



Delman, ankle strap sandal with peep-toe, red/blue/yellow/green suede, c.1939, USA, museum purchase. Photograph, MFIT.



Delman, day shoe, black faille, c.1937, USA, lent by Nina Footwear Corp. Photograph, MFIT.



Delman, cocktail bootie, multi-color floral print with gold brocade, c.1958, USA, lent by Nina Footwear Corp. Photograph, MFIT.



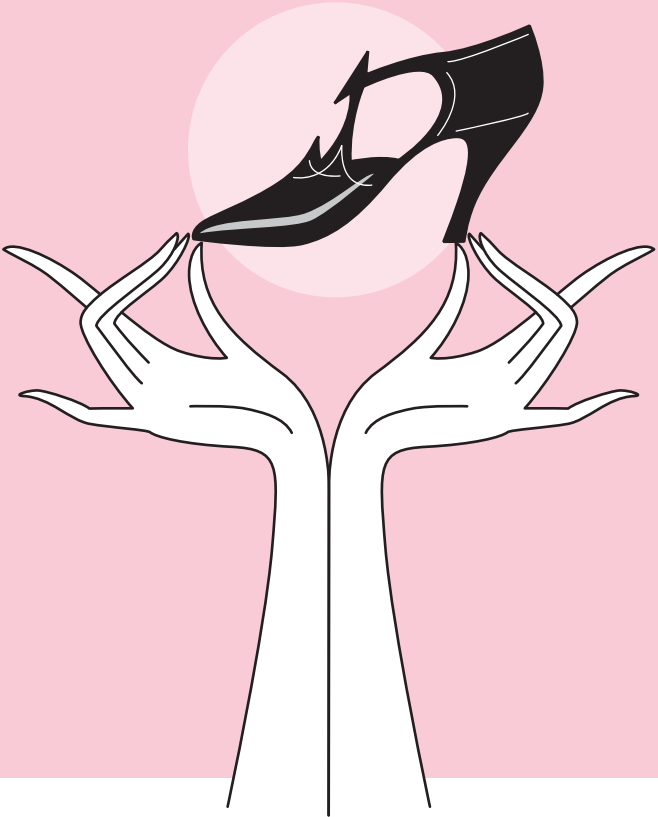
Delman, peep-toe cocktail shoe, red satin, 1954, USA, gift of Mrs. Janet Chatfield-Taylor Braguin. Photograph, MFIT.



A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S
Scandal Sandals and Lady Slippers: A History of Delman Shoes has been organized by the graduate students in the Fashion Institute of Technology's MA program in Fashion and Textile Studies: History, Theory, Museum Practice.

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SCANDAL SANDALS and LADY SLIPPERS



The Museum at FIT

Seventh Avenue at 27 Street
 New York City 10001-5992
Scandal Sandals and Lady Slippers
A History of Delman Shoes
 March 9-April 3, 2010
 Hours:
 Tuesday-Friday, noon-8 pm
 Saturday, 10 am-5 pm
 Closed Sunday, Monday, and holidays
 For more information, visit www.fitnyc.edu/museum or call
 the exhibition information line at 212 217.4558.

Cover Artwork by Sean King

A HISTORY OF DELMAN SHOES

The Museum at FIT

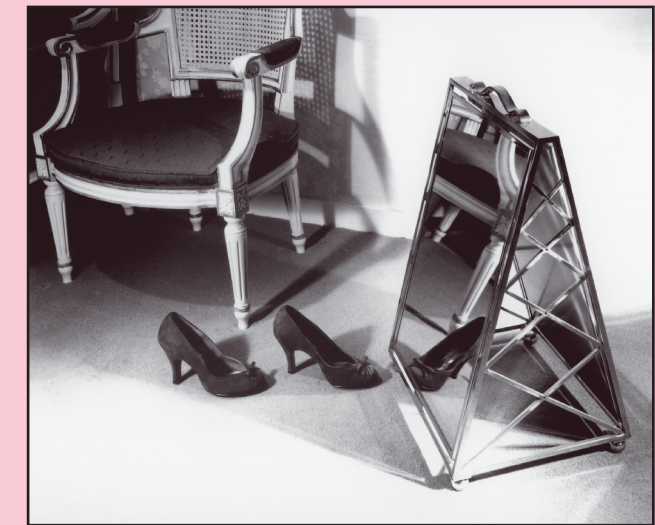
MARCH 9-APRIL 3, 2010

“Fashion makes our shoes important—
Delman makes them exquisite!”
—Delman ad, 1929

In the 1910s, shoes were given new visibility—and added importance—as hemlines rose above the ankle. Designers took advantage of this change in the fashionable silhouette to create a wider variety of shoe styles than ever before. Innovative, high-quality American fashion began to emerge from the shadow of Parisian design; so, too, did American footwear companies. Prominent among them was Delman Shoes, which provided women with a vibrant selection of glamorous, classic styles to suit any fashion need, from the boudoir to the ballroom. Delman is one of the few early twentieth-century American shoe companies still in operation today, and it continues to build upon its legacy.

Scandal Sandals and Lady Slippers: A History of Delman Shoes is the first exhibition to chronicle the story of the company and its founder, Herman Delman. Mr. Delman, whose parents were shoe retailers in Portland, Oregon, had strong ideas about shoes and their ability not only to “polish” a woman’s outfit but to enhance her entire presence. He wanted every woman who wore his shoes to become a more elegant, graceful, and sophisticated version of herself—his ideal vision of a “lady.” To promote this concept, he developed a company logo based on an illustration of Cinderella. It depicts a man slipping a dainty shoe onto a woman’s foot, conjuring the idea of a “perfect fit” while evoking the emotion of fairy tale romance.

Herman Delman started his company in 1919. After incorporating in 1925, it grew rapidly. Although Delman Shoes created custom-made footwear, the company’s reputation for style and comfort was built on its high-end, ready-to-wear line. Many of Delman’s advertising and branding strategies were ahead of their time. Shoes had previously been marked with the names of stores, such as Saks Fifth Avenue, but Delman Shoes were among the first to carry a designer label. Mr. Delman was expanding his business and licensing stores in many cities to sell his shoes. He wanted to make sure that customers knew they were buying his brand.



Photograph of Delman Shoe Salon at Bergdorf Goodman, 1951-1956. Photograph courtesy of New York Historical Society.

As he built his company’s reputation, Mr. Delman crafted an image of refinement and glamour. In 1926, he opened a store at 558 Madison Avenue, near the residences of many of New York’s most fashionable and wealthy women. Suggesting an aristocratic environment, Delman’s shoe “salon” was distinctive. Women were graciously welcomed into a Louis XVI-style gallery, where shoes were displayed like works of art. A review in *The Shoe Retailer* describes “the special evening slipper room, intimate as a boudoir, where only evening slippers are sold and exclusive fittings are given to bridal parties.” In 1933, Delman Shoes closed its Madison Avenue doors and entered into an exclusive retail agreement with Saks Fifth Avenue. Three years later, however, Delman formed a new partnership with Bergdorf Goodman, an affiliation that continues to this day. At both locations, Delman essentially replicated the design of the Madison Avenue salon, thereby creating early versions of the “store-within-a-store” concept that remains the prevalent model in today’s high-end department stores.

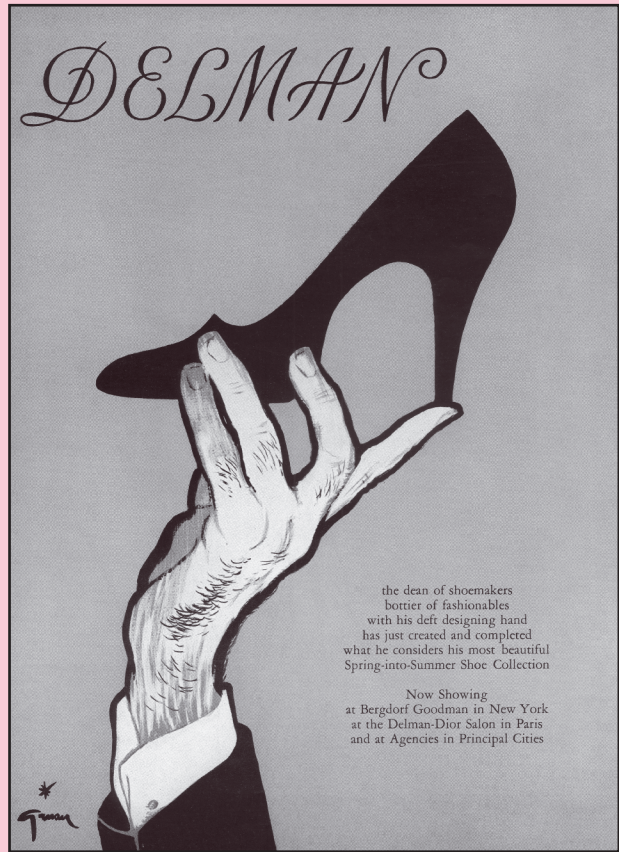
Many of Delman’s ready-to-wear shoes were versions of custom designs made for celebrity clients. Tango shoes created for ballroom dancer Irene Castle were later transformed into Delman’s “Scandal Sandals,” which laced provocatively up the calf. The Delman shoes worn by Queen Elizabeth II at her coronation led to many ready-to-wear versions that were equally elegant, even though they lacked the Queen’s ruby-studded heels.

Many notable women who wore Delman shoes were loyal customers who also helped promote the company’s image of style and glamour. Opera singer Risë Stevens allegedly had a favorite pair of Delman shoes resoled numerous times so that she could wear them for every performance. In the 1920s and 1930s, movie stars became fashion icons; luminaries such as Joan Crawford, as well as dance and theater celebrities like Margalo Gillmore, were featured in Delman’s print ads and publicity photographs. In addition, Delman Shoes produced “newsreels” during the 1940s and 1950s that featured models wearing its latest designs.

Delman showcased fine craftsmanship as much as it promoted beautiful design. In an extravagant gesture consistent with his theatrical style of brand promotion, Mr. Delman installed a large oval window on the second floor of his Madison Avenue store in order to showcase three cobblers hard at work. Print advertisements also drew attention to the fine construction of Delman’s ready-to-wear shoes. Their unique workmanship did more than provide a comfortable fit; as Mr. Delman boasted: “We’ve put so much handwork in them that they will defy the copyist.”

From the start, Delman Shoes was known for its innovative use of materials—some rather exotic, such as zebra, frog, and monkey skins. In 1939, the company created a “Cinderella slipper” made of glass fabric with glass heels. Such experimentation proved especially valuable during World War II, when Regulation L-85 curtailed the use of leather and many other materials from 1942 to 1945.

As the company grew, Herman Delman’s personal role in design diminished. Another critical factor in the company’s success became the selection of talented designers who created an extensive variety of fashionable shoes. Designers employed by



Delman advertisement, *Harper’s Bazaar*, April 1954, lent by Nina Footwear Corp.

Delman Shoes over the years included Herbert and Beth Levine, Kenneth Jay Lane, and Howard Davis. The “Delmanette” line of youthful styles, introduced in 1949, featured the work of women designers such as Bernice Shafan. Renowned footwear designer Roger Vivier worked for Delman from 1938 to 1953, in which year Vivier began designing the Delman-Dior line, produced in partnership with French couture designer Christian Dior. Vivier returned to Delman in 1992.

After Herman Delman’s death in 1955, the company passed through several parent corporations until it was acquired in 1989 by Nina Footwear, Corp. Nina admired the aesthetic of Delman’s golden years, and built an archive of classic Delman shoes in order to inspire contemporary designers. Some of the modern shoes are reinterpretations of those classic styles, while others transform aspects of the company’s history into decorative accents. The Cinderella logo, for example, became an oversized shoe buckle in 2007. Building upon the successful company Herman Delman created in the early twentieth century, Delman Shoes is carrying on his legacy of innovative design. It remains one of the oldest—and still vital—American brands of women’s footwear.

Sarah Byrd and Laura Mina, Curators

“You can tell more about a woman by the
shoes she wears than by reading her palm.”
—Herman Delman, 1945

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