

*Havisham wedge with
winter cherry velvet.*

CREDIT: SOPHIA WEBSTER

*Chiara Butterfly Wing sandal
in pink and neon red.*

CREDIT: SOPHIA WEBSTER



Dreams can come true (with hard work)

Students in our design schools are encouraged to work hard and dream big, and most take up both suggestions with enthusiasm. Statistically, the chances are slim that these young people will ever see their creations in a superstar's outfit, their names in a glossy magazine or their logo on a prestigious shop front, but it can happen, and when it does it's something worth celebrating.

Glittering prizes

Sophia Webster thought she was busy when she studied footwear design at Cordwainers' College in London (now part of the University of the Arts). But the long hours and the hard work then hardly compare to the effort she has had to put in to make a success of her own-name brand, which she launched in 2012. "In all, I spent six years studying, as an undergraduate and then as a post-graduate," she explains. After graduation she spent two years as a design assistant at Nicholas Kirkwood before launching out on her own. She has not looked back.

Her first collection was for spring-summer 2013 and in September 2016, she will take part in London Fashion Week

London-based shoe designer Sophia Webster has enjoyed startling success in the four years since she launched her own brand, but she has a clear recollection of long years of learning as a student at Cordwainers' College and even has some advice for her younger self.

for the ninth time. That first year, 2012, she was awarded the Condé Nast Footwear Emerging Designer of the Year, and followed this up with the British Fashion Award for Emerging Accessories Designer 2013. She also won the British Fashion Council's New Generation Award for her first three consecutive seasons. In 2016, she won the BFC Vogue Fashion Fund in 2016, which brings high-level mentoring and a grant of £200,000. Also in 2016, she opened a flagship store in Mount Street in London's Mayfair.

Carrie suede sandal with embroidered feather appliqué.
CREDIT: SOPHIA WEBSTER



Selina sandal in black and rose gold.
CREDIT: SOPHIA WEBSTER

Advice lines

Drawing breath, Sophia Webster says there are five principal pieces of advice that she would give to her 22-year-old self. "Number one would be to have self-belief," she says. "Before I started my own company, I went about my day as though I had already taken that step, so I knew who it was I wanted to wear my shoes and I knew which stores I wanted to stock them." Always going above and beyond and setting herself apart, is the second piece of advice, while number three is to work hard and force herself outside her own comfort zone. Number four is to make sure of having support in place. "You need support," she says, "and for me that came from people beyond design. For example, my husband stopped what he was doing before to become my chief executive." And the final piece of advice she has for her younger self is to avoid falling into the trap of "believing your own hype", but making sure to enjoy success and celebrate it.

A woman's world

She questions the perception that footwear design is a male-dominated sector and says that she felt able as a student to focus on an industry, in the UK at least, that was "full of amazing women designers", naming Georgina Goodman, Olivia Morris, Adele Clarke and Charlotte Dellal as prominent examples. Ms Webster secured a placement at Georgina Goodman while still at college and worked on baby shoe and leathergoods projects. "But all I wanted to do was draw shoes," she recalls, "so I drew shoes in my spare time and handed the sketches to Georgina and she gave me feedback. I remember her saying there was too much going on in what I had drawn, like there were ten



Sophia Webster was the keynote speaker at the 2016 Cordwainers National Footwear Student of the Year Ceremony.
CREDIT: THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF CORDWAINERS

shoes in one." The main lesson she learned from this, she says now, is that, while it's important to be "innovative" when you are a student, you have to develop a strong understanding of production, too, to learn that there are limitations to what it is possible to achieve, given the restrictions shoe manufacturers face: materials and money, factory capacity and (the most fundamental thing of all) feet. 🌊