

Cowboy Boots

the art and sole

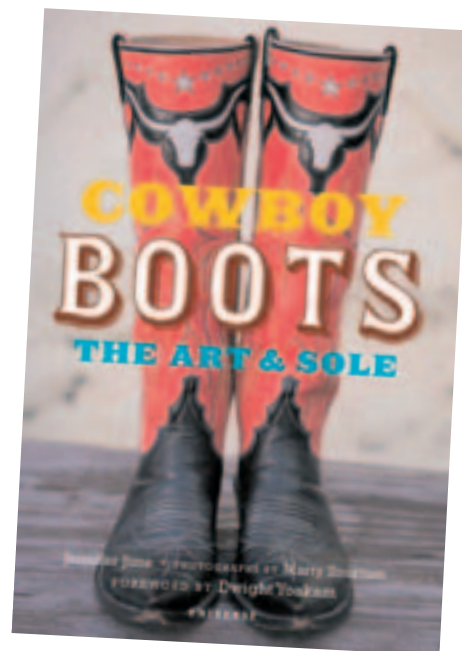
Cowboy Boots have long held a fascination for people all over the world due to Hollywood actors such as John Wayne and Clint Eastwood riding endless miles across endless prairies to right endless wrongs. They were originally developed out of traditional cavalry boots to withstand the rigours of herding cattle in the plains of North America during the mid-19th Century. They needed to be tough to stand up to the constant hard use and to protect a wearer's legs against sage brush and the occasional snake.

They were handmade by local bootmakers in the small townships that sprang up as the ranchers moved west, closely followed by the railroads that brought the cattle back for slaughter and consumption by the rapidly expanding immigrant population of the Eastern States. By the early 1900s, the era of the traditional cowboy and his way of life was over. His boots, however, lived on as one thing the old bootmakers had learned was how to make a last that really fitted the foot and a well-made cowboy boot

was acknowledged as possibly the most comfortable thing you could wear on your feet.

The large panels that went into forming the upper also provided a perfect opportunity for embellishment and the 20th Century saw cowboy boots develop into more of an art form than a working essential, with both bootmakers and their customers vying with each other in producing the most individual and complex designs possible. The 335 pages of *Cowboy Boots the art & sole* is devoted to some of the very finest ever produced. There are examples from all the best-known bootmakers from the 1930s up to the present day and the sheer diversity of inspiration and ideas in regard to subject, colour and texture, is breathtaking.

The book traces the origins of the different aspects of a boot's construction and the way that the stitching originally used to stiffen the leg of the boot grew into a medium of self expression. It follows the influence of Western films in the 1930s and 40s on how cut and decoration



developed into distinctive themes and styles over the period and identifies individual bootmaker's trademark designs.

Compiled by America's best-known expert on cowboy boots, Jennifer June, with images by fine art photographer Marty Snortum, the book is a rich celebration of the cowboy boot as an artform and highly recommended to anyone who appreciates fine shoemaking. And, even for someone who does not, it will reveal an aspect of traditional American culture that continues to this day.



Heels and soles on these boots are hand carved. Hand carved leather is regaining popularity as boot customers seek prestige in labour-intensive decoration. (C.T. Boot Shop., Saint Jo, Texas.)



'La Pareja' (The Pair) by Rocketbuster Boots. Like custom boots of the 1940s and 50s, bootmakers such as Rocketbuster combine colourful inlays and overlays, crystals and hand lacing. Modern colours and contemporary skulls keep them from looking like reproductions.



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1. A simple two-colour stitch pattern decorates an otherwise plain boot. Working cowboy boots like these still remain popular. (Maker unknown)

2. Rattler. These vintage factory-made boots by Kirkendall (Omaha, Nebraska,) are a good example of how even a simple inlay pattern can add beauty and interest to a boot top. These simple rattlesnake inlays work well because they imply a sense of Western strength and toughness.

3. '62 Muertos' by Liberty Boot Co. Skulls are very popular with younger wearers who often associate cowboy boots with a rock 'n' roll lifestyle. Carved leather boots like these are meant to shock a viewer with their realism.

4. Texas Longhorn. Even vintage boots in poor condition are sought by collectors for their innovative designs. A two-colour inlay often has more energy and impact than a more colourful or complicated pattern. Buck Steiner Maker (Charlie Dunn.)

5. Exotic materials are sought by a growing number of customers seeking luxury and glamour. These boots by Stallion Boot Company combine beautiful reptile leather, medallions carved from fossilised mammoth ivory and carefully pieced wingtips.

6. Yellow Burst by Stewart Romero (Los Angeles, California). Toe shape, heel height, and inlay patterns from vintage boots continue to inspire today's designers.

7. Reasserting the masculinity of the cowboy boot, pin-up girls are posing on the boot tops of fashion-forward companies such as Rocketbuster and Liberty Boot Co., and nearly a calendar's worth of pin-ups are carved into these by Rocketbuster.



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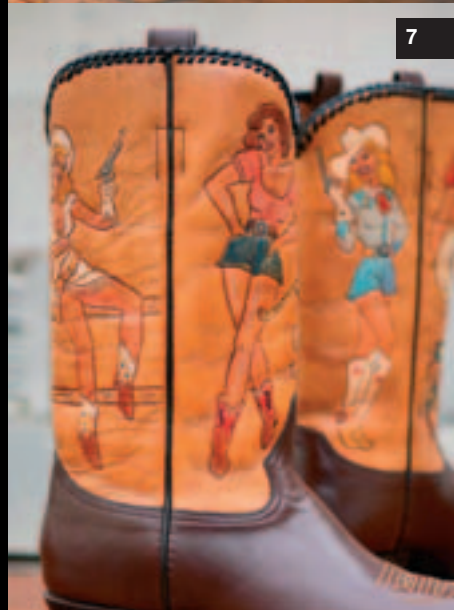
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