



A carnival of colour

The 59,000 visitors that attended 'Franal' were left in no doubt as to where they were in the world as there was a definite Brazilian theme in evidence at the footwear, components, and leather goods fair held in São Paulo, in July. Despite the unusually chilly weather, visitors were treated to a rainbow of colours and exotic styles in the spring/summer 2005/2006 collections that evoked the vibrancy of the Brazilian carnival season and the exotic natural environment.

As the third largest footwear producer in the world, Brazil is suffering from the effects of the China phenomenon in the same way as other countries. As the country is unable to compete on price, manufacturers have adopted a different strategy—cashing in on their national identity and environment. As a result, rather than 'copying' European designs, as has been the norm in the past, designers have now been given the freedom to look towards their own culture and country for inspiration. This has led to an array of truly unique footwear and accessories being created, many of which were exhibited at Franal, the largest footwear event in Latin America.

Back to nature

Although most of the footwear on show for the domestic market was synthetic, the leathers—used predominately in exported products—and the colours on show oozed 'Braziliability' as it was termed at the show. Bovine leather was abundant as it is widely available in the country that has now become the world's foremost beef exporter, but more exotic

'Brazilian' skins such as fish skin, alligator and crocodile were also widely used such as in Betarello's collection that offered sporty casual shoes in a range which included alligator effects.

Colours and textures reflected those found in nature such as deep woody browns and rich greens, which evoked images of the Amazon.

This was particularly evident in Valdemir Balestrin's winning entry in the Franal Top Design Award that combined transparent materials and gemstones with green shades and leaf-like shapes to create an exotic jungle-inspired feel.

This was taken one stage further still with textures and finishes which were actually designed to look like wood. Wood was also widely adopted in the shoes on show. High wedge and platform heels in wood effect materials were abundant. Although these were mainly aimed at the domestic market of petite Brazilian ladies, these styles could be seen on the vast majority of the ladies' shoe stands, including that of Brazil's largest brand, Azaléia.

In sharp contrast to this natural feel, the vivid colours associated with the carnival, so synonymous with Brazil, were incorporated into many designs for men, women and ➤

1. Andrea Sahyoun's lace up boot. Second place in the Franal Top Design Award for Women's Casual Footwear.
2. Thiagode Melorosa wooden-soled shoe. Winner of Franal Top Design Award for Women's Casual Footwear.
3. Azaléia platform wedge.

WORLD FOOTWEAR

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4. *Pabulo de Paula sports shoe in red and green. Winner of Francal Top Design Award in the sports footwear category.*
5. *West coast sports shoes in natural colours.*
6. *Pé de Ferro casual shoe with used effect.*
7. *Heitor Hugo - second place in the Francal Top design award for Men's Formal Footwear.*
8. *Tanara ethnic wooden shoes and platform.*
9. *Paralelo sandals evoke the 1970s in feminine colours.*

especially the wide ranges of children's shoes exhibited by big names such as Pampili, Bibi and Opanken. In the adult ranges touches of colour added a vibrant flair to more traditional styling. This could be seen in Betarello's collection where red was combined with black to add a subtle touch of colour.

New talent

This 'Braziliability' was particularly evident in the designs on show in the Francal Top Design Award that honoured young designers in women's, men's and children's formal, casual, and sports footwear and accessories. Although the themes were similar in that Brazil's natural environment and carnival atmosphere were evident, this competition allowed the designers to really let their imagination run riot, producing some truly unique designs such as Andrea Sahyoun's lace up boot that conjured up a feel of the Andes with a more of a Peruvian feel rather than a Brazilian one. Yarbos Conrado's design also embraced the idea of getting back to nature, so much so, that this actually incorporated 'toes' into the shoe design.

FOOTWEAR FASHION: BRAZIL



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10. Valdemar Balestrin green with a 'woody' finish. Winner of the Francal Top Design Award for Women's Formal Footwear.

11. Three Betarrello shoes: black and red formal men's shoe; alligator skin shoe; moccasin in natural greens and brown.

12. Opanken orange and blue children's shoe.

13. Yarbos Conrado's 'bare foot'-style shoe. Winner of Men's Casual Footwear category at Francal Top Design Award.



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An international twist

However, although there was a definite Brazilian theme across the spectrum of footwear and accessories exhibited, designers have not ignored the fact that European styling remains very popular, especially in Brazil's major export markets of the USA and Europe itself. With this in mind, brands such as Pé de Ferro and West Coast, have combined Brazil's 'natural diversity with globally popular trends' combining European elegance with Brazilian flair. This resulted in men's collections with a 'used' finish that contrasted natural greys, off-white and beiges, with more exotic blues and turquoises.

Other themes apparent at the show were nostalgia, with Paralelo and Tanara, just two examples of brands whose collections were inspired by the 1970s.

All in all, the show was an eclectic mix of various styles, with a national flavour running through the collections. Designers have moved away from imitating European styles and are now concentrating on developing modern styles with a Brazilian twist. The inspiration for this has come from Brazil itself, reflecting the natural environment, and the people who themselves come from a mix of European and African backgrounds, that has created a unique culture and lifestyle. 

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