

How-To



A Spectacle of Spectators Margot Silk Forrest

A well-known author and instructor on shoe embellishment shows how to recreate classic footwear of the 1920's and 1930's.

Although two-toned “spectator” shoes – white with a black or brown overlay – appeared on the cricket fields of England for the first time in 1868, it wasn’t until Edward, then Prince of Wales, wore a spiked pair to play golf in the early 1920’s that the world of fashion took note.

They made their debut in the U.S. in 1925 (golfer Walter Hagen and the Prince of Wales are both credited with that). Soon men and women alike were wearing spectator shoes (called co-respondent shoes in the U.K.) as casual footwear.



Two-toned “reverse calf” golf shoes worn by the Duke of Windsor in the U.S.. Photo: auction catalog, 1998.



Early ad for men's spectators.

In the 1930’s, they took an irreversible step into fashion history when Jazz Age babies, gangsters, zoot suiters, and Swing Era fashionistas adopted the style. Fred Astaire wore them to dazzling effect on the silver screen and the once-sporty brogues got a glossy new look.



Fred Astaire in “Yolanda and the Thief,” 1945.

In the second half of the Twentieth Century, spectator shoes nearly vanished from the scene, but they are enjoying a resurgence of



Steve Madden's NLIGHT, 2006.

popularity now, thanks to modern versions by Michael Kors, Ralph Lauren, and Steve Madden and in the J. Peterman catalog.

Of course, the styling has evolved over the years – the ladies of the 1920's didn't wear stilettos – but for the most part the style has remained true to its basics. These



Women's spectators, made by Hellstern and Sons, French, 1925-1930. Photo by Bata Shoe Museum.

are a solid color body with (usually) contrasting-color overlays on the toe, heel, and sometimes on the vamp. The overlays usually have pinked edges and decorative perforations.

The “two tone” effect that defines spectators has, at times, been accomplished by use of two textures instead, such as leather and patent or exotic leather, or suede and linen. Colors nowadays no longer stick to the more staid tones of the early 1900's.

To see some eye-popping examples, search for “spectator shoes” online.

For instance, check out the men's style offerings, such as this Stacy Adams Matte Blue and Black Spectator at the ZootSuitStore.com.



But if you want to really enjoy getting spectator shoes for your costume, you can create them yourself. My passion is what I call DIY shoe design, what others call altered shoes, and what, simply put, is painting and embellishing plain shoes into fabulous ones.



Before.



After.

If you want to be strictly true to history, you start with a men's lace-up shoe (like an oxford) or a woman's pump with a fairly chunky heel. Women could also start with a short lace-up bootie with a mid to chunky heel. The shoes can be made of leather, manmade "leather," suede, faux suede or fabric like canvas, crepe or satin.

At left are the two shoes I created for this article, along with the two thrift-store shoes I started with. The men's is manmade leather, the women's is fabric – it's a recycled bridal shoe.

You are simply going to paint on the contrasting color overlays, using masking tape cut with pinking shears to create the pinked edges of the overlay, then adding dots of the original color to simulate the perforations. (If you possibly can, start with shoes that already have dark soles, as it's very hard to paint the sole of a shoe and have the paint stick permanently.)

The first step in painting shoes is always to prep the surface so that it's clean and the paint will adhere to it properly. Here's how. Gently rub the surface with a cotton ball that's been dampened with:

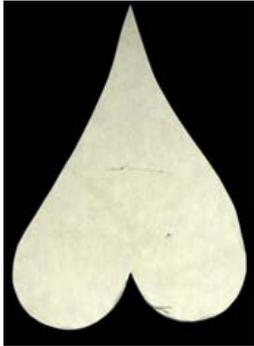
1. Rubbing alcohol, if the shoes are leather or suede
2. Acetone, if the shoes are man made leather
3. No prep needed if the shoes are fabric or faux suede (which actually is fabric). Just brush off any loose dirt and remove any stains with spot remover.

Now you are going to mark in light pencil the areas where you want to put your contrasting-color overlays. (I chose which areas I wanted to paint after looking at lots and lots of styles online.) I did pretty well drawing the heel area freehand – I did use a ruler to make sure the overlay intersected with the heel at the same point on each side of the shoe. Then I cut a strip of masking

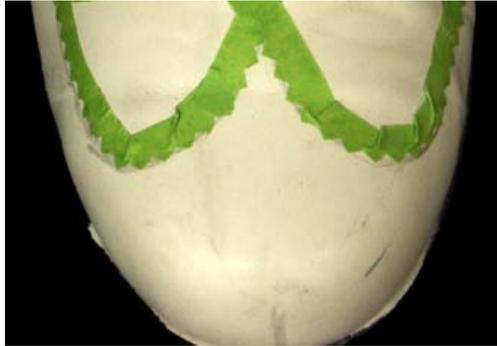
tape with my pinking shears and placed it along the line on the side where the shoe would need to remain white.



(Note: If you can't start with white shoes, you can paint them white using Neopaque White – more info below – but you will have to wait four or five days for the paint to cure before you can use masking tape over it. And do use the gentlest masking tape you can find.)



Heart shape.



As applied to toe of men's shoe.



And to a women's shoe.

Next I had to draw the fancy curvy bit on the toe. This was bad, because I can't actually draw. That's when I noticed it looked like an upside down heart. Back to the Internet. I found an outline of a heart, stretched it a little bit to get the shape right, enlarged it so it was approximately the right size for the shoe and printed it out. Then I cut out the heart. I laid it upside down on the toe of the shoe and traced around it.

I had to revert to freehand when sketching the line from the curve of the heart down to the sole, but again my trusty ruler helped me out.

Once I had both the shoes all taped, I started painting. I prefer the Lumiere paints by Jacquard, which are fabric paints that also adhere to leather, straw, wood, and more. They don't have a flat white or black, however, so I used some of their "sister" line

of paints instead, These are called Neopaque and are also made to adhere to fabric, leather, etc.

On the men's shoes I used Neopaque Black and did touchups with Neopaque White. On the pumps, I mixed Lumiere's Metallic Rust with some Neopaque Black, then used Neopaque White for touchups. (There is a Neopaque Brown, but I couldn't find my bottle!)



When you paint shoes, you need to apply the paint gently, as if you were laying it on, not daubing a Van Gogh-like masterpiece or even brushing paint on a wall. I use a small fan brush (No. 1) to do this. I also use a tiny pointed brush to make touchups.

At left are some before-and-after shots of the taped and painted shoes.

When the paint is dry to the touch, which takes about 15-20 minutes, gently pull away the tape. If you are working on a fabric shoe, you may not even need to touch up the zigzags. If you are painting a leather or manmade leather shoe, you probably will need to. (Especially if you make the mistake I did and place the tape on top of some of the stitching....)





Dots made with Colour Shaper.

Last of all, you want to paint little dots around the “pinked” edge. They are fairly large dots, so a toothpick might not do. Me, I love having the right tool for the job, so I use a silicone-tipped brush called a Colour Shaper (available at larger or online art stores).

For these dots I used a taper point firm, size #2. I simply eyeballed where to place them. (One of the wonderful things about painting and embellishing shoes is that they are almost never seen close up. Tiny mistakes or unevenness doesn’t show.)



The final step, which can be skipped if your shoes are made of fabric, is to seal the paint. The manufacturer recommends brushing on a coat of Future Acrylic Floor Finish, which is also called “Pledge With FUTURE Shine Premium Floor Finish.” It’s a clear floor sealer available in hardware stores and some big-box stores and supermarkets, or you can get a small bottle for \$1.99 from my online store. You’ll only need about a tablespoon to seal your shoes and add a nice long-lasting shine.



If you decide to do your own spectators, I’d love to see before-and-after photos. I often post pictures of shoes others have painted and embellished on my blog. Also, if you have any questions about doing shoes – spectators or otherwise – feel free to email me at margot@sassyfeet.com. And have fun!

Margot Silk Forrest is an artisan, craft teacher, and author of “Sassy Feet! How to Paint, Bead, Bedeck, and Embellish Your Shoes.” Photos of her altered shoes and purses, along with free how-to information, are on her web site, SassyFeet.com. For leather paints (Lumiere, not Neopaque), embellishments, books, tools and other supplies, explore her online store. Her weekly blog about DIY shoe design is at glittersweatshop.typepad.com.

Editor's Note



A review of Margot Silk Forrest's book *Sassy Feet!* appeared in the “Short Subjects” section of [“The Virtual Costumer,” Volume 8 Issue 1.](#)