

A craftsman from Heinrich Dinkelacker gave a live workshop to show visitors how its men's shoes are made.

CREDIT: RENE TILLMANN/MESSSE DUESSELDORF

Art at the heart of GDS

Art and craftsmanship were important themes at the most recent edition of GDS, held September 11-13 in Düsseldorf, Germany.

One major crowd-puller was the Art & Hamlet exhibition which, in addition to highlighting the beauty of shoes, showed how wooden shoe lasts can be turned into 'objets d'art'. The idea came from the founder of men's shoe brand Hamlet, Detlef Stichling, who had previously worked as an advertising filmmaker. His love for art and marketing inspired him to turn the functional lasts into "coveted" pieces of art in order to give the brand a more personal, interactive feel.

Hamlet owner, Michael Ottopal, who has a background in set design and sculpture, was also behind the marketing concept, which involved working alongside artists such as Klio Karadim, Alexander Ritter and Jörg Wedepohl. A number of art enthusiasts and art students from Holbein grammar school in Augsburg were involved in turning 100 blank lasts into one-off pieces of art. These pieces featured gold sequins, tree bark and artificial lawn, among other unusual items.

"It is just great fun to work creatively with shoes as a product," says Mr Stichling. "At GDS we received numerous enquiries from artists and buyers who were enthusiastic about this idea. The project is now to become a kind of travelling exhibition and will in future be featured in the shop windows of some of our clients."



Showing how it's done

Another attraction at the show was a live display from premium men's shoe brand Heinrich Dinkelacker. A craftsman demonstrated how the firm makes its shoes at a special workshop at the fair. He showed visitors how styles are lasted, welted and folded by hand and how the original, hand-braided welt is produced. He also provided tips on how to make high-quality shoes last longer, demonstrated how an antique finish is produced and explained what needs to be considered when treating Cordovan leather.

The company's original shoe factory was founded in 1879 in the heart of Sindelfingen, Germany. Right from the outset, it has always emphasised the importance of spending time on each pair of shoes, focusing on quality rather than on quantity. "This understanding of quality time was already fixed, and runs until today as a thread throughout the entire company," says the firm, adding that "time-consuming, manual labour in our fast-paced world of mass production has become a rarity." Dinkelacker's goal has always been to offer customers "only the best shoes".

Although production has now moved to Budapest, all of its shoes are made by hand at its small factory. The company points out that the decision to produce by hand is not an attempt to "cling to old fashions" but because it believes it is the only way of consistently providing the level of quality its customers expect. "Maintained in our factory is the old shoemaker's art and, from little more than exquisite leathers and craftsmanship, our master craftsmen create works of art," the company says.

According to Dinkelacker, style, fit and comfort are all extremely important elements, with finish being the most important. Each shoe takes a day to make and the process involves 300 different stages. For example, it claims the shaping process takes half an hour for most standard shoes, but for Dinkelacker shoes it takes a full week using a typical Hungarian wooden shoe last with an elevated



The Art & Hamlet exhibition at GDS focused on beauty and creativity.

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toe. The shoes are given a cork lining for added durability, while vulnerable areas, such as the heel, toe, and ball of the foot, are reinforced with 132 small brass tacks in groups of six. The toe is strengthened with a small brass plate and the heel is reinforced with a strip of sturdy rubber.

Fashion and film

Furthermore, a presentation given by the International Museum of Footwear (Musée International de la Chaussure), based in Romans-sur-Isère, also focused on art, as well as cinematography, in relation to shoe design. It showcased shoe styles from a number of prominent French fashion designers such as Charles Jourdan, Louis Vuitton, Raymond Massaro, Robert Clergerie, Roger Vivier and Stéphane Kélian as well as European designers including Patrick Cox, Paco Rabanne and Andréa Pfister.

The exhibition presented 20 styles dating from between 1967 and 2009

selected from the French museum's 16,500 exhibits. According to the organisers of GDS, a large number of visitors came to see the display and were impressed by the level of creativity in the designs shown. A highlight for film fans was the ankle boot designed by Carlo Pompéi, which was worn by Leonardo Di Caprio in the 1997 blockbuster film *Titanic*.

"We had many visitors and the event was a resounding success. The professional setting meant the exhibition went down very well. We were able to forge key contacts for future projects," said Philippe Drésin, deputy mayor of Romans-sur-Isère.

This exhibition was complemented by the fair's lecture programme, with several of the lectures and seminars focusing on the importance of creativity and craftsmanship within the shoe sector. Sales expert Hans Meurer expressed the opinion that people do not buy shoes because they need them, but because of the aesthetic appeal and kudos they offer. "If we only sold the shoes people need we would have all gone bankrupt long ago," he says. "People don't buy products, they buy feelings," he said.

Fashion retail expert Hanns-Jürgen Assent from Schleifenbaum Design &

Project, which helps shoe firms with shopfitting, interior design and window display solutions, said shopping was all about seduction and desire. He compared it to a play at the theatre where the main protagonists—the shoes—have to stand out from the crowd with their authenticity, winning over hearts with successful staging. One way of doing this is to offer product that is carefully crafted, a piece of art in its own right, he suggested. Mr Assent presented a range of ideas designed to make looking at shoes inside shops and in shop windows a tactile and engaging experience.

Around 28,500 buyers from 82 countries attended GDS, the majority of whom travelled from the Benelux countries, Italy, the UK, Spain and France. Around 765 exhibitors, and more than 1,800 collections, were on show. 🌐