MATERIALS

One simple technical property is no longer enough for modern materials and hybrid products are now more the rule rather than the exception. Nanotech leather is no longer simply that, as there are variations and points of difference.

Tre Effe, for instance, has added Nanotechnology using the TFL Cool System to its suede calf skins and created triple benefits. The leather has anti-UV features and absorbs up to 25% less sunlight to keep the feet much cooler. It is also anti-static and water repellent, which are almost regular nano features today. The new leather comes in fresh strong colours and is both colour-fast and light resistant.

Nova Empresa calls its Nanotech leather 'Barnyard', as it is resistant to the acid and alkali often found in farmyard and stable manures. Breathability is maintained, as the effect of the nano particles is actually applied inside the leather. Because of this, it has to be full grain or nubuck and not corrected. So although it is water- and dirt-resistant, it will never be totally waterproof. Boots made from the leather will also be oil and stain-resistant.

Nanotechnology is not just for upper leathers. Giardini's Harmony lining is created by what it calls a 'plasmaterial' process. Plasma is a partially ionised gas. This cold plasma acts on the surface of the material on a nanometre scale so that it is both breathable and fast drying. The lining has been given bacteriostatic properties to stop bacteria multiplying. There is also a silver ion treatment, which is considered ecological and lasts longer than conventional chemical treatments. The new ►



Old look leather by Atema

Metallic leather by Dolmen



Bling from Pieffe



Burnished leather by Atema



Extravagant wedges from Zanzani



Wrinkled leather boots are already being worn

Men's casual sole
from Silga

material is claimed to have advantages over even high quality PU—which is apparently slower at absorbing humidity—and leather which is hygroscopic but dries too slowly.

TRIMS

Huge trims as big as a brooch offered real 'bling'. The trend set by Afro-American rappers has filtered down into mainstream footwear. Multiple glitzy Hollywood style trims appeared on dressy shoes and boots. Settings were not just silver but also gold and bronze, and stones were more often brown or green rather than clear. Swarovski crystals in every colour were all over the shafts of boots or incorporated into big settings in the forms of bows, lizards, brooches or even fruit. Crystals even appeared on the tongues of Puma sneakers. Velvet ribbon with small diamantes was applied to sporty canvas webbing tape by Rotex, a hybrid look combining sport and fashion.

New from Hawaii were nylon eyelets with both top eyelet and bottom ring in the same material. Nylon speed laces have been around for a while but real nylon eyelets are new. They work in the same way as normal eyelets, just hammered into place so that they create a star pattern at the back. The advantages are not just non-rust and lightweight, as they are metal-free, they are ideal for workers in the security services who need to pass through metal detectors.

Vatzedakis' buckles were big and royal where large gold crowns fitted perfectly with regal red pony skin belts and bags. For men, it still showed many huge biker type buckles with macho motifs such as skull and crossbones, handcuffs and chains.

SOLINGS

High wedges and interesting heels again provided Hollywood glamour. Glossy '80s style satin finish cone heels from Tacchificio Val di Chienti came in shadowy pewter and bronze. Coloured transparent windows in towering metal frame wedges from Zanzani were real show stoppers. Wedges, units and cone shape heels came in all sorts of finishes from metallic to wood, engraved or covered with a stack leather look. Platforms are here to stay for another season according to Dolmen, which showed pewter metallic leather boots on matching '70s block heels and forepart platforms decorated with giant matching antique studs.

Italian sole makers have found they need to produce abroad in order to reach the new footwear manufacturing countries, whether it be India, China or elsewhere. While Skywalk is still in the process of establishing itself in China, Vibram seems to have stolen a march with massively increasing volumes coming out of that country. It does in fact have totally different collections in Italy and China, each suited to the nearby markets. The more classic hiker types and advanced fashion still came from Italy, while dual density units with multi-colour sporty rubber bottoms for the primarily technical athletic factories are made in China. Even samples for these new developments now come from China.

For sporty uses, lightweight is an increasingly important factor.

Vibram has developed new moulds for China using a blown EVA called Newflex. Density on these soles is about half that of rubber, and the mould definition is very detailed. There is also greater shock absorption and comfort. Rubber soles with fragrance were one idea from Bolflex from Portugal, which has a whole range of 'flavours' such as vanilla, lemon, cappuccino, mint and strawberry to name but a few. 